

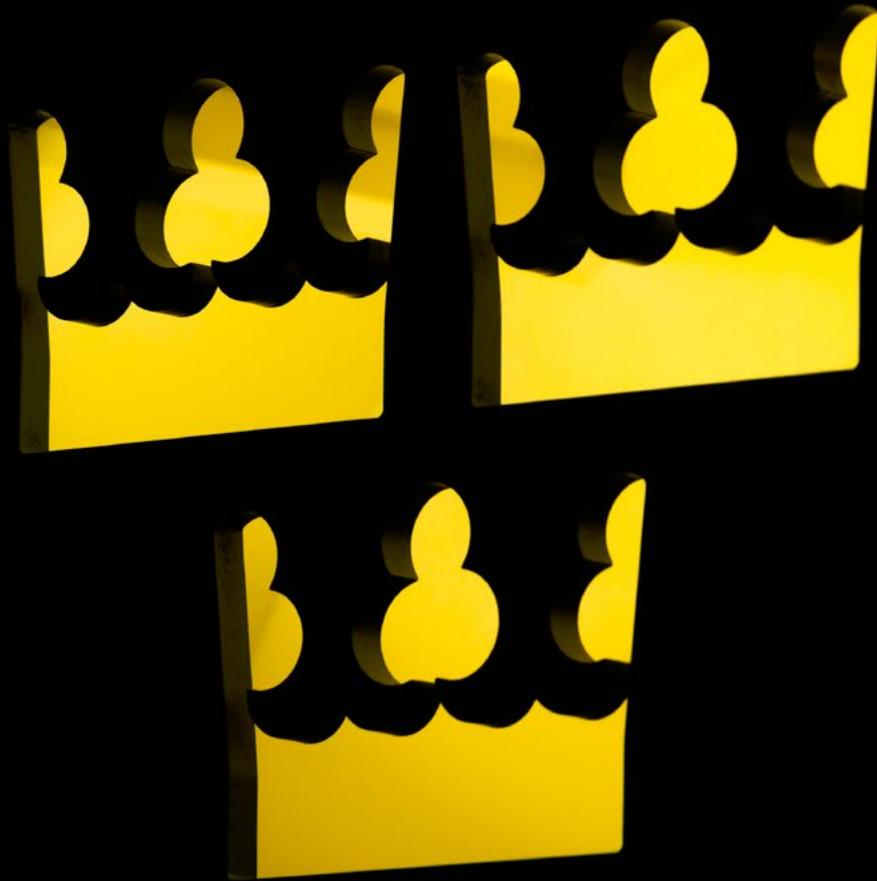
The Swedish
Security Service

2023
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2024



We must learn to live with this deteriorated security situation, to take it seriously and to act accordingly.

Charlotte von Essen, Head of the Swedish Security Service



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A serious security situation

An unstable world has an impact on Sweden. Overlapping, mutually reinforcing threats make for a complex threat scenario. This serious security situation is likely to persist, affecting the threat posed by foreign powers and violent extremism alike.

Deniable attacks, disinformation, systematic security threats, and a terrorist threat that remains high; the threats to Sweden are complex, overlapping and mutually reinforcing. External threats affect internal security. We must all be prepared for the situation to deteriorate.

The Swedish Security Service is aware of activities that threaten national security in all of our operational areas, including counter-espionage, protective security, counter-terrorism, counter-subversion and dignitary protection. We work intensely, in all of our operational areas, to counter the threats to our country.

Sweden must not become a platform for foreign powers or violent extremists. Our protectees must be able to perform their duties safely and securely. Sweden must safeguard what is most valuable to us, including our secrets.

As a national security service, we must be able to handle threats both in the short and long term, whether direct or indirect. In a gradually deteriorating situation, it can be difficult to discern escalation. Events and perspectives must be viewed as a whole to reveal the bigger picture. Being able to cooperate

and share information with our partners is crucial to creating the most detailed situational picture possible.

Foreign powers engage in systematic security-threatening activities against Sweden on a broad scale, from acquiring technology to carrying out cyberattacks in order to steal information and knowledge. They also attempt to influence Swedish decision-making, gather information on the activities of dissidents, and plan attacks against individuals in Sweden.

The war in Ukraine continues to impact the security situation in Europe and Sweden. The outcome of Russia's war will affect the threat to Sweden in terms of Russia's risk appetite as concerns influence operations and sabotage against targets in the West. We also know that Russia is in great need of technology and equipment to maintain its military capabilities for the war in Ukraine, and that it is willing to use both legal and illegal means to obtain it. As a country at the forefront of research, development and innovation, Sweden is an attractive target.

In addition to Russia, China and Iran pose the greatest threats to Sweden. These countries strive, and to some extent cooperate, to bring about a change in ►



Charlotte von Essen,
Head of the
Swedish Security Service

Säkerhet

the global security order, and they are becoming more aggressive in pursuit of their goals. Their activities may also become a threat to the security of other Western countries, and we must do everything in our power to prevent foreign powers from strengthening their capabilities at the expense of Sweden and other countries.

The attention of foreign powers is also being focused on new areas that affect Swedish interests, such as the Arctic with its raw materials and strategic location. The militarisation of space will also have consequences for Sweden, as many of our security-sensitive activities and essential services are dependent on space-related services. Rapid technological development in fields such as artificial intelligence (AI) presents opportunities, but also new threats and vulnerabilities.

In the past year, the Swedish Security Service has had to handle the consequences of a new negative portrayal of Sweden. Strong reactions to Qur'an burnings, combined with disinformation campaigns such as claims that Swedish authorities routinely kidnap Muslim children, and the portrayal of Sweden as anti-Islamic, has led to Sweden being considered a more legitimate target for violent extremists. As a result, the terrorist threat level has been raised to high (level four on the five-level scale). This was made clear by the tragic attack in Brussels, in which Swedes were killed and injured simply because of their nationality. The image of Sweden has ultimately become a matter of national security.

Conflicts in the Middle East, including the fighting between the terrorist organisation Hamas and Israel, have contributed to polarisation and has an influence on actors in Sweden. Violent extremists exploit troubled times to spread distrust, especially online. This may affect lone actors or groups to move from thought to action, sometimes guided by actors abroad. Such developments are exploited by foreign powers.

The Swedish Security Service cooperates nationally and internationally with security services and police authorities to counter violent extremism and terrorism. We carefully analyse and assess developments so that we can act when needed. Much of our work must be

carried out covertly. As a national security service, our aim is often to intervene at an early stage to prevent a serious incident.

Foreign powers employ proxies to carry out security-threatening activities in order to achieve aims such as damaging Sweden's reputation and increasing polarisation. This can have a knock-on effect on other courses of events, such as Sweden's NATO process or the terrorist threat. Foreign powers use proxies to disguise their involvement. We know that foreign actors exploited last year's Qur'an burnings to divert Sweden's focus. These threats overlap and thus grow stronger.

