

Sweden: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On May 11, 2020, Danish prosecutors charged two Swedish men with terrorism for detonating an explosive at Denmark's central tax authority in August 2019. The men face life in prison if found guilty. The two Swedes drove from Sweden to Copenhagen's tax agency's main office and detonated the explosive, damaging the building but not injuring any bystanders. In recent years, Danish authorities have been on high-alert over Swedish-based organized crime networks seeping into Denmark, leading to Denmark briefly closing its land bridge with Sweden and introducing temporary border controls. (Source: [Deutsche Welle](#) [1])

On April 7, 2017, Uzbek-born Rakhmat Akilov rammed a truck into a crowd of pedestrians outside the Athens Mall in Stockholm, killing five people and injuring 15 others. The attack spurred Sweden's government to temporarily heighten border security, increase surveillance of terrorism suspects, and expand information sharing among Swedish authorities in order to better protect public spaces. Following the attack, Sweden's prime minister said, "Our message [to the terrorists] will always be clear: you will not defeat us, you will not govern our lives, you will never, ever win." Akilov reportedly carried out the attack to punish Sweden for joining a coalition against ISIS. On January 20, 2018, Swedish prosecutors charged Akilov with attempted terrorism and causing danger to others. Prosecutors called for a life sentence. On June 7, 2018, Akilov was sentenced to life imprisonment. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [2], [Reuters](#) [3], [Reuters](#) [4], [CBS News](#) [5], [Deutsche Welle](#) [6])

On June 16, 2017, Anders Thornberg, chief of the Swedish Security Service, revealed that the presence of Islamic extremists inside Sweden had increased from 200 in 2007 to "thousands" in 2017. Tips received by authorities about suspected extremists also reportedly jumped from 2,000 in 2012 to 6,000 in 2017. According to Thornberg, most of the suspected extremists are located in the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmo, and Orebro. Though Thornberg said that only a few domestic extremists are willing and able to carry out attacks inside Sweden, he warned that the threat of a domestic attack has become more immediate. (Source: [Newsweek](#) [7])

Overview

According to the Swedish Security Service, the greatest threat of terrorism in Sweden stems from Islamic extremism, specifically "violence-promoting Islamism, or so-called al-Qaeda-inspired groups." Terrorist threats in Sweden have generally been motivated by perceived insults to Islam or by Sweden's military and financial support for international peacekeeping and counterterrorism missions abroad. The Swedish Security Service assessed that, inside Sweden, Islamic radicals are more likely to support terrorism abroad via recruitment, finance, or travel facilitation than to plan domestic attacks, which remain rare. (Source: [Swedish Security Service](#) [8])

However, the U.S. Department of State assesses that Sweden's expanded role in international military coalitions abroad has increased its risk of domestic terrorism. Sweden sent its first troops to Afghanistan in January 2002 and to Iraq in April 2015. This increased international profile, coupled with relatively lax immigration policies at home, have resulted in a growing presence of foreign-born extremists in Sweden. Sweden also remains concerned with the return of Swedish jihadists from Iraq and Syria. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Committee](#) [9], [Swedish Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research](#) [10], [Reuters](#) [11])

According to a U.S. State Department assessment, Islamic extremists view Sweden as a legitimate but not high-priority target for terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, individuals with the intent and ability to conduct terror attacks are present in Sweden. In April 2016, Swedish authorities arrested a Swedish-born man who allegedly had wanted to join ISIS in Syria but instead plotted a suicide bombing in Sweden. A year later, on April 7, 2017, an Uzbekistan-born ISIS sympathizer residing in Sweden drove a truck into a shopping mall in Stockholm, killing five people. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Committee](#) [9], [Reuters](#) [12], [Reuters](#) [13])

The recent increases in Swedish domestic terrorist activity and foreign fighter travel have led to Swedish government efforts to tighten counterterrorism laws. For example, in 2016, Sweden extended an existing law so that it outlawed travel for the purposes of undergoing military training or committing acts of terrorism abroad, and also outlawed the financing of such trips. In November 2015, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said, "Sweden will never become a safe-haven for terrorism and terrorists. The message to those who travel from Sweden to commit crimes against humanity in other countries is that if they return they will be met by police, prosecuted and punished." (Sources: [Swedish Security Service](#)

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[8], [Swedish Security Service](#) [14], [Reuters](#) [15], [Reuters](#) [16])

