

One-year assessment for 2020 - summary

The terrorist threat to Sweden 2020

The overall threat to Sweden from terrorism is assessed to remain elevated (3). The elevated threat level includes the possibility of a terrorist attack in 2020.

Introduction

It is assessed that the terrorist attack threat in 2020 will be posed mainly by Islamist-motivated and right-wing extremist motivated terrorism. There are both violence-promoting Islamists and right-wing extremists who regard Sweden as a legitimate target. A small number of Islamist-motivated individuals and a small number of right-wing extremist motivated individuals will possibly develop both the intent and the capability to carry out terrorist attacks on targets in Sweden. Most terrorist attacks in the West are planned and carried out by lone actors who, although acting on their own initiative, are inspired by violence-promoting extremist ideologies and propaganda as well as earlier attacks. For several lone perpetrators of terrorist attacks, a common denominator is that they have either been outside or on the fringes of known violence-promoting extremist circles. Lone perpetrators could espouse any violence-promoting ideology, but could also base their actions on other ideas or motives but at the same time be inspired by earlier ideologically-motivated attacks. Individual circumstances such as personal setbacks, mental health problems or a situation that causes great frustration are possible triggering factors that could lead an individual to turn their terrorist attack intent into action.

Islamist-motivated terrorism

In the West, the number of Islamist-motivated attacks has decreased significantly while the number of thwarted attacks has remained more or less the same for several years. Several attacks were thwarted in the West in 2019, which indicates that there is still a threat of terrorist attacks from violence-promoting Islamists. That said, the terrorist threat was lower as a whole in 2019 than it was in the preceding years. This is mainly reflected in the lower number of attacks that have actually been carried out. The primary explanation for this gradual reduction in the number of attacks is the decline in Daesh's¹ power to attract and its ability to inspire.

One important driver of radicalisation into terrorism is the violence-promoting propaganda being disseminated by for instance Daesh and al-Qaeda and the sympathisers of such organisations. Violence-promoting Islamist propaganda which inspires and encourages attacks in the West continues to be spread on social media and is an indicator that radicalisation is still occurring. Daesh's capability to produce and distribute propaganda remains limited. The propaganda being developed, reused and disseminated by sympathisers of Daesh, has not

¹ *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).

succeeded in replacing official Daesh propaganda as a source of inspiration for terrorist attacks. Because their official propaganda output has decreased, Daesh's overall capability to recruit and inspire has likely also decreased. That said, much of the older Islamist terrorist propaganda remains available online and this propaganda not only helps to further radicalisation efforts but also provides practical advice for attack planning.

Sweden was not specifically pointed out as a target by international terrorist organisations in their encouragement of attacks in 2019, nor have any Swedish individuals in the conflict zone encouraged attacks in Sweden. Most of the individuals who have decided to remain in the conflict zone to fight for Daesh probably have a more hardline ideology than those who decided to return to Sweden on their own accord several years ago. It can however be pointed out that only a small number of returnees have been involved in attacks or attack planning in Europe. Most attacks were carried out by individuals who had not trained or fought with violence-promoting groups abroad.

Daesh has experienced several setbacks in the last two years that have decreased its power to attract and its ability to inspire. It is likely that Daesh currently has a limited capability to direct external attacks from within conflict zones. This will probably remain the case in 2020. However, Daesh will probably attempt to regain its capability to direct and carry out external attacks in the West, with the goal of reinstating and consolidating its relevance and credibility. Individuals in the al-Qaeda network are also engaged in attempts to enhance capability in Syria and Turkey, possibly with the goal of carrying out attacks in the West. Individuals belonging to the al-Qaeda network will probably continue to prioritise local and regional fighting over planning attacks on the West.

Sweden has seen a growth in violence-promoting Islamist circles for several years in a row. The violence-promoting Islamist environment in Sweden consists of several more or less interconnected nebulous networks and lone individuals. The environment extends across Sweden, although it is mainly concentrated to socially disadvantaged areas of medium-sized to large cities. There are groups and individuals in the violence-promoting Islamist environment in Sweden who likely regard terrorist attacks as legitimate and who are inspired by violence-promoting Islamist propaganda.

The majority of individuals in this environment still appear to sympathise with Daesh, although there are also some who sympathise with al-Qaeda. The idea of waging a holy war against infidels appears to be a stronger unifying force than affinity to any particular group. In general terms, violence-promoting Islamists are unified in their contempt of the open and democratic system and in their intolerance of and voluntary alienation from those regarded as infidels. There is therefore a desire within this environment to increase segregation and undermine confidence in the Swedish system with a view to recruiting more individuals and creating parallel structures in society based on Islamist ideology.

The violence-promoting Islamist environment in Sweden has no cohesive leadership or organisational structure and does not seem to have any common national strategy concerning terrorist-related activities in Sweden. The type of terrorist-related activities that some individuals and groups in this environment are engaged in are mainly carried out for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating terrorist activities in other countries, e.g. through financing, recruitment, or radicalisation. This has so far been reflected in their prioritisation of the facilitation of terrorist activities for terrorist organisations in various conflict zones over their intent to carry out terrorist attacks on Sweden.

Assessment of the threat to Sweden from Islamist-motivated terrorism in 2020

Sweden is still considered a legitimate target for terrorist attacks by violence-promoting Islamists both in Sweden and abroad. A small number of violence-promoting Islamists will possibly develop the intent as well as the capability to carry out terrorist attacks on targets in Sweden. Should a terrorist attack take place, it would probably be carried out by a lone perpetrator or a small group using easily accessible means. A terrorist attack involving a more advanced modus would possibly be carried out by a lone perpetrator or a small group.

Right-wing extremist motivated terrorism

There was an increase in 2019 from previous years in the number of completed and thwarted terrorist attacks in the West motivated by right-wing extremism. The March 2019 right-wing terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, set off a wave of violence that year, inspiring like-minded individuals to commit similar terrorist attacks.

Lone perpetrators with a right-wing extremist ideology who carried out terrorist attacks in 2019 found inspiration and legitimisation for their deeds through contacts with like-minded individuals around the world. Violence-promoting opinions are accessible to anyone through interactions between individuals on social media. The quick dissemination of such thoughts and ideas on social media also probably gives the impression that they are successful and gaining ground. Potential new perpetrators, having examined and derived inspiration from previous attacks, could probably be driven to some extent by a desire to emulate or even outdo earlier perpetrators.

In the past few years, nationalist and right-wing populist views and parties have gained ground in several countries in the West, probably leading to an increase in the number of groups and individuals who share these views and who believe that violent countermeasures are needed to cope with their countries' challenges and problems. Violence-promoting right-wing extremist circles in Sweden for instance communicate in terms of a cultural and ethnical extinction of Swedes, conveying the view that the country is being taken away from the Swedish people and that the number of ethnical Swedes will eventually decrease to the point of becoming a minority in their own country. Considering this, the growth in the number of violence-promoting individuals in this environment will probably continue.

Several older established violence-promoting right-wing extremist organisations are based on the idea that a racial war will inevitably take place at some point in the future. The last few years have seen the international emergence on digital platforms of extremist groups advocating the immediate initiation and acceleration of a racial war. These groups urge and inspire their sympathisers to carry out terrorist attacks as soon as they can.

The violence-promoting right-wing extremist environment in Sweden consists of individuals, groups and organisations, some of which are striving for an ethnically homogeneous society and an ethnicity-based form of government. In the past, various organisations have served as a unifying force for the right-wing extremist environment in Sweden. It is difficult to establish how many individuals in the violence-promoting right-wing extremist environment in Sweden do not belong to any established group, but there are indications that violence-promoting right-wing extremist ideologies are attracting an ever-increasing number of individuals internationally, probably in Sweden too.

Assessment of the terrorist threat to Sweden from right-wing extremist motivated terrorism in 2020

Societal developments in several Western countries and the terrorist attacks carried out in the West in 2019 have probably factored into increasing the awareness of and attraction to violence-promoting right-wing extremist ideologies. The attacks carried out in the West have possibly also had the effect of lowering the threshold in terms of violence-promoting individuals turning thought into action, and thereby remain a factor which leads to the radicalisation of still more individuals. This possibly inspires and causes certain individuals in Sweden to develop the intent to carry out terrorist attacks targeting perceived opponents.

As in previous years, the terrorist threat emanating from the violence-promoting right-wing extremist environment will probably be posed mainly by individuals acting on their own or those who no longer belong to the established groups, and by small groups on the fringes of this environment. An attack carried out in this context would probably target groups and individuals that violence-promoting right-wing extremists regard as being responsible for what they perceive to be the collapse of society.

Facts

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 Director General of the Swedish Security Service decides on the threat level for Sweden.

The National Centre for Terrorist Threat Assessment (NCT) produces strategic assessments of the terrorist threat to Sweden and Swedish interests abroad based on the information available from the National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA), the Military Intelligence and Security Service (MUST) and the Swedish Security Service (SAEPO). The NCT consists of personnel from FRA, MUST and SAEPO. 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. FRA personnel may process personal data only when it is relevant to specified defence intelligence matters and do not process personal data concerning violence-promoting extremism unrelated to foreign circumstances.

The National Centre for Terrorist Assessment (NCT) is a joint working group staffed by personnel from the National Defence Radio Establishment, the Military Intelligence and Security Directorate, and the Swedish Security Service. The NCT makes strategic analyses of incidents, events, trends and tendencies within terrorism and produces long and short-term assessments of the terrorist threat to Sweden and Swedish interests.