One-year assessment for 2019 – summary

Assessment of the terrorist threat to Sweden in 2019

The overall threat to Sweden from terrorism is assessed to be elevated (3). The elevated threat level includes the possibility of a terrorist attack in 2019.

The main terrorist threat to Sweden is likely from Islamist-motivated terrorism. There are individuals both in Sweden and abroad who consider terrorist attacks against targets in Sweden as legitimate. A small number of these individuals probably have both the intent and the capability to carry out attacks.¹

The threat to Sweden from Islamist-motivated terrorism

The violence-promoting Islamist environment in Sweden consists of groups and individuals that espouse a violence-promoting ideology, according to which terrorist attacks against targets in the West are considered legitimate. These circles are inspired by propaganda spread by groups such as al-Qaeda and Daesh². In 2018, Daesh was their main source of inspiration. Those who sympathise with such groups are mainly engaged in facilitating terrorism, directly or indirectly, through financing, recruitment and radicalisation.

Daesh is under severe military pressure; in 2018 it focused mainly on maintaining its defence of the small areas it holds in Syria and Iraq, which will probably continue to be the case in 2019. This will likely further limit Daesh's capability in terms of training, recruiting and financing which, in turn, will likely hamper Daesh's capability to direct terrorist attacks from the conflict area. Nonetheless, Daesh likely has the capability to guide external terrorist attacks from other locations.

Since the last one-year assessment, a small number of individuals with links to terrorism have returned to Sweden from conflict areas. The number of returnees will likely remain very low in 2019.

In 2018, Daesh continued inspiring its adherents in the West to carry out terrorist attacks in their home countries. However, the scope and quality of Daesh's official propaganda has decreased now that it is no longer at the height of its territorial control. That said, propaganda is continually being developed, reused and disseminated by Daesh's supporters, and this has become increasingly important for Daesh.

¹ In this report, we use the terms directed, guided and inspired attacks. A directed attack is carried out under the direction of leading figures of a violence-promoting ideological group. A guided attack is carried out by a domestic group or individual, advised or encouraged by one or several members, usually via social media. An inspired attack is carried out by an individual (often acting alone) who has been inspired to carry out an attack by calls issued by a violence-promoting organisation, for instance via online magazines or social media.

² Daesh – Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham. Daesh is also known as the Islamic State (IS), and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria (ISIL/ISIS).
In 2018, some fatal terrorist attacks were carried out by Islamist-motivated perpetrators in the West, all of them by lone actors using simple means such as stabbing and cutting weapons, firearms, or vehicles. They occurred in public places and the targets were police officers and civilians. The perpetrators of these terrorist attacks appear to have been inspired rather than guided or directed by terrorist organisations. There were fewer successful Islamist-motivated terrorist attacks in the West in 2018 compared to 2016 and 2017. There were fewer planned and thwarted Islamist-motivated terrorist attacks in 2018 compared with previous years.

There were also cases in 2018 where lone perpetrators planned complex terrorism attacks. Planning of complex terrorist attacks increased in 2018, albeit from a very low number in 2017. Possibly, the threat of inspired terrorist attacks is gradually decreasing and the threat of guided terrorist attacks increasing.

Possible factors that could trigger already radicalised individuals into attempting to put their terrorist attack intent into action are personal disappointments (such as frustration over an asylum-seeking process) or mental health issues. Combined with the consumption of violence-promoting propaganda, such factors could lead to radicalisation and possibly the development of an intent to carry out terrorist attacks.

Assessment of the threat to Sweden from Islamist-motivated terrorism

In 2019, Sweden will continue to be regarded as a legitimate target by violence-promoting Islamist actors, both in Sweden and abroad. However, both al-Qaeda and Daesh likely assign higher priority to a small number of other countries in Europe and elsewhere in the West. An increasing share of the propaganda will be spread by Daesh supporters around the world in 2019. The effects of inspiration received from groups such as Daesh and al-Qaeda have probably decreased. This is due not only to the reduction in propaganda and the fact that fewer attacks have been carried out in the West, but probably also to the decrease in enthusiasm among the supporters of such groups. It is unclear however whether these setbacks will keep down the terrorist threat from inspired actors, as there are many uncertainties in this regard and the propaganda of the violence-promoting groups remains available to radicalised individuals.

In view of the above, a small number of actors will probably have both the intent and the capability to carry out acts of violence in Sweden that could be tried as terrorist offences under Swedish legislation.

A potential terrorist attack in Sweden would probably be carried out by a lone actor or a small group using simple means. A complex terrorist attack would possibly be carried out by a lone individual or a small group. An attack in Sweden would probably be inspired or possibly guided by violence-promoting Islamist actors either in Sweden or abroad.

Civilian gatherings would be the most probable target for a terrorist attack in Sweden. A potential terrorist attack would probably be carried out in a location that is difficult to protect and where mass casualties could occur.

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3 Complex attacks refer here to attacks that are coordinated in time and space and are carried out by more than one individual and/or incorporate the use of explosives.
4 In Europe, the countries that are likely prioritised higher are France, Great Britain and Germany. Most of the rest of Europe, including Sweden, is prioritised lower.
5 Simple means refers to knives, vehicles and handguns.
The terrorist threat to Sweden from Islamist-motivated terrorism is assessed to be elevated (3).

The threat to Sweden from violence-promoting right-wing extremism

In this report, violence-promoting right-wing extremism is used as an umbrella term for individuals, groups and organisations with a xenophobic or a so-called white power ideology, that encourage, legitimise or commit crimes for the purpose of attaining their ideological objectives. The violence-promoting right-wing extremist environment emphasises attributes such as ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religious or cultural identity, etc. Actors inspired by these ideologies believe that it is justified to use violence to change the existing order of society.

Individuals in the white power movement are mainly engaged in opinion-building activities, although the use of violence, mainly directed at ideological opponents, is accepted and has been used from time to time. A part of the white power movement has had a parliamentary focus with the aim of gaining political influence through the parliamentary system in connection with the 2018 elections in Sweden; but this was not successful. Some members of the white power movement have expressed dissatisfaction with this new focus however and are calling for a more violent approach towards their ideological opponents.

In 2018, a small number of terrorist attacks in the West were carried out by lone actors supporting a right-wing extremist ideology. These terrorist attacks, along with an increasing amount of right-wing extremist propaganda, could possibly inspire isolated right-wing extremists to carry out terrorist attacks in Sweden.

Assessment of the threat from violence-promoting right-wing extremism

Actors in the violence-promoting right-wing extremist environment will likely have the capability to carry out acts of violence in Sweden that could be tried as terrorist offences under Swedish legislation.

Possibly, lone actors or small groups inspired by a violence-promoting right-wing extremist ideology will carry out terrorist attacks in Sweden in 2019. A potential terrorist attack carried out by actors with connections to the white power movement in Sweden would likely be committed by a lone actor or by a small group. A potential terrorist attack committed by a lone actor who is not backed by any organisation would probably be carried out using simple means.

There will be a small number of individuals with the capability, and possibly with the intent, to carry out terrorist attacks. Possible targets for potential terrorist attacks are ideological opponents in the left-wing extremist environment, and locations and individuals linked to migration.

The terrorist threat to Sweden from violence-promoting right-wing extremism is assessed to be low (2).

The threat to Sweden from violence-promoting left-wing extremism

The violence-promoting left-wing extremist environment consists of individuals, groups and networks fighting various forms of perceived fascism and oppression. This category is also referred to as the autonomous movement. Their long-term vision is to create a classless society
free from authorities and hierarchies. Within the autonomous movement, violence is accepted as a means to attain overall ideological objectives.

The autonomous movement engages in activities ranging from opinion-building to violent crimes. The violent offences committed most often target their ideological opponents in the white-power movement. During confrontations with their ideological opponents, there is a general acceptance within the autonomous movement of using violence also against the police.6

Assessment of the threat posed by violence-promoting left-wing extremism

There are individuals and groups in the autonomous movement who likely have the capability to carry out acts of violence that could be tried as terrorist offences under Swedish legislation. There are individuals who have the intent to carry out violent crime, mainly against their ideological opponents but also against public officials on occasions when these are considered to be protecting ideological opponents. However, there is no available information indicating any intent within the autonomous movement to carry out a terrorist attack. That said, isolated individuals, inspired by violence-promoting left-wing extremist ideology, could possibly develop the intent to carry out terrorist attacks in Sweden.

**There is no identified terrorist threat from violence-promoting left-wing extremism (1).**

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6 This sometimes occurs during demonstrations and in other situations where the police present are perceived by left-wing extremists to be protecting ideological opponents.
About this report
This report is a summary of the NCT one-year assessment of the terrorist threat to Sweden in 2019. If necessary, threat levels may be adjusted during the assessment period. In Sweden, a five-level scale is used to describe the relevant threat. The threat levels are: No identified threat (1), Low threat (2), Elevated threat (3), High threat (4) and Very high threat (5). The Head of the Swedish Security Service sets the threat levels for Sweden. The assessment of the threat to Sweden encompasses an assessment of the terrorist threat from Islamist-motivated terrorism, from violence-promoting left-wing extremism and from violence-promoting right-wing extremism. Should the assessed threat for these categories differ, it is the highest level that determines the threat level set for Sweden as a whole.

The NCT produces strategic assessments of the terrorist threat to Sweden and Swedish interests abroad based on information available to the National Defence Radio Establishment, the Military Intelligence and Security Service and the Swedish Security Service.

The National Centre for Terrorist Threat Assessment (NCT) is a joint working group staffed by personnel from the National Defence Radio Establishment, the Military Intelligence and Security Service and the Swedish Security Service. The NCT makes strategic analyses of incidents, events, trends and tendencies within terrorism and assesses their impact on the terrorist threat to Sweden and Swedish interests in the short and the long term. The National Defence Radio Establishment may process personal data only when it is relevant to specified defence intelligence matters. The National Defence Radio Establishment does not process personal data concerning violence-promoting extremism unrelated to foreign circumstances.