Swedes generally view Muslim citizens favorably and value the diversity that they add to Swedish society. At the same time, Swedes are split on the impact of immigration, with 57 percent viewing Muslim immigrants as increasing the risk of domestic terrorism and 40 percent viewing Muslim immigrants as having no impact on the likelihood of domestic terrorism. In a public opinion survey carried out in the fall and winter of 2016, more Swedes (48 percent) said there were more concerned about the threat of terrorism than any other issue. Such sentiment has helped fuel increased levels of popular support for anti-immigrant movements. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [17], [The Local](#) [18])

In addition to Islamic extremism, far-right domestic extremists such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) are present and active in Sweden. NRM has enjoyed gains in popular support in recent years. For example, its “hard core” membership grew by one-third from 2015 to 2016. As of March 2017, support for the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats party had doubled since 2014 elections, according to public opinion polling. (Sources: [Sun](#) [19], [Independent](#) [20])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Al-Qaeda

According to the Swedish Security Service, the terrorist threat to Swedish interests stems mainly from “violence-promoting Islamism,” or so-called “al-Qaeda-inspired” groups. The Service assesses that, “followers of al-Qaeda in Sweden are affected by changes to and between international terrorist networks, including changes in leadership, cooperation, alliances, as well as mergers of various networks.... Al-Qaeda-inspired ideology will continue to inspire violence-promoting Islamist networks in the coming years.” (Source: [Swedish Security Service](#) [21])

Mohamed Moumou (a.k.a. Abu Qaswara) was a Moroccan-born naturalized Swedish citizen who became the second-in-command of al-Qaeda in Iraq, an al-Qaeda affiliate group and precursor to ISIS. He lived in Sweden from the 1980s until 2006, when he traveled to Iraq, and was known to Swedish security authorities since the 1990s. Moumou was suspected of leading an extremist group at a Stockholm mosque, as well as a broader Sweden-based terrorist network that supported and orchestrated terrorist activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and North Africa, including the 2003 Casablanca suicide bombings that killed 33 people. In 2006, he was sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Treasury for financing al-Qaeda and facilitating terrorist activities. Moumou was killed in Mosul, Iraq, on October 5, 2008, by American forces. According to *Foreign Policy* in 2010, a “surprising number” of Sweden citizens had traveled to join jihadist groups—likely al-Qaeda-linked—in Iraq. (Sources: [The Local](#) [22], [CBS News](#) [23], [Washington Post](#) [24], [Foreign Policy](#) [25])

ISIS

Swedish Islamic extremists have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and have facilitated recruitment, travel, and financing on behalf of ISIS. Swedish ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria have posted videos of themselves glorifying murder and urging other Swedes to join them. At least 150 of about 300 jihadists that traveled to Iraq and Syria have returned home to Sweden. (Sources: [New York Post](#) [26], [The Local](#) [27], [Newsweek](#) [28], [Reuters](#) [29])

Gothenburg, Sweden, has reportedly experienced one of the largest per capita rates of recruitment to Islamic extremism. Sweden’s security service estimates that, from 2012 to 2016, around 300 people traveled from Sweden to Iraq and Syria to join militant groups—primarily ISIS. Gothenburg police estimate that 40 percent of the 300 are from Gothenburg, specifically the neighborhoods of Bergsjon and Angered. In November 2015, a local police leader in Gothenburg estimated that between 50 and 100 extremists had returned to Gothenburg and said that none of them had been prosecuted for crimes of terrorism. Some, he said, received medical care and returned to the Middle East. In 2017, researchers at the Swedish Defence University estimated that close to 120 Swedes from the Gothenburg area had returned home. (Sources: [The Local](#) [30], [The Local](#) [31])

In February 2015, a 29-year-old Swedish convert to Islam, Michael Nikolai Skramo (a.k.a. Abo Ibrahim al-Swedi), posted a video online urging other Scandinavians to join ISIS in Syria. “My brothers, ‘hijra’ (migration) and ‘jihad’ are so simple. It only costs a few thousand ‘lapp’ [Swedish kronor]. Do you not wish in your heart to fight and show God what you have to offer him? The door to jihad is standing there waiting for you. It’s the fastest way to ‘jannah’ [Paradise],” he said in

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Swedish in the video. Skramo grew up in Gothenburg, Sweden, and is believed to have moved to Raqqa, Syria, in September 2014, with his wife and two children. Per Gudmundson, a blogger for a Swedish newspaper, claimed that Skramo had been a well-known preacher at the Gothenburg mosque and a supporter of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) propagandist Anwar al-Awlaki. However, Mohammad El Altı, a spokesman for the mosque, said that it was “unclear” whether Skramo ever worshipped there. “I don’t know this man. These are people who have not really been following Islam properly and they get recruited by ISIS, and this may have happened to him. If it turns out he was converted to Islam in Gothenburg mosque,” said El Altı, “then we are really sorry about this link.” (Source: [The Local](#) [32])

In February 2016, a teenage Swedish girl rescued from ISIS by Kurdish militants in Iraq said that she had been duped by her boyfriend into joining the terrorist group. She said that her boyfriend “started to look at ISIS videos and speak about them and stuff like that. Then he said he wanted to go to ISIS and I said, ‘Ok, no problem,’ because I did not know what ISIS meant or what Islam was.” Swedish authorities working with the Kurdish Regional Government eventually repatriated the girl to Sweden. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [33], [Christian Science Monitor](#) [34])

ISIS has been linked to only a handful of terrorist attacks or plots in Sweden. In August 2015, a Swedish soldier claimed that he had been stabbed by two men possibly linked to ISIS in the town of Skara in west Sweden. The soldier said one of the men told him, “you will be the first victim of IS in Sweden” before stabbing him in the stomach. However, there was no evidence to back up his claims. (Source: [The Local](#) [35])

In April 2016, the Iraqi government warned Sweden that ISIS was planning an attack in Stockholm after Iraqi intelligence services uncovered a plot targeting the Swedish capital. The Swedish newspaper *Expressen* reported that Swedish security police had also received intelligence from Iraq that seven or eight ISIS fighters had entered Sweden with the intention of attacking civilian targets. The ISIS plotters were allegedly able to reach Sweden in 2015 by traveling among thousands of other refugees. According to Swedish counterterrorism expert Magnus Ranstorp, “There were so many refugees who came in at once, many on false identities, so many were not checked or registered properly.” (Sources: [CBS News](#) [36], [NBC News](#) [37], [Reuters](#) [38], [ABC News](#) [39])

On June 2, 2016, a Swedish district court convicted and sentenced 20-year-old Aydin Sevigin to five years in jail for building a bomb with the intent of staging a suicide attack in the country. Sevigin had used the Internet to find instructions on how to build a bomb and to download ISIS propaganda. Swedish prosecutors said that they believed that Sevigin had intended to join ISIS but was detained in June 2015 en route to Syria and returned to Sweden. Prosecutor Ewamari Haggkvist said: “My belief is that he obtained, stored and combined liquids and objects with the purpose of making a suicide bomb. The criminal act that was in preparation could have seriously harmed Sweden.” (Source: [Reuters](#) [13], [Reuters](#) [40])

ISIS claimed credit for an arson attack targeting a Shiite mosque in Malmö, in southern Sweden, in October 2016. On April 7, 2017, Uzbek-born Rakhmat Akilov drove a hijacked truck into a crowd of pedestrians outside the Athens Mall in Stockholm, killing five people and injuring 15 others. Akilov, a 39-year-old ISIS sympathizer, claimed that he was ordered by ISIS to conduct the attack. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [41], [Reuters](#) [42], [Reuters](#) [12], [Express](#) [43])

In March 2017, the Swedish Security Service said that Sweden faced a greater threat from terrorism because of increasing numbers of foreign fighters returning to the country as ISIS continues to lose territory in Iraq and Syria. (Source: [Swedish Security Service](#) [44])

Nordic Resistance Movement

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a Socialist, transnational, neo-Nazi movement with official chapters operating in Sweden, Finland, and Norway. The group also draws support from neo-Nazis in Denmark and Iceland, though the group has failed to establish branches in those countries. Formed by neo-Nazi nationalists in Sweden in 1997, the NRM seeks to merge all Nordic countries into a single, nationalist-socialist state, either by elections or through revolution. The group also aims to repatriate all “non-ethnic northern Europeans” and regain power “from the global Zionist elite.” NRM has a website and active social media accounts, and also creates and disseminates podcasts under the auspices of Radio Nordfront, which was founded by group member Robin Palmblad. (Sources: [Hate-Speech.org](#) [45], [Frihetskamp.net](#) [46], [NationalVanguard.org](#) [47], [The Sun](#) [19], [Red Ice Radio](#) [48])

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NRM's Sweden branch is led by Simon Lindberg and Par Oberg. The group is known for its opposition to non-white immigration to Sweden. In 2016, NRM ranks reportedly grew by a third. A 2016 study of the group's most active members by anti-racism organization Expo found that 56 percent had been convicted of a criminal offense, with a quarter of those individuals having served jail time. In November 2016, some 600 of the group's members staged a demonstration in central Stockholm at which five arrests were made and two people were injured in clashes with counter-protestors. Video footage of the demonstration suggested that it had anti-Semitic themes. A march organized by the group on May 1, 2016, in the city of Borlange also reportedly turned violent. Most recently, several hundred NRM members marched on May 1, 2017, in Falun, Sweden, after which Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist said that NRM represented "crimes against humanity." (Sources: [RedIceRadio](#) [48], [The Sun](#) [19], [LiveLeak.com](#) [49], [LibertyFight.com](#) [50], [Times of Israel](#) [51]).

In a 2016 Internet radio interview, NRM in Sweden co-leader Par Oberg, Robin Palmblad, and another NRM member discussed NRM's objectives. They also alleged Jewish and Zionist control in Europe, "infiltration" of the Sweden Democrats party, and Jewish financing of refugee centers in Sweden. They also discussed "the problem of Islam in Sweden" and NRM strategies to "awaken, organize, and mobilize the citizens of Sweden." Oberg emphasized the value of building "a solid organizational structure with members who can maintain positions within the existing political system and law enforcement." (Source: [RedIceRadio](#) [48])

Additionally, the members of the NRM have communicated and trained with other neo-Nazi groups, such as the [Russian Imperial Movement](#) [52] (RIM). Two NRM members, Viktor Melin and Anton Thulin, underwent the RIM's Partizan military training course before carrying out a series of bomb attacks against refugee centers in Sweden in January 2017. During their trial, the prosecutor stated that "attending this paramilitary camp in St. Petersburg was a key step in Melin and Thulin's radicalization. We also believe it may be the place where they learned to manufacture the bombs that they used in Gothenburg." (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [53], [The Local](#) [54], [Daily Beast](#) [55])

In July 2017, a Swedish court convicted three NRM members to up to eight-and-a-half years in prison for three bomb attacks on refugee centers that wounded one person. In January 2018, a Swedish court convicted Lindberg of "contempt for groups based on their race, skin color, national or ethnic origin by shouting 'Sieg Heil' while raising his right arm upwards" during a November 2016 rally. The court initially recommended one month in prison but reduced the sentence to an 800 krona (\$98) fine because the NRM had a legal permit for the rally. (Sources: [The Local](#) [56], [Agence France-Presse](#) [57])

Far-Right Movement

Although Sweden has welcomed the most asylum seekers per capita than any other European country, following the April 2017 terror attack in Stockholm, anti-immigrant sentiment became more salient throughout the country. In 2018, the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna or SD)—a party that was once rooted in neo-Nazism—made significant gains and won more than 18 percent of the votes in the general election. In terms of policies, the SD opposes multiculturalism and seeks to strengthen immigration restrictions. However, despite having a sizable number of seats in parliament, the SD is shunned by other parliamentary groups who refuse to cooperate with the party due to its extreme agenda. The SD's viewpoints are strengthened by alternative news sites that often link immigrants to crime while also alleging the cultural backgrounds of refugees to be incompatible with Swedish culture. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [58], [Guardian](#) [59], [CBS News](#) [60])

Muslim Brotherhood in Sweden

In May 2016, police in Bosnia arrested five people suspected of trafficking arms to Islamists in Sweden and seized large amounts of weapons and military equipment. A sixth person was detained in Sweden. Bosnian Interior Ministry spokesperson Mirna Miljanovic said the arrests were made in cooperation with Swedish police. Police suspected that the weapons seized were intended for the Swedish branch of Egypt's Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. Swedish police and security officials declined to comment further. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [61], [The Local](#) [62])

In March 2017, a controversial study commissioned by Sweden's Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) concluded that the Muslim Brotherhood was secretly building an infrastructure for itself in Sweden by infiltrating organizations and political parties. However, 22 Swedish experts in religious studies signed a statement challenging the report's accuracy and

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research methods. An MSB official, however, defended the report, calling it a “feasibility study” that would help MSB determine if any further research into the possibility of an Islamist infiltration in Sweden was necessary, rather than a conclusive research report itself. (Source: [The Local](#) [63])

Foreign Fighters

The Swedish Security Service assesses that “several” people are known to have traveled from Sweden to conflict zones to engage in terrorist training or other unlawful acts of violence. In June 2016, the Swedish Security Service noted a decline in the number of would-be fighters seeking to travel from Sweden, likely because travel had become more difficult. In May 2017, the U.S. State Department reported that terrorism experts warned of an increased risk of terrorist attacks within Sweden because would-be fighters were having difficulties traveling, and ISIS was encouraging them to conduct attacks at home. Nevertheless, as of April 2017, an estimated 300 Swedish nationals or residents, many from the area of Gothenburg, had traveled to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS or al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Sweden’s national counterterrorism strategy recognizes foreign fighters and returnees as potential threats. (Sources: [Swedish Security Service](#) [8], [U.S. Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Committee](#) [9], [International Centre for Counter-Terrorism](#) [64], [Xinhua](#) [65])

In March 2013, Mohamed Ibrahim Ahmed, an Eritrean national and permanent resident of Sweden, was sentenced to nearly a decade in U.S. prison after pleading guilty to conspiring to provide material support to al-Shabab and receive military-type training from the group. Ahmed, 38, was arrested in Nigeria in November 2009 and brought to a U.S. federal court in New York to face U.S. terrorism charges in March 2010. (Source: [Reuters](#) [66])

In a September 2013 article, Swedish journalist and terrorism investigator Per Gudmundson said that he had identified 18 fighters from Sweden who had joined the war in Syria, and described their socioeconomic backgrounds, regional distribution, criminal histories, and ethnicities. Though his sample size was small, Gudmundson observed that most fighters came from relative poverty and had criminal records, and that half had previous links to terrorism or “activities in the global jihadist movement.” Gudmundson concluded, “The Syrian war continues to attract young men from Sweden at a pace not seen in previous jihadist conflicts. Unless stricter enforcement measures are taken, this participation rate may continue to rise.” As of October 2014, 15 to 20 women were among the 85 extremists who had departed Sweden, according to terrorism expert Magnus Ranstorp. “They want to marry martyrs,” said Ranstorp. “[Widows] become more revered. If you become a widow, you become a mentor to young women and you would get status.” (Sources: [Reuters](#) [67], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [68], [Reuters](#) [69])

In December 2015, Austrian police reportedly detained a 17-year-old Swedish girl en route to Syria to join Islamist militants. The girl’s parents, who had no previously known link with Syria, had informed Swedish police of their daughter’s travel plans and their concerns about the possibility of her joining ISIS in Syria. A description of the teenager allowed Austrian police to identify and detain her at a Vienna train station. “She said she wanted to go to Syria and wanted to meet a friend in Vienna. She did not specifically mention [ISIS], but the suspicion would not be far-fetched,” said a police spokesman in Vienna. (Source: [Reuters](#) [70])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

According to the Swedish Security Service, the greatest threat of terrorism in Sweden stems from “violence-promoting Islamism, or so-called al-Qaeda-inspired groups.” The Service assesses that terrorists are motivated by perceived insults to Islam or by Sweden’s military and financial support for international peacekeeping and counterterrorism missions abroad. (Source: [Swedish Security Service](#) [8])

On June 26, 2017, the Swedish government announced that Swedish citizen Johan Gustafsson, held by al-Qaeda in Mali (previously part of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) for five and a half years, had been released, but provided no details about how his release was secured. Gustafsson was on a motorbike trip from Sweden to South Africa when he was abducted in Timbuktu in November 2011, along with a South African and a Dutchman. The men were dining on the terrace of their hotel when they were taken. The Dutchman was subsequently freed by French special forces. Al-Qaeda’s North African affiliate al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb claimed credit for the kidnappings. Sweden’s Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom said the release was the result of “several years of efforts” by police, politicians, diplomats, and Swedish and international authorities, but declined to say if a ransom was paid. (Source: [Telegraph](#) [71])

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In 2007, Islamic extremists conspired to attempt to kill Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist who has drawn controversial depictions of the prophet Mohammed. Sometime between summer 2008 and early 2009, American female jihadist Colleen LaRose claimed to have met a man online who called himself Eagle Eye and worked for al-Qaeda. In March 2009, Eagle Eye convinced LaRose that she could travel to Sweden and use her appearance—white skin and blonde hair—to blend in and get close enough to kill Vilks. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [72], [Reuters](#) [73])

April 2017 Stockholm Attack

On April 7, 2017, Uzbek-born Rakhmat Akilov drove a hijacked truck into a crowd of pedestrians outