

Fighting terrorism in the Netherlands; a historical perspective

Dr. Ronald Janse, lecturer in jurisprudence, Faculty of Law, Utrecht University

Abstract

The Dutch government and legislature are in the process of introducing an unprecedented set of anti-terrorist measures. It is claimed that these measures are necessary and justified, as terrorism today threatens the security of Dutch society as never before. But does it? In the present state of excitement, it is all too easy to forget that Dutch society has had to face terrorism before. Indeed, if the number of people killed or targeted is a measure of the gravity of a terrorist threat, terrorism in the 1970s was more serious than current terrorism has been up until now. Yet in the 1970s, the Dutch government did not introduce a comprehensive set of anti-terrorist measures, unlike, for example, the British and German governments. In this paper, the Moluccan actions, the most serious terrorist actions Dutch society has experienced so far, and the reaction by the government to these actions, are discussed. This leads to the conclusion that current terrorism is less different from old-style terrorism than the government claims it to be, although there may be one important difference: the risk that current terrorists use deeply destructive weapons. This is not to say that the government's policies were better in the 1970s than they are now. However, a sense of what the record tells us may help us in disciplining current fears and in taking a more critical stance towards the view that the present anti-terrorist measures are necessary and justified because we never saw anything like current terrorism before.

Keywords

Terrorism, Moluccas, anti-terrorist measures

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ISSN 1871-515X