When anti-government forces and violent extremists disseminate conspiracy theories and disinformation about Sweden's decline, this risks undermining confidence in Swedish society and our democratic system.

Generally speaking, trust in the institutions of society remains high. That said, we must take these



We can be better at protecting ourselves. Much has already been done, and is being done, but there is room for improvement. One crucial aspect is to better protect our most valuable secrets, many of which are in digital form.

*Charlotte von Essen,
Head of the Swedish Security Service*

signals seriously. Society as a whole must continue working to maintain trust and confidence in its institutions and political decision-making.

In the serious global situation we find ourselves in, it is of the utmost importance that we demonstrate the will to defend ourselves and our democracy. While the Swedish Security Service works purposefully and on a long-term basis to prevent and avert attacks and activities in order to make Sweden a less attractive platform, there are many other stakeholders who must also take crucial measures.

The global situation makes it increasingly important to protect security-sensitive activities, essential services and critical infrastructure, such as our energy supply, transports, telecommunications, and financial sector. Sweden must be prepared to counter attacks of various kinds, including subversive activities such as cyber attacks, attacks on critical infrastructure, and influence operations.

We can be better at protecting ourselves. Much has already been done, and is being done, but there is room for improvement. One crucial aspect is to better protect our most valuable secrets, many of which are in digital form.

Those who carry out security-sensitive activities and vital societal functions are increasingly aware of the necessity of protective security. That said, major flaws and vulnerabilities remain and can be exploited by capable threat actors.

As the understanding of the threats to Sweden's internal security increases, we note a greater willingness in society to contribute and make a difference. This is also reflected in the number of applications to work at the Swedish Security Service.

Only together can we build resilience. We must learn to live with this deteriorated security situation, to take it seriously and to act accordingly. It is time to concentrate our efforts to counter the threats to our security. ■

Threats and vulnerabilities



The troubled international situation has an impact on Sweden

The outcome of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is crucial to the security of Europe and Sweden, as Russia's focus may come to be aimed more at the West. Conflicts in the Middle East, including the war between the terrorist organisation Hamas and Israel, contribute to polarisation and has an influence on actors in Sweden. This serious security situation will likely remain for a long period of time, and will affect the threat posed by foreign powers and violent extremism alike.

Threats from foreign powers

Foreign powers engage in security-threatening activities against Sweden on a broad scale. This includes everything from procurement of technology, cyber attacks, attack plots targeting individuals, compiling of information on dissidents, and attempts to influence Swedish decision-making. Russia, China and Iran pose the greatest threats to Sweden's security. They operate, and to some extent cooperate, to alter the current global security order, which affects Sweden's security situation.

Swedish technology is an alluring target

The war in Ukraine has left Russia in great need of technology and equipment in order to maintain its military capabilities. As a country at the forefront of technology and innovation, Sweden is an attractive target. The two greatest threats are Russia and China, but Iran is also engaged in technology procurement from Sweden.

New arenas mean new vulnerabilities

New technology and focus areas have consequences on Sweden's security. The raw materials found in the Arctic, along with its strategic location, attract a growing interest from foreign powers, which in turn affects Swedish interests. The militarisation of space will also have consequences for Sweden, as many of our security-sensitive and essential services are

dependent on space-related services. Rapid technological developments, not least in the area of AI, present enormous opportunities but also new threats and vulnerabilities.

High threat level

The attack threat against Sweden is posed mainly by violent Islamist extremism and violent right-wing extremism. Attacks are most likely to be carried out by lone actors. There is a slight trend towards attempts to guide attacks from abroad. There is also a threat from individuals motivated by a mixture of extremist ideologies, often influenced by conspiracy theories and anti-government rhetoric.

Developments place demands on protective security

The serious security situation places demands on Sweden's resilience. One important element is to protect that which is most valuable. To reduce the vulnerability of security-sensitive activities, necessary security measures must continue to be prioritised.

A new portrayal of Sweden

Descriptions of Sweden as an anti-Islamic country have contributed to the increased terrorist threat from violent Islamist extremism, which now views Sweden as a legitimate target. Conspiracy theories and anti-government rhetoric are also being disseminated, especially online. Increasing distrust in societal functions and the democratic system risks undermining trust in public authorities and institutions.

Overlapping and mutually reinforcing threats

The situation is complex, and must be viewed as a whole to reveal the bigger picture. When the image of Sweden is challenged and its democracy questioned, foreign powers and violent extremists alike may take advantage to spur on division and polarisation, which in turn may have an effect on events in Sweden. To create smokescreens and deniability, foreign powers use proxies who, whether knowingly or unknowingly, are used to tarnish Sweden's reputation.



Sweden under pressure

The negative change to Sweden's image is affecting national security. Events are being exploited by both foreign powers and violent extremists, who are constantly engaged in activities that threaten Sweden's security.



Sweden's changing image affects the threat

A number of events over recent years have affected Sweden's image at home and abroad. These developments lead to increased pressure on society, and insecurity and polarisation is fertile ground for extremism.



during 2023, Sweden has increasingly become the focus of attention for violent extremists in a way not previously seen. From being viewed as part of a homogeneous West, Sweden now

stands out as a target. The Swedish Security Service has seen the narrative of “a Sweden in decline” and “an anti-Islamic Sweden” being disseminated not only by violent extremists, but also more generally and to a wider audience.

The attack threat in Sweden is posed mainly by violent Islamist extremism and violent right-wing extremism. Conflicts around the world also has an effect on actors in Sweden. Reactions to Qur'an burnings and disinformation campaigns painting Sweden as an anti-Islamic country have increased the threat, and in August 2023, the Swedish Security Service raised the terrorist threat level to 'high'.

In the short term, the main impact of this new image of Sweden is on the terrorist threat, as Sweden is specifically pointed out in propaganda and has become a specifically pointed out target for violent Islamists in terms of propaganda and attack planning. In the long term, it risks driving societal polarisation and contributing to attack threats and subversive threats.

“This development needs to be addressed by society as a whole. The cooperation already taking place between relevant authorities and organisations is part



Anti-government movements run the risk of becoming a breeding ground for infiltration, polarisation and subversive activities. Such movements may also be exploited by foreign powers, as they can be used as proxies to destabilise society and influence political decisions.

*Susanna Trehörning,
Head of Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Subversion
at the Swedish Security Service*

of this, and will continue to develop in accordance with the new national strategy to counter violent extremism and terrorism,” says Susanna Trehörning, Head of Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Subversion at the Swedish Security Service.

Mistrust of societal institutions poses a long-term threat

The Swedish Security Service notes that actors in violent extremist circles and anti-government movements, as well as foreign powers, spread propaganda, disinformation and distrust in society in order to increase polarisation and to radicalise more individuals, including children and young people. This rhetoric refers to perceived injustices

and conveys a solution that often involves violence.

Developments noted by the Swedish Security Service over the past year risk increasing polarisation in Sweden and undermining social solidarity – an important condition for democracy as a whole – among certain groups. Ultimately, the ability of authorities and elected representatives to address societal problems can affect trust in the institutions of society.

“Anti-government movements run the risk of becoming a breeding ground for infiltration, polarisation and subversive activities, where attempts to influence policies and decisions may occur. The Swedish Security Service knows that this occurs in Sweden. Anti-government movements may also be exploited by foreign powers, as they can be used as ▶



proxies to destabilise society and influence political decisions,” says Susanna Trehörning.

One challenge posed by subversive activities is that they can be relatively difficult to detect, and in extent counter, as they generally take place in the shadows. Another challenge is that such activities often exist in the grey area between legal and illegal activities.

Radicalisation and recruitment on a broad scale

Radicalisation and recruitment continues to take place on digital platforms, where minors are often exposed to it. While digital platforms have become increasingly important, physical platforms have not lost their relevance.

“Those at high risk of radicalisation are often dissatisfied or vulnerable in some way, leaving them open to exploitation by violent extremists. Much of this takes place online, but there are also natural physical meeting places. Successful terrorist attacks may also inspire and further radicalise these individuals,” says Susanna Trehörning.

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more accessible, there is a risk that violent extremists may come to use AI for radicalisation, recruitment and increasing their own capability. Anti-government actors may also come

to utilise AI to more efficiently spread propaganda and disinformation.

“Given the rapid development and improvement of AI tools, it will likely become increasingly difficult to distinguish between genuine and fabricated content. This risks, among other things, affecting polarisation and, in the long term, undermining trust in the democratic system,” says Susanna Trehörning. ■

Summary of counter-terrorism and counter-subversion

The attack threat to Sweden is posed mainly by violent Islamist extremism and violent right-wing extremism. The spreading of conspiracy theories and anti-government messages increases mistrust in societal functions and the democratic system, at the risk of undermining trust in public authorities and institutions.

Subversive activities

Covert security-threatening activities with the aim of overthrowing or fundamentally altering the democratic form of government or making the country dependent on foreign powers. Subversive activities are carried out using methods such as propaganda, disinformation, infiltration, criminality, sabotage, and terrorist threats.

Lowered threshold for foreign powers

Foreign powers are becoming increasingly offensive and taking advantage of situations that arise in order to further their own agendas at the expense of others. The Swedish Security Service notes that the threshold at which foreign powers are willing to act has been lowered.

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developments in recent years, where countries such as Russia, China and Iran are challenging the prevailing rule-based international order, entail consequences for Sweden. Russia has

taken an increasingly aggressive line, especially when it comes to its neighbouring countries, leading to increasing instability in Sweden's immediate vicinity. The eventual outcome of the war in Ukraine will be crucial to Europe and Sweden's security, as Russia may well turn its attention towards the West.

"It is difficult to provide a more accurate forecast of global developments and how these might affect the security of Sweden. What we can say is that there is a risk that the situation will deteriorate further over the next few years in a manner that is not favourable for Sweden's security. It is therefore vital that we, as a country and as a society, have the capability to counter this," says Daniel Stenling, Head of Counter-Intelligence at the Swedish Security Service.

Sweden is in a serious and complex security situation in which the intent of foreign powers could rapidly change, and where Sweden is part of a greater context.

"Sweden is considered part of the collective West, making us a pawn in a larger global game. This means that foreign intelligence operations in Sweden may have negative consequences for other countries. >

One example is the illegal acquisition of Swedish technology for use in the Russian military-industrial complex, something that poses a direct threat to others," says Daniel Stenling.

While Russia poses a threat to Sweden's territorial integrity, China poses an equivalent threat to Sweden's economic security. In its quest to become a global superpower, China procures innovations, technical know-how and cutting-edge expertise from Swedish companies and universities. Swedish businesses are acquired and strategic investments are made.

"Dependencies create vulnerabilities. It is vital that Sweden avoids becoming overly dependent on China," says Daniel Stenling.

Increased aggression from foreign powers

Over time, Russia's behaviour has challenged not only the European security order, but also the fundamental norms, institutions and cooperation on which European security rests. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has led to further deterioration of the security situation in Europe, and to a wider conflict interface between Russia and the West.

Russia is increasingly risk-prone and reliant on strong-arm tactics to achieve its strategic aims: to reinforce its status as a superpower, ensure control over its immediate vicinity, secure the regime's grip on power, and strengthen its civil and military industries.

There has been a gradual shift toward challenging the international conventions and laws that govern how countries behave towards one another.

"We can see that countries have pushed the

common rules and norms of behaviour to their limits and beyond. States are acting more offensively and aggressively on other countries' soil to promote their own interests. When these boundaries are pushed back, norms also become less rule-based. While this has always to some extent been bubbling under the surface, the tendency has been much more obvious in recent years," says Daniel Stenling.

As a result of international developments, foreign powers have a larger incentive to engage in security-threatening activities in Sweden. This shift has also lowered the threshold for when foreign powers choose to act. As the risk of attack increases, in addition to the intelligence activities already being carried out, this constitutes a threat to Sweden's national security.

The use of proxies by foreign powers

The Swedish Security Service is aware that Iran has gathered information on and prepared attacks on Swedish soil against perceived threats to its regime. Like other countries, Iran sometimes uses proxies to carry out activities in Sweden. These proxies may have links to terrorist organisations or other types of groups. Russia is also increasing its use of proxies as the country's isolation is limiting its scope for conducting intelligence activities.

"As Russia becomes more isolated, with many countries having expelled Russian intelligence officers who have been working under diplomatic cover, Russia is forced to employ other means to achieve its objectives. Using proxies is one approach, but Russia also uses cyberattacks to gather intelligence, and when



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at the Swedish Security Service*

it is possible to use the old tried and tested methods, Russia will do so," explains Daniel Stenling.

This isolation has also resulted in Russia to a greater extent cooperating with China and Iran in order to meet its need for military technology and equipment and to circumvent sanctions.

"Russia, China and Iran are working, and to some extent cooperating, in order to change the prevailing world order. They are willing to support one another in this endeavour, even if their own interests always come first," says Daniel Stenling. ■

Summary: Counter-intelligence

The serious international situation affects the level of threat to Sweden, and foreign powers are acting more offensively. The Swedish Security Service notes that the threshold at which foreign powers are willing to act has been lowered. Security-threatening activities are broadly targeted against Sweden. The outcome of Russia's war with Ukraine is crucial to Sweden's national security, as Russia's focus may come to be aimed more at the West.

Increased awareness of the importance of protective security

An increasing number of entities report conducting security-sensitive activities. An attack against one of these could have extensive and serious consequences for Sweden. Meanwhile, many organisations struggle to identify which specific aspects of their activities are especially critical, making it difficult to achieve commensurate protective security.



he Swedish Security Service is one of the supervisory authorities for protective security, and as such is responsible for reviewing how entities protect their security-sensitive activities. In this

capacity, the Swedish Security Service can attest that many entities that conduct security-sensitive activities find it difficult to identify their critical assets, their vulnerabilities, and the threats they face.

“If there is no common thread running through identifying critical assets and identifying threats and vulnerabilities, there is a risk that incorrect or insufficient measures will be taken. One way to handle at least part of this problem may be to involve more areas of operation in the protective security efforts. This will create a better overall understanding and thus better conditions for identifying critical assets,” says David Hughes, Head of Protective Security at the Swedish Security Service.

Alongside the Swedish Armed Forces, the Swedish Security Service coordinates inspections by supervisory authorities, which are vital to strengthening

the protective security work of entities engaged in security-sensitive activities. The Swedish Security Service’s expertise in other areas of operations – such as counter-espionage and counter-terrorism – is one significant success factor to this.

“With our combined expertise, the Swedish Security Service is in a good position to assess threats to security-sensitive activities and thus to strengthen protective security. It is also gratifying to see that the awareness of the importance of protective security is increasing. In our encounters, we see great commitment and an obvious desire on the part of the entities to protect their security-sensitive activities, and thus Sweden’s security,” says David Hughes.

Interdependencies and critical assets in one place

The Swedish Security Service notes that various interdependencies present a challenge to protective security. Certain activities that at first glance appear to be of only local or regional concern may have national significance due to the potential secondary consequences of an attack on entities other than the one under direct attack.



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*David Hughes,
Head of Protective Security
at the Swedish Security Service*

“We can see that entities find it challenging to assess the significance other actors have on their own security-sensitive activities, and to identify who is responsible for protective security in the event of interdependencies. We are examining how we can give greater guidance on this issue,” says David Hughes.

Outsourcing of security-sensitive activities is also common, and the Swedish Security Service is aware that risks arise when many entities depend on the same supplier.

“Gathering critical assets with a single supplier increases the risk of the supplier in question being targeted by foreign intelligence activities. In certain cases, it may be inappropriate to expose critical assets in this way,” says David Hughes.

Increased international focus

In the future, in addition to Swedish protective security legislation, it may be necessary for entities that carry out security-sensitive activities to comply with international regulations to a greater extent, not least in

light of Sweden’s application to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

“Organisations that may come to process classified NATO data will need to take certain protective security measures that have not been an issue until now. The Swedish Security Service is currently working with other authorities to assess how NATO’s protective security rules should be accommodated,” says David Hughes. ■

Summary of protective security

The altered global security situation places demands on Sweden’s resilience, including its ability to protect state secrets. Foreign powers have a significant capability, and attacks against Swedish targets may lead to severe consequences. To reduce the vulnerability of security-sensitive activities, awareness needs to be raised concerning the protective security measures that must be taken.

The protection of the Central Government is vital to Sweden's total defence

The altered global situation has an impact on the Swedish Security Service's dignitary protection work, and places greater demands on national and international cooperation. The Swedish Security Service also notes an intelligence threat to the Central Government.

The serious global security situation has accelerated the rebuilding of the Swedish total defence and the vital work of equipping Sweden for harder times. The situation sheds a harsh light on the importance of maintaining the function of the Government regardless of the situation.

The deteriorated security situation has a direct impact on the Swedish Security Service's dignitary protection work. The Swedish Security Service is therefore taking various measures to ensure continuity of Government under considerably worse conditions than those faced today. This includes cooperation with other authorities, security organisations, and international partner services.

"We have increased our operational capability, so that we can quickly reallocate resources to meet changing needs. As a result, we will be better able to correctly prioritise protection," says Carolina Björnsdotter Paasikivi, Head of the Security

Department at the Swedish Security Service.

In certain cases, the Swedish Security Service's remit extends to protecting members of the Government on trips abroad. During 2023, a number of Swedish dignitaries visited Ukraine.

"Travelling to a warzone increases the risk to both the protectee and our own staff. These trips require meticulous planning and very high security awareness," says Carolina Björnsdotter Paasikivi.

The threat to the Central Government

Most of the investigations conducted by the Swedish Security Service that relate to members of the Central Government concern threats, harassment and physical approaches. That said, the altered threat to Sweden's national security has made it increasingly important to address intelligence threats. Most intelligence threats and influence campaigns by foreign powers targeting the Swedish Security Service's protectees are attributable to Russia, China and Iran.



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International cooperation

Close protection officers from Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland are already able to operate unhindered on each other's territory, and officers from other Nordic countries have operated on Swedish soil in 2023. The Swedish Security Service cooperates extensively, and is continuing to develop its cooperation, with the other Nordic security and intelligence services in order to create greater flexibility and opportunities to join forces when the situation demands it.

"In terms of dignitary protection of the Central Government, we see similar trends in threats, requirements and vulnerabilities within the Nordic countries. We see considerable benefits from this type of cooperation. When we join NATO, the Swedish Security Service will need to be prepared for new demands on international cooperation in the field of dignitary protection. We are already preparing for this," says Carolina Björnsdotter Paasikivi. ■

Summary of the Central Government

The Swedish Security Service is responsible for protecting the members of the Central Government. This covers just over 400 positions, including the Head of State and the heir to the throne, the Speaker and Members of the Riksdag, the Prime Minister, ministers, state secretaries, and cabinet secretaries.

Summary of dignitary protection

The Swedish Security Service's dignitary protection work is affected by the serious global situation. Measures are taken to counter this threat. The Swedish Security Service cooperation with other organisations and authorities has become an increasingly important parameter. The intelligence threat to the Central Government from foreign powers remains.



Serious situation

In a troubled international climate, Sweden finds itself in a serious situation with complex, overlapping threats. These threats can be countered through cooperation, establishing the overall threat scenario, and enacting relevant legislation.



A higher and more complex terrorist threat

In January 2023, a Qur'an was burned outside the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm. The strong reactions that followed marked the start of a year in which Sweden went from being a legitimate to a designated target for violent Islamist extremism. Sweden remains in a deteriorated situation with a high terrorist threat level.

Over the course of the year, Qur'an burnings and disinformation portraying Sweden as an anti-Islamic country have fuelled developments of the terrorist threat. Sweden is now in the cross-hairs of violent Islamist extremists to an extent not previously seen by the Swedish Security Service.

The Swedish Security Service has noted an influx of attack threats against Sweden over the course of the year. This began with a large increase in early 2023, with fluctuations seen since. In response to this altered threat, the Head of the Swedish Security Service raised the terrorist threat level to high in August 2023.

"From experience, we know that incidents perceived as an offence against Islam play a key role when violent Islamists designate targets, even several years later, as demonstrated by the reactions to caricatures of the prophet Muhammad by Lars Vilks and Charlie Hebdo. This also applies to the threat against Sweden

and Swedish interests, as certain actors have cemented the image of Sweden as an anti-Islamic country, which may mean that the threat to Sweden will persist for an extended period of time," says Alex*, a senior analyst with the Swedish Security Service.

More complex cases

The attack threat is still considered to be posed mainly by individuals acting alone or in small groups, using simple means such as firearms and knives. The Swedish Security Service has noted a slight increase in attempts to guide and plan attacks from abroad, somewhat complicating matters.

"It also means that it takes longer to assess and, hopefully, dismiss a threat. The complexity is also affected by foreign powers reacting opportunistically to events, which in turn may influence violent extremism," says Alex.

Technological developments and greater security



awareness among actors also contribute to this complexity.

“We can see a greater focus on Sweden among violent Islamists globally, and an interest from a few individuals to travel from abroad to carry out attacks in Sweden. However, there is also a threat to Swedish interests abroad, as witnessed during the year with the storming of the Swedish Embassy in Baghdad in particular,” says Alex.

The Swedish Security Service has also noted a difference in how Sweden is referenced in violent extremist propaganda. Unlike previously, Sweden is now singled out, and calls for action have become more frequent.

Propaganda inspires and creates intent

“Propaganda is a means by which to radicalise, recruit, spread fear and create an intent to do something. We saw this in the attack on Drottninggatan in 2017, which

was in part inspired by propaganda,” says Alex.

The threat of attacks by violent right-wing extremists also remains. This threat is primarily characterised by lone actors acting upon mixed, sometimes unclear, extreme far-right ideological convictions, often in combination with more personal motives. They too consume and disseminate violent propaganda. The threat posed by violent far-right extremists is weighed up in the overall terrorist threat level.

“While the heightened threat from violent Islamist extremism has been a clear theme in the past year, we must not forget that violent right-wing extremism still presents a threat. In recent years, we have handled information about attack preparations carried out by people inspired by a combination of violent right-wing extremism ideology and personal motives,” says Alex. ■

**Alex is a pseudonym.*

Financing of terrorism from Swedish soil

The Swedish Security Service regularly receives intelligence concerning organisations and individuals in Sweden that are financing terrorism abroad. A substantive part of the suspected financing of terrorism occurs through criminal activity.



In the assessment of the Swedish Security Service, the majority of these funds are destined for members of terrorist organisations abroad and to terrorist organisations outside of Europe, including al-Qaeda, the PKK, and al-Shabaab.

A number of different methods are used, and the use of intermediaries increases the possibility of operating covertly. Communication via social media and the use of digital banking and money transfer services makes it easier for actors to handle funds.

Public funds, enforced collection, and contributions

The money that finances terrorism comes from a range of sources. It may be earned from gainful employment, the proceeds of legitimate business activities, or public funding in the form of subsidies. It may also be collected through donations and enforced collection from both individuals and businesses that feel forced to hand over money for fear of reprisals. These activities can be likened to unlawful taxation, extortion, and racketeering.

Banking and credit institutions and payment services are used to transfer money from Sweden to terrorist organisations abroad. Hawala, an informal system for transferring money bypassing the traditional banking system, is also used to finance terrorism. Couriers are also used to carry cash, concealed in their luggage, from Sweden to terrorist organisations in other countries.

The Swedish Security Service notes that there is often an overlap between financing of terrorism and economic and organised crime, the proceeds of which are sometimes entirely or in part used to finance



terrorism. Together with other government agencies, the Swedish Security Service take various measures to mitigate and prevent this. ■

Successful prosecution for attempting to finance terrorism

In autumn 2023, an individual was sentenced to four and a half years in prison for offences including attempted financing of terrorism in a case related to the PKK. The convicted individual had attempted to obtain money for the PKK through extortion. The preliminary investigation was conducted by the Swedish Security Service and headed by a prosecutor from the Swedish Prosecution Authority's National Security Unit.

Criminal participation

An amendment to the Swedish Terrorist Offences Act (2022:666) that entered into effect on 1 June 2023 makes it a criminal offence to participate in a terrorist organisation in a manner that is intended to promote, strengthen, or support the organisation. This makes practically all active participation in a terrorist organisation a criminal offence, including acting on behalf of such an organisation, providing training or guidance, disseminating propaganda, recruiting, financial management, and acquiring weapons. It is also a criminal offence to become a member, place oneself under the organisation's leadership, swear allegiance, offer services, provide and gather information, participate in educational or training activities, distribute materials, services or equipment, or arrange transportation. Other acts that do not fall within the definition of participation may also be punishable, such as criminal association, financing, or recruitment to terrorism.



Russia, China and Iran

Russia, China and Iran are the countries that pose the greatest threat to Sweden. All three carry out intelligence operations and security-threatening activities in and against Sweden.

In many ways, Sweden is an attractive target for foreign powers. Sweden's geographical location, its strong protection of democratic freedoms and rights, a competitive high-tech sector, and large diasporas are among the factors that contribute to threat actors engaging in security-threatening activities in and against Sweden.

Russia, China and Iran are working, and to some extent cooperating, in order to change the prevailing world order. Each of these countries has an interest

in positioning itself as a counterpoint to the West, something that has an effect on the security situation in Sweden. Their cooperation is driven by a shared interest in countering the United States' position as the leading global power, but also by economic and technological interests. However, while Russia, China and Iran may all be striving to change the prevailing world order, they are acting based on differing national interests and have different approaches. China has a quest to become a global superpower, Iran wishes to establish itself as a major power in the Middle East,

and Russia considers itself to be in conflict with the collective West and NATO.

Russia – the greatest threat

Russia poses the greatest threat to Sweden’s security, and is assessed to be the only actor in Sweden’s immediate vicinity that poses a military threat.

The Russian government’s foreign and security policy has, over time, challenged not only the European security order, but also the norms, cooperation and institutions that serve as the basis for European security. The war in Ukraine has further deteriorated the security situation and led to a widened conflict interface between Russia and the West. Russia’s increasingly aggressive attitude to its neighbours has destabilised the situation in Sweden’s immediate vicinity, especially around the Baltic Sea.

Meanwhile, sanctions have forced Russia to turn to other countries for the technology it needs to maintain its military and domestic industries. When Russia increases its military capability as a result of cooperation with other authoritarian regimes, such as China and Iran, this poses a threat to countries in Russia’s vicinity.

Russia deploys intelligence officers under diplomatic cover or in the guise of legitimate visitors to conduct intelligence operations on Swedish soil. Russia also uses proxies – other actors who are willing to act covertly and deniably against targets in Europe and Sweden – to a greater extent than previously. Russia also reacts opportunistically to world events in pursuit of its own objectives. This includes running influence campaigns to take advantage of events that the Russian regime may not be behind, but that serve Russia’s purposes. These operations are conducted through both organisations and individuals.

China presents a growing long-term threat

Chinese intelligence activities pose a threat to Sweden’s independent decision-making, as well as Swedish research and development. China gathers intelligence on and attempts to influence Swedish decision-making, and is also involved in strategic investments and acquisitions in Sweden. This is a potential vulnerability given the risk of political and economic pressure being

exerted on Sweden. China has a record of using economic means against other countries in pursuit of its own objectives. China’s intelligence and security services are tools for achieving the regime’s long-term strategic objectives. While much of China’s intelligence gathering in Sweden is conducted through cyber espionage, China also conducts operations through its embassy and by recruiting agents. Agents are often recruited in a third country, but recruitment attempts also take place in Sweden via false social media profiles on platforms such as LinkedIn. China acquires technology and know-how through Chinese researchers at Swedish universities, as well as through collaborations and by acquiring companies in Sweden.

China also gathers intelligence on dissidents who live in Sweden. Identifying and neutralising critics of the regime is a high priority, and dissidents are routinely harassed and threatened. Like other authoritarian regimes, China also intimidates opponents by threatening reprisals against family members still living in their homeland. Sometimes, dissidents are also arrested beyond the country’s borders.

China’s economic influence

When Sweden imposed an export ban on a Swedish company acquired by China, the company ceased supplying products to the Swedish and European defence industry. China has also imposed import bans on both Norwegian and Lithuanian goods following actions by these countries deemed to conflict with China’s interests.

Iranian influence and refugee espionage

Although Iranian intelligence gathering in Sweden mainly targets opposition groups and individual critics of the regime within the Iranian diaspora, Iran also gathers information on other states. Iran has been known to use violence to silence critical voices and quell perceived threats to the regime outside its borders, including in Europe. Iran sometimes uses proxies to carry out attacks and intelligence gathering. The regime also engages in cyber intelligence collection and attempts to access information by approaching people of Iranian origin. ■

Unlawful technology procurement in Sweden

A number of countries are engaged in unlawful technology procurement in Sweden. The major threat comes from Russia and China.

Sweden is at the forefront in several fields of interest to foreign powers, and Swedish research and innovation is in high demand. As a result of this, in combination with the ease with which a business can be established and built up in Sweden, foreign intelligence agencies procure cutting-edge technology and knowledge from Sweden. The two largest threats are Russia and China, but Iran is also engaged in procuring technology from Sweden.

The war in Ukraine has increased Russia's need for Western technology, products and knowledge in order to build up and maintain its military capabilities and domestic industries.

Russia uses a range of well-established methods to procure knowledge and technology from Swedish universities, research institutes, and companies. Russia also cooperates and trades with other countries, including China and Iran, to circumvent sanctions imposed by e.g. the EU in order to access vital technology.

As more sanctions are imposed, Russia to a larger extent employs covert methods to acquire knowledge and technology from the West. The Russian security and intelligence agencies play a vital role in this, covertly procuring technology for the Russian military using actors and corporate structures that at a glance appear to be legitimate.

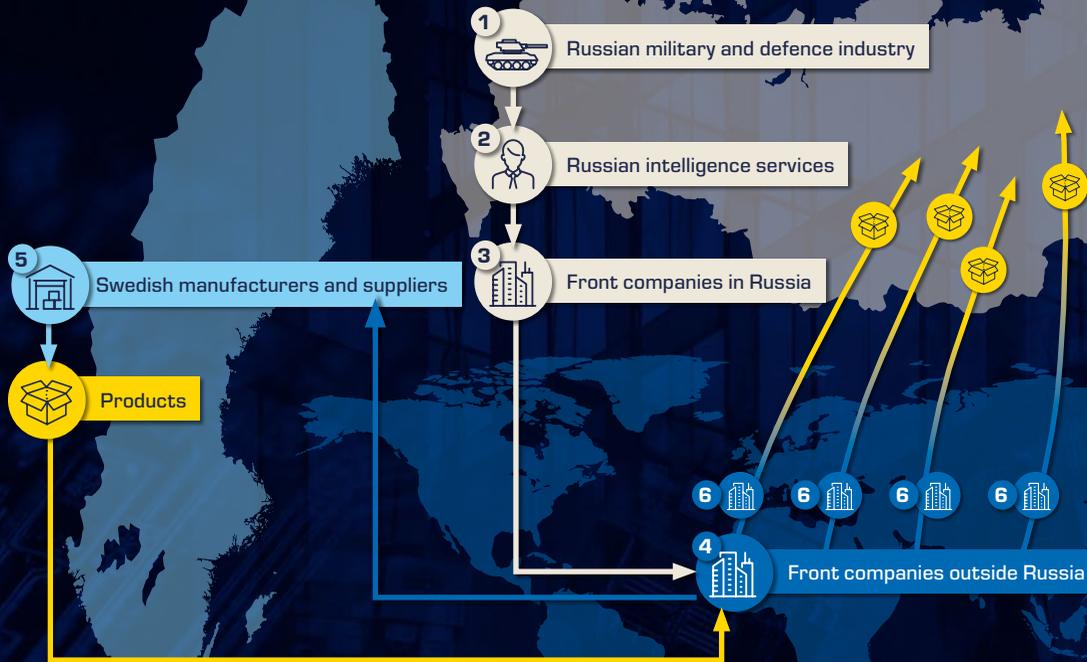
This is happening in Sweden, and Sweden is being used as a platform for procuring technology from the West. In 2023, an individual was charged in Sweden for running a business on behalf of the Russian military intelligence service GRU to unlawfully procure technology from the West. According to the charges, advanced technology has been acquired and delivered to the Russian military in contravention of export regulations and sanctions. A district court found the alleged offences largely proven, but acquitted the defendant primarily based on an interpretation of how the offence unlawful intelligence activities is formulated in the Swedish Criminal Code. An appeal against the district court judgment has been lodged with the court of appeal.

In the assessment of the Swedish Security Service, Russian security and intelligence services continue to exploit various actors and corporate structures with links to Sweden.

The fact that Russia is building and maintaining its military capability using Swedish and Western technology and know-how poses a security threat not only to Sweden, but to other countries as well. This has been shown by the war in Ukraine, where Western technology has been used.

In addition to Russia, China's procurement of technology also poses a threat to Sweden. However, China employs different methods and has other underlying

Russian technology procurement – how it happens



1. Russian military and defence industry identifies a need for Western products.

2. Russian intelligence services are called upon to fulfil the need. The degree of direct involvement by the Russian intelligence and security services varies.

3. Front companies are created, or existing companies in Russia are modified for technology procurement. The purpose is to be able to receive products from abroad and make it difficult to identify the military end recipient.

4. Front companies are created in many countries outside Russia. The purpose of such companies varies. It may be to act as intermediaries for orders, transport, or payments. Existing foreign companies may also be acquired and incorporated into the procurement network.

5. Swedish companies receive what appear to be legitimate orders from the front companies. Russia attempts to procure products manufactured in Sweden as well as in other Western countries.

6. The products are delivered to Russia through several front companies in the network. By using a complicated system of companies, Russian military involvement is concealed.

motives and aims for its technology procurement. China uses a variety of methods ranging from legal and open research collaborations, to clandestine, covert, or illegal methods, including cyberattacks.

China targets a wide range of products, focusing mainly on materials and raw materials, industrial goods, and information technology. China is acquiring knowledge and technology in order to modernise its industries and become a global leader in prioritised

areas. This is part of China's long-term objective and ambition to reshape the world order and cement its place as a global superpower. China's technology procurement on a wide scale is a threat to Sweden's economic security and competitiveness, both in the short and the long term. ■

Foreign direct investments as a tool for foreign powers

While foreign direct investments are important to Sweden's economy and business sector, they can also create dependencies that allow foreign powers to engage in security-threatening activities.

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oreign direct investments in Swedish businesses may leave Sweden dependent on other countries for goods and services that are critical to the basic functions of society and national

defence. They may also allow foreign powers to exert influence over Swedish decision-making and political choices, which may jeopardise Sweden's political independence and freedom of action.

Foreign direct investments may result in sensitive technology, information, and expertise being transferred to foreign powers, potentially strengthening their military capabilities and, in the long run, potentially posing a threat to Sweden and other countries. It may also mean that knowledge and technology are exported in a manner that weakens the competitiveness of Swedish industry. Gaining access to or control over systems, infrastructure, or data may also allow foreign powers to engage in surveillance or sabotage.

In order to prevent harmful foreign direct investments in critical assets, the Swedish Foreign Direct Investment Screening Act (2023:560) entered into force on 1 December 2023. The Government has appointed the Inspectorate of Strategic Products (ISP) as the supervisory authority for compliance with the Act. Cooperating authorities are the Swedish Security Service, the Swedish Armed Forces, the Swedish

National Board of Trade, and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB).

Chinese direct investments

China has the long-term ambition of exerting global influence to reshape the world order. To this end, China has long been engaged in procurement of Western technology and knowledge in order to become a leading

high-tech manufacturing economy.

Foreign direct investment is one means of acquisition. By initiating economic cooperation and creating dependencies, China is also able to exert greater influence on the political and diplomatic choices of other countries.

China's foreign investments are generally in line with the regime's official plans and priorities, and Chinese legislation provides intelligence services many opportunities to exert control over the activities of Chinese companies and citizens outside China's borders. Enacted in 2017, the National

Intelligence Law of the People's Republic of China requires organisations and citizens to support and cooperate with national intelligence services.

While not every Chinese investment has implications for Sweden's security, the new Foreign Direct Investment Screening Act provides the Swedish Security Service the opportunity to submit an opinion to the ISP if it believes that an investment may have a negative impact on national security. ■



The targets of foreign powers in Sweden

Russia, China and Iran are targeting a wide range of areas in Sweden in an attempt to obtain information and knowledge. These intelligence gathering operations threaten Sweden's political and territorial sovereignty, economic independence and prosperity, as well as fundamental rights and freedoms.

Political independence

Intelligence gathering may be carried out in order to influence political decision-making, primarily in areas such as foreign affairs, security and defence, sanctions, and decisions concerning the country in question. Attempts are also made to influence the Swedish people and thus public opinion. These operations mainly target:

- politicians and civil servants
- higher education institutions and research institutes
- the media
- businesses.

Territorial sovereignty

Russia carries out intelligence gathering to strengthen its own capabilities and to gain knowledge about Sweden's defence and total defence capability. Russia's main targets are:

- the Swedish Armed Forces
- the defence industry
- civil defence, especially in the sectors:
 - energy supply
 - information and communications technology (including mass media)
 - economics and finance
 - transport.

Economic independence and prosperity

Intelligence is gathered to strengthen the country's own capabilities and to exert influence by economic means. This places Sweden's economic independence and prosperity at risk. Intelligence is gathered from:

- Swedish research and development
- businesses
- universities and research institutes.

Fundamental rights and freedoms

The threat from foreign powers targets individuals and groups, which is a threat to Sweden's security. Various forms of repression are used to silence dissidents. Foreign powers target:

- the public
- the diaspora
- dissidents and those deemed to be security threats.

Sweden as a platform for cyber attacks by foreign powers

Foreign powers hack private individuals' routers and rent servers in order to carry out deniable cyber attacks against other countries. This is a significant problem that threatens the security of both Sweden and other Western countries.

By hacking people's personal devices, it is possible to build infrastructure capacity to carry out both cyber attacks and intelligence gathering. Globally, Sweden ranks high in terms of the amount of hacked infrastructure used by foreign powers to commit deniable cyber attacks. China poses the greatest threat, employing both rented servers and hacked private routers. Over recent years, tens of thousands of devices have been hacked in Sweden. China is not alone in using this approach – Russia also engages in similar operations. While the purpose of these networks is the same, the execution differs from one country or threat actor to the next.

“When countries such as China and Russia exploit Sweden as a platform for cyber attacks, it not only poses a threat to Sweden’s national security, but also places other countries at risk of attack. Most of the individuals

whose routers have been hacked are unaware that a foreign power is using their device in this way, and it usually does not present a problem to the person in question, but it is a problem for the Swedish state,” says Liv*, who holds a leadership position within counter-intelligence at the Swedish Security Service.

The Swedish Security Service has investigated a number of cases in which other European countries and their authorities have been hacked from Sweden. In one case, it was assessed that the threat actor, in this case China, had access to the hacked system for an extended period of time and had gathered – exfiltrated – data from the country in question. In this case, the attack was launched from rented servers in Sweden.

The exploitation of Sweden and Swedish cyber infrastructure by foreign powers is a problem across society and a type of crime that must be countered





through cooperation between affected services, authorities, and other relevant organisations.

“As these cyber attacks are executed by foreign powers operating from abroad, the crimes are more or less impossible to prosecute. Instead, our primary focus is on intelligence gathering; we map and analyse in order to prevent the crimes and reduce the damage to the greatest possible extent,” says Liv.

While Iran also carries out cyber attacks against Sweden, its approach and purpose are somewhat different. The principal target of Iran’s cyber intelligence gathering is exiled dissidents in Sweden. That said, the Iranian regime is a qualified threat actor that is quite capable of acting opportunistically should the chance present itself. ■

**Liv is a pseudonym.*

Anonymisation networks: an advanced threat

The internet is home to botnets, clusters of computers that have been infected by malware. Botnets are common and are used for less advanced campaigns, such as disseminating spam and carrying out distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. Botnets should not be confused with anonymisation networks, which are designed to disguise the user’s traffic and identity. Anonymisation networks differ from botnets in both purpose and capability. Foreign powers use anonymisation networks to carry out advanced attacks and incursions against other countries. The main purpose of these operations is to gather sensitive, sought-after information. These covert operations must be deniable and the information must be extracted without the attacker being detected. The key to this is anonymisation networks, which constantly change form and size to avoid detection.

New arenas in focus

The development of AI technologies presents great opportunities but also creates new vulnerabilities and threats that must be addressed. At the same time, foreign powers are focusing more on the Arctic and space, with ramifications for Sweden's security.



Vulnerabilities arise when space is prioritised

Space and activities linked to the space sector are growing ever more important from a security and defence perspective, and are highly prioritised by many foreign powers. Developments in this area bring about vulnerabilities and threats that affect Sweden's security.



he deterioration of the global security situation has an impact on the security- and defence-related aspects of the space sector. This development can be characterised as an arms race

leading to the increased militarisation of space. As more and more countries view space as part of the military sector and institute space commands, potential vulnerabilities emerge in traditionally civilian space operations that must be addressed.

In Sweden, most research, development and operations linked to space are conducted in the private sector. The space sector is highly security-critical. At the same time, there is a lack of security awareness, which in itself poses a vulnerability.

At present, many of Sweden's security-sensitive or essential services use or depend on space-related services, including communications and control for maritime and air traffic, Global Positioning System

(GPS), navigation, or accurate and synchronised timekeeping. A destructive attack on the satellites that provide these services could have far-reaching consequences for essential services, and a number of countries have proven capability to take out satellites with missiles. Cyber attacks also pose a risk to satellites, either by leaking stolen data by or destroying the satellites themselves.

Swedish space operations are an asset not only to Sweden, but also to the EU and NATO. When a foreign power acquires technology and knowledge related to the Swedish space sector, Sweden's competitiveness is threatened. Such foreign powers increasing their own military capability in space may also pose a threat to other Western democracies.

Foreign powers are prioritising space

China is prioritising space and becoming a leading space nation. To compete with Western countries,



China uses both overt and covert methods, ranging from traditional industrial espionage to research collaborations, to acquire technology and knowledge related to space.

Sweden's geographic location and good infrastructure makes it one of the few places where China can meet its need to establish a presence at space facilities close to the poles. As there is a limited window for retrieving data from satellites in relatively low Earth orbit, it is advantageous for satellites in polar orbit to have ground stations close to the Earth's poles, such as in the Arctic, where satellites pass overhead on almost every orbit.

Russia is also prioritising space operations. Sanctions have however made it difficult for Russia to maintain domestic production, and Western components are therefore in demand. Swedish space technology is important to Russia, which therefore covertly procures technology in Sweden through

agents controlled by the Russian intelligence services.

The fact that, to some extent, Russia and China cooperate on space operations may come to pose a threat to Sweden's security. ■

The space sector is highly security-critical. At the same time, there is a lack of security awareness, which in itself poses a vulnerability.

Security-threatening activity increases in the Arctic

Climate change, superpower rivalries, geopolitical conflicts, and rapid technological development have led to a greater focus on the Arctic. Security-threatening activities are being carried out against Swedish interests in northernmost Sweden.

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lobal demand for metals and minerals used in industry, defence, information and communication technology, and the space industry is expected to grow substantially. As things stand, China dominates the market. A number of Western countries have taken initiatives to secure access to critical minerals, thus reducing dependence on strategically important raw materials and technologies from China and the vulnerabilities to which this gives rise. Access to and the extraction of these types of raw materials in northern Sweden may therefore come to increase the strategic and economic significance of the area, and the level of security-threatening activities conducted there by foreign powers.

Both China and Russia are already engaged in such activities in Sweden's far north. With Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, the alliance's border in the Arctic region has been extended. At present, Russia's

interest in northern Sweden mainly concerns Swedish military capabilities. China, on the other hand, has expressed an ambition to become a polar superpower.

Climate change is opening up new economic opportunities to exploit natural resources such as oil, gas, ore, minerals and fish stocks, with shipping routes navigable for longer periods of the year, potentially shortening shipping time between Asia and Europe significantly.

From a Chinese viewpoint, the changing conditions in the Arctic are opening the area to global competition in which even non-Arctic countries have a legitimate interest. China's interest in the region is closely linked to its ambition to become a leading space nation. The security threat that China poses in northern Sweden is primarily related to intelligence gathering and influence campaigns targeting decision-makers. The research and development sector is also a target, as Sweden possesses cutting-edge expertise and advanced technology, and conducts research related to the Arctic. ■



A security service in troubled and changing times

The Swedish Security Service's role has been increasingly in focus over recent years as the security situation has deteriorated. The ability to cooperate and act in both the short and long term are crucial to protecting Sweden's national security.



he Swedish Security Service is a national security service that conducts security and intelligence operations. The focus of the Swedish Security Service's activities is to detect and

prevent security threats, thus protecting Sweden's national security, system of government and independence.

"Operating in the current serious global situation, with a high terrorist threat level and a changing image of Sweden that affects the level of threat, and with Sweden in the midst of the NATO accession process, means that the Swedish Security Service constantly needs to adapt to the situation at hand. At the same time, we must also have a long-term approach and concentrate on new arenas, such as developments in artificial intelligence and the space sector," says Magnus Krumlinde, Deputy Head of the Swedish Security Service.

Establishing continuous situational assessments of world events and how these affect Sweden's national security is part of the Swedish Security Service's remit. The situational assessments are also shared with partners and commissioning authorities.

"We are in a serious global situation in which Sweden's internal security is affected by events beyond our borders. This has made international

cooperation increasingly important if we are to obtain an overall picture and early warning of any escalation of the threat. The intelligence we obtain provides a basis for others to reach decisions and take measures," says Magnus Krumlinde.



The Swedish Security Service acts on the intelligence it receives.

"We have a dual mission that we approach from two perspectives. Firstly, we must gather intelligence to ensure that our situational awareness is up to date, and then we must act on the information we have at our disposal. This involves taking a long-term view, but also limiting our adversaries' room for manoeuvre in the here and now," explains Magnus Krumlinde.

The remit of the Swedish Security Service is unique, and demands both national and

international cooperation in order to create situational assessments of the threats to Sweden's national security and how these are developing.

"The focus of our mission is on preventing and averting threats and crimes. In a best-case scenario, they are never committed, or we can at least mitigate the harm. To this end, the Swedish Security Service conducts extensive intelligence operations both independently and in collaboration with others, both nationally and internationally," says Magnus Krumlinde. ■



More information about the Swedish Security Service
and its activities can be found at
sakerhetspolisen.se and in social media.



Production: Swedish Security Service

Graphic design: Intellecta

Photo: Swedish Security Service, TT

Printed by: Stibo Complete A/S Horsens Denmark

ISBN: 978-91-86661-26-7

How to order: The publication can be downloaded
from www.sakerhetspolisen.se or ordered via:
sakerhetspolisen@sakerhetspolisen.se

The Swedish Security Service is responsible for ensuring that what must not happen does not happen. Therefore, our work is preventive. We avert threats to Sweden's security and to our citizens' rights and freedoms. Because our mission is to secure the future of our democracy. This we carry out resolutely and with a long term perspective. We protect the central government and Sweden's secrets. We counter espionage, extremism and terrorism. For us, the most important incidents are the ones that never happen.



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