


Terrorism in Modern Denmark

Terroryzm we współczesnej Danii

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Abstract: The article attempts to outline the problem of terrorism in modern Denmark. Terrorism is identified as one of the major threats to this state, alongside the problem (conflict?) in the Arctic and cyber-crime. The article analyses the phenomenon of terrorist attacks in the Danish state and shows the topic of state security in the institutional dimension, including the protection of state institutions. In addition, the issue of contemporary terrorist threats in Denmark, as well as the measures taken in this area, was highlighted.

Keywords: terrorism, Denmark, state security

Streszczenie: Artykuł podejmuje próbę zarysowania problematyki terroryzmu we współczesnej Danii. Terroryzm jest wskazywany jako jeden z istotnych czynników zagrażających temu państwu, obok problemu (konfliktu?) w Arktyce i cyberprzestępczości. W artykule zanalizowano zjawisko ataków terrorystycznych w państwie duńskim, ukazano tematykę bezpieczeństwa państwa w wymiarze instytucjonalnym, w tym ochronę instytucji państwowych. Nadto naświetlono kwestię współczesnych zagrożeń terrorystycznych w Danii, jak i podejmowanych przeciwdziałań w tym zakresie.

Słowa kluczowe: terroryzm, Dania, bezpieczeństwo

Terrorism is identified as one of the major threats to this state, alongside the problem (conflict?) in the Arctic and cyber-crime. This article attempts a critical analysis of terrorism in modern Denmark. The main thesis of the article is the assertion that despite the lower threat of terrorism than in other Western European countries, terrorist attacks have occurred in Denmark and measures are being taken to prevent this phenomenon. Thus, the research questions concern the attacks themselves (their subject, object and purpose) and counter-terrorism (in an institutional and practical context). The article was divided into relevant parts resulting from research questions – the attacks were discussed, the state entities fighting terrorism were

presented, and the main threats and Prevention of terrorism were shown. The research led to two hypotheses. The first assumes that the danger of terrorist attacks threatens Denmark primarily from Islamic fundamentalists. The second hypothesis is that the Danish state is currently undertaking successful and sufficient efforts and activities to prevent and combat terrorism.

Due to the limited size of the publication, some content has been discussed in a general, signal way, while other content has been omitted, such as financial transfers from Danish territory supporting terrorism, the problem of the scale of participation of Danish citizens in fighting on the side of radical Islam, and family reunification policy in the context of the terrorist threat.

The issues discussed in the article are not present in the Polish scientific literature. Denmark almost always appears as one of the many countries serving as an example of a chosen issue in the field of terrorist security. In foreign literature, the issue of terrorism in Denmark is constantly present, although its intensity is not particularly high. It should be noted that quite often it is of a comparative nature with selected countries (e.g., the United States, Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom).

The article uses various source materials, including legal acts, scientific publications, journalistic articles and internet data. As the primary research method, the analysis of texts – legal acts, documents, and articles – was adopted.

1. Terrorist attacks

In the post-war period, Denmark did not experience terrorism on its territory for a long time. If anything, it was of an incidental nature, which does not mean that there were no criminal organizations operating in its territory. Such an example was the Blekingegade Gang (Gang (of) Blekinge Street), which operated 1972–1989, being responsible for crime and murder (including the November 3, 1988 robbery of a post office in Copenhagen that handled the transfer of money from local bank branches to their headquarters. As a result of the attack, one of the policemen was killed).¹

¹ Activities of the Blekingegade Gang were detailed in a book by documentary journalist Peter Ovig Knudsen (Ovig Knudsen 2008). The story of the gang was also an inspiration for the producers of the series *The Blekinge street gang* of 2009 directed by Jacob Thuesen.

The publication of caricatures of Muhammad by the daily *Jyllands-Posten*² on September 30, 2005 appears to have been crucial in changing the terrorist threat in Denmark, followed by the wars in Syria and Iraq and the influx of refugees from these areas. Denmark's participation in the international coalition against terrorism, including its military involvement, has also played a role (among others Afghanistan, Iraq, Islamic State, Libya, and Kosovo).³

There have been approximately 11 significant terrorist incidents or attacks in Denmark since 1985 in which a total of five people (including one attacker) have been killed and 31 injured. Terrorist attacks took place in 1985, 1992, and 2015.

The largest attack was carried out on July 22, 1985, in Copenhagen by people associated with Hezbollah. One of the bombs was placed near the Great Synagogue, and the other in the Office of the American airline Northwest Orient Airlines. While in the first case there were no casualties, in the second one person was killed and 26 were injured. Shortly after the attacks, two more explosives were discovered – one at the bottom of the sea near the port of Nyhavn (the bomb was supposed to be planted in the Office of the Israeli airline El Al), the second in the courtyard of the palace Christiansborg, which is the seat of the Danish parliament.

The second attack took place on March 16, 1992, also in Copenhagen. His target was the Office of the Socialist International. One person was killed. Despite the failure to identify the perpetrators, suspicions were directed at far-right extremists.

The most recent attacks took place on February 14 and 15, 2015 also in the Danish capital, at the *Krudttønden* café, which is at the same time a local cultural centre. On this day there was an event called “Kunst, Blasfemi og Ytringsfrihed” (Art, blasphemy and freedom of expression). The meeting was organized by the committee of Lars Vilks – a Swedish artist who became famous after the publication of caricatures of Muhammad by his author. It appears that he was the target of the attack.⁴ The terrorist (Omar El-Hussein) attacked with an automatic weapon. Soon after, he fled. Just

² The opinion-giving Danish magazine with the largest circulation in the country.

³ A thorough analysis of the reasons why Denmark participated in military operations was presented in a collective work by Rasmus Mariager and Anders Wivel (Mariager, Wivel 2019).

⁴ This was not the first attempt to assassinate cartoonists. On January 1, 2010, Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard was targeted. The attacker (Somali) broke into the apartment of the artist and tried to kill him. The cartoonist hid in a special room and called the police, who

after midnight, he opened fire in front of the synagogue on Krystalgade Street, where the Jewish religious ceremony of Bat Mitzvah was taking place. Eventually, on the morning of February 15, 2015, the attacker was killed by the police. The balance of the two-day shootings is three people killed (including the attacker) and five people injured (for more information, see Strand 2020).⁵

Many attacks have been avoided thanks to the work of the services responsible for state security. Along with the threat of terrorism, there was an intensification of intelligence activities, which as a result led to a number of preventive measures, including the arrest of would-be bombers. Since 2005, at least a dozen arrests of people suspected of terrorism or linked to such organisations are known. Below are a few of them (Danske terrorsager 2021).

The case from Vollsmose (Odense district). On September 5, 2006, following a large-scale operation by, among others, the police, Politiets Efterretningstjeneste PET (PET; Police Intelligence Service) and the army, a number of arrests were made of people suspected of preparing the attacks. During searches of the flats, homemade bomb-making materials were found, including trimeric acetone peroxide (TATP), which is often used in terrorist activities. Two were sentenced to 12 years in prison and the third to five years. In addition, one person was found guilty, but the punishment was waived, and another five were acquitted. The people serving the sentence are of Danish (conversion to Islam), Palestinian and Kurdish nationality (from Iraq).⁶

Bomb under the Jørgensen Hotel. On September 10, 2010, there was a limited explosion underneath a hotel in Copenhagen. Shortly after this incident, the perpetrator was arrested. As a result of the investigation, it was established that a Belgian citizen of Chechen origin tried to construct a small bomb (letter), which was most likely to be addressed to the editorial office

upon arrival detained the perpetrator. The attacker was sentenced to nine years in prison and expelled from Denmark without the possibility of return (Dembowska 2021).

⁵ In 2019, a publication in the field of investigative journalism appeared, taking a closer look at, among other things, the silhouette of the bomber, the attacks carried out and finally the manhunt. In the same year, she received the Danish Foreningen for Undersøgende Journalistik award (FUJ; The Association Of Investigative Journalism; Mayli Albæk, Dalsgaard, Ree Mikkelsen 2019).

⁶ The event was described in detail in a book by Danish investigative journalist Kaare Gotfredsen (Gotfredsen 2018). In 2008, she also produced a film on the subject, for which she received an award. Foreningen for Undersøgende Journalistik.

of the newspaper "Jyllands-Posten." For the construction of the charge, he used an unstable TATP, which exploded uncontrollably. Loris Doukaiev was sentenced to 12 years in prison and handed over to Belgium in 2013.

The arrest of terrorists in Copenhagen. It took place on December 29, 2010 and was the result of cooperation between the Danish and Swedish services. The PET task force arrested three people suspected of preparing an attack (most likely on the editorial office of "Jyllands-Posten"). Another person was arrested shortly afterwards. During the searches of the premises, numerous materials needed for the construction of bombs, a machine gun with a silencer and live ammunition were found. Those arrested were sentenced to 12 years in prison. Among them were three Swedish nationals (of Lebanese, Egyptian and Tunisian origin) and one Tunisian national.

The girl from Kundby. Although a huge proportion of the world's assassins are men, women are increasingly involved, and at a young age. In 2017, the first trial in Denmark of a woman accused of planning terrorist attacks took place. She was 16 at the time of her arrest. Her targets were to be two schools, one of which was Jewish. While in custody, she injured a prison educator with glass. The court sentenced her to six years in prison. The press emphasizes the very short time that has passed from the moment when she did not stand out like other teenagers, to the desire to fight for a new order (Bartkiewicz 2017; for more information, see Nowacka-Isaksson 2017).

2. State security – the institutional dimension

PET is primarily responsible for Denmark's internal security. This institution was established in 1951 and it is under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice. Its current activities are regulated by the regulation of the Minister of Justice (Bekendtgørelse 2014/1600). According to the aforementioned act, PET's activities include, among other things: preventing and investigating matters that threaten state security, including the highest state authorities and national and international social order; preparing threat assessments; assisting other police formations; assisting public and private bodies in matters of security or protection of persons, institutions and organs of the state (§ 1). PET is supervised by a five-person body appointed by the Minister of Justice in agreement with the Minister of National

Defence. It is headed by the president, who must be a judge of the Supreme Court. The term of office of the Supervisory Authority is four years, and its members cannot be dismissed by the Minister of Justice (for more information, see *Bekendtgørelse 2014/1600*: § 16–22). PET is a key actor in the fight against terrorism in Denmark.

Another institution with the fight against terrorism as part of its objectives is the police. It operates on the basis of regulation of the Minister of Justice (*Bekendtgørelse 2019/1270*). According to § 1, the police are to strive to guarantee security and public order through preventive, supportive and enforcement actions. In principle, the act makes no direct reference to the fight against terrorism, other than § 24a point 5 of the regulation, which states that for personal protection, hostage rescue, operational work related to the fight against terrorism, particularly dangerous arrests and other special tasks, the police may request support from the Danish Armed Forces. In the case of support by the Armed Forces, the tasks are carried out under the direction of the police. However, practice shows that the police are very often involved in anti-terrorist activities – most often in cooperation with PET. In addition, it cooperates with the services of other states, among others Sweden or the United States.

The entity that is also responsible for the safety of citizens and property is the fire department. In Denmark, it operates on three levels. The first level is a municipal rescue, which performs its tasks independently. The second level includes activities related to the consequences of accidents and disasters – at this level, the fire service is supported by other services (police, ambulance). Level three is specialized rescue operations.

The Danish fire department is constantly undergoing training in terrorist attacks. For this purpose, exercises are arranged that are aimed at best depicting the realities of the attack (e.g., using sounds/sounds). This training is often carried out in conjunction with the police. Various scenarios and ways of preventing them are created. The fire department also uses materials and information from the activities of the services of other countries. There are working groups set up with the police and medical services to coordinate or discuss terrorist attacks in other countries. All fire department operational personnel are trained in first aid and equipped with life-saving medical equipment. Each fire station is prepared (staff, equipment) to accept approx. 90 people to be injured as a result of attacks (or other cataclysms). The fire department also has three trained units that can operate in the danger zone under the protection of the police and during its operational

tasks. They are equipped with ballistic equipment (e.g., bulletproof vests; Delldén 2018: 21–22).

3. Protection of state institutions

The protection of buildings and people associated with the state apparatus is diverse. Particular attention is paid to the security of the Folketing (Danish parliament). In the organisational structure of the parliament, a unit responsible for the operation and security of Folketing has been set aside in the Service and Administration Department. Its tasks include among other things: monitoring of premises, operation of alarms, and control of people entering the parliament building. The main part of its duties is carried out inside the building, with the exception of servicing traffic entering the parliament. Officers receive special training. They are uniformed but do not possess firearms or other coercive means, they are equipped only with personal protective equipment. The unit works closely with the police and PET. Any major changes concerning, among other things, the tasks of officers or security measures require the approval of the Folketing Bureau, which consists of the president and four vice presidents (Hemmingby, Håkon Sand, Bjørgo, Snortheimsmoen 2015: 27–29).

Another security feature is a small police station located in the Folketing area. Some of the officers are in uniform, some are not. The equipment of the police officers working there does not differ from the standard equipment of other officers (Hemmingby, Håkon Sand, Bjørgo, Snortheimsmoen 2015: 39).

The security of other buildings and people working in government administration (Ministries) is not uniform. This depends, among other things, on the extent to which police presence is a priority, which is decided by the various ministries. Some of them employ security companies, which, in carrying out their tasks, are subject to the relevant law (Bekendtgørelse 2016/112).

4. Terrorist threat in Denmark

The analysis of the above, as well as other incidents with signs of terrorism, indicates that the main part of them is the work of people associated

with Islamic fundamentalist groups. Only a few are attributed to far-right groups. The findings are consistent with reports from the Center for Terroranalyses (CTA) PET. These reports are produced every year and assess the current threat of terrorist activity in Denmark. Below are the key findings of the 2021 report (CTA 2021) and 2022 (CTA 2022).

The March 31, 2021 report identifies Islamic militant activity as the main danger to Denmark. The risk of activity (attacks) in this group was assessed at the level of “serious.”⁷ This means that Islamic fundamentalists have the real ability to plan, prepare and carry out attacks. Among them, al-Qaida and the so-called Islamic State were identified first and foremost, but also sympathisers and supporters of the militants, including Danish citizens. It is recognized that the main motive behind fundamentalist activity may be behaviour perceived by them as violating the principles of Islam (including caricatures of Muhammad) The report indicates that in 2020, no terrorist attacks linked to Islamic fundamentalism were carried out in Denmark, but there were 12 in Europe at the time, and eight more were foiled. And despite a significant decline in such attacks in Europe, compared with 2015–2017, they can not be ruled out in the future. Unprotected public places, symbolic places, objects related to Jewish culture, the military or the police are indicated as targets of attacks.

Another danger arises from the activities of right-wing extremists. The report defines the level of this threat as “general” (“average”). It is stated that if the attacks occur, they will be the work of one bomber or a small group and will be carried out using readily available means or firearms. The targets of the attack may be Muslims, Jews and other people from ethnic groups different from Denmark, left-wing extremists, politicians with opposing views to the right or LBGTQ+ persons. The report indicates that in 2020, there were two attacks carried out by right-wing extremists in the West,⁸ while seven were foiled.

There is even less of a threat from left-wing extremists. The CTA PET places them at the “Limited” level. As in the case of right-wing extremism, it is also indicated that possible attacks will be the work of one person or

⁷ The CTA PET report defines a 5-degree scale of terrorist threat (in parentheses translation and probability of occurrence): *Minimal* (negligible: from 15%), *Begrænset* (limited: 15–40%), *Generel* (average: 40–60%), *Alvorlig* (serious: 60–85%), *Meget alvorlig* (very serious: above 85%).

⁸ For the purposes of the report, the term “West” includes North America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe excluding Russia, Belarus, Turkey and the Caucasus.

a small group and can be carried out using readily available materials or firearms. Potential targets include right-wing extremists, government officials and police. To a lesser extent, it can be people sympathising with right-wing radicals, some politicians, public figures, and artists.

The report indicates that there are many other factors that can – in extreme cases – lead to acts of terror. Among them are: mental disorders, some conspiracy theories and social movements, the impact of social media on vulnerable people, political, ethnic and religious conflicts that take place in the world, but may have their echo in Denmark.

Analysts at CTA PET also pointed out the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related state policies on the threat of terrorist attacks. It has been recognized that it is generally small, but it can radicalize social attitudes, including in particular those associated with the extreme right, individuals professing conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 by promoting distrust of authorities, “black-and-white” perception of reality, and civil disobedience.

According to the latest report dated March 1, 2022, the greatest threat of terrorist action continues to come from Islamic militants – in this case, the threat level has been maintained at “serious.” Analysts pointed out that after numerous arrests in the West, the activity of Islamic organizations has been reduced. There were no direct calls for attacks against targets in Denmark or against Danish interests. It was also considered that the Taliban takeover of power in Afghanistan is unlikely to increase the threat of terrorism due to the ideological, linguistic and cultural differences between the Islamic groups in Denmark and Afghanistan. However, because Denmark in previous years was the target of attacks by Islamic militants, it was decided to maintain the degree of threat of Islamic terrorism at the mentioned second level.

As in the 2021 report, the threat from right-wing extremists was maintained at “general” (“average”). Describing the ideological dimension, the report shows that the environment of the far right is diverse, but they are united by a strong dislike of immigrants from Muslim countries. They are often susceptible to conspiracy theories, such as anti-Semitic or COVID-19 restrictions. Analysts point out that in the latter case, right-wing circles may have increased their influence due to activity directed against the government’s anti-covid policy (anti-state narrative). It is estimated that the probability of attacks by this group is less, but it increases its ability to influence society through virtual communities.

Compared to the 2021 report, the threat level from left-wing extremists has been reduced from “limited” to “negligible,” meaning no threat. This group has traditionally directed its actions against racism and fascism. The report said that while the left-wing extremist group was active, it was unlikely that they used bombs or firearms. Also, these groups are unlikely to attack members of the authorities or the police (such a confrontation can take place, in principle, only during clashes between police and demonstrators).

5. Fight against terrorism

As you can see, the problem of terrorism in Denmark primarily concerns radical Islam. The Danish state has long sought to develop and implement an optimal integration policy for all immigrants. These actions seem to be of particular importance in the context of the fight against Islamic radicalism.

The Danish government has supported a number of initiatives aimed at countering radicalisation. The most famous is the model from Aarhus (Hemmingsen 2015). Its main creator is Preben Bertelsen, a professor associated with the University of Aarhus. Actions under the model are aimed at achieving two goals: prevention and “exit.” Prevention is intended to prevent the radicalisation of young people when it does not yet pose a serious threat to national security. In turn, the “exit” program is aimed at people who are already radicalized and ready to use violence, including acts of terror. The programme also covers Islamic militants returning to Denmark from the Middle East (e.g., Syria), as long as they have not been proven to have committed any crimes. It should be noted that the creators of the program proposed a different approach to people at risk of radicalization or already radicalized – the emphasis was on reintegration and multi-faceted support, rather than on the threat of legal penalties.

The entire program is voluntary. Within its scope, the use of penalties or threats has been renounced. Participants receive psychological and material support, help in getting a job, health care, help in finishing school, etc. Guides (mentors) play an important role. They are specially trained to implement the program. Their task is to identify risk factors, choose the right form of action for individual cases, and support in daily activities and activities that

could increase radicalization. The mentor is also a partner for political or religious discussions.

The programme is part of a wider, comprehensive policy to prevent violence and radicalisation at local, regional, central (including ministerial) and non-governmental levels. It is worth mentioning here the formalised cooperation between schools, social welfare and the police (Danish: *skole, socialforvaltning, Politiet - SSP*), which provides a forum for the exchange of comments, experiences and problem-solving proposals (Taggatz Jensen, Bjønsson Haraldsen, Dalsgaard, Tugger Nielsen, 2015).

The program appears to have a beneficial effect on reducing radical attitudes among people at risk of indoctrination, although there are difficulties in accurately assessing its effectiveness.⁹ On the other hand, it is also criticized, especially by right-wing circles, as too “soft.” However, it is still being implemented and expanded by successive governments.

Conclusions

In contrast to the overall terrorist threat picture in the European Union countries (including the UK until February 1, 2020), where national-ethnic terrorism dominates (*European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020*), in Denmark the greatest threat flows from Islamic terrorists. Despite the fact that there were relatively few terrorist attacks, the Danish security services define the risk of a real threat at the level of “high.” This is confirmed by the continuous arrests of people associated with Islamic militant groups. With the changing international and domestic situation, Denmark has introduced a number of changes in the field of state security, including the protection of citizens and institutions. This applies to both military and auxiliary formations, as well as to the policy of preventing the radicalization of young people, recognizing actions in this regard as one of the key steps in the fight against the phenomenon of terrorism. The changes seem to be having an effect, but final conclusions will have to wait a while.

⁹ Among the scientific research on the effectiveness of the SSP program is the work of Lone Bæk Brønsted. The study group consisted of boys with Danish citizenship but from national minorities (Bæk Brønsted 2021).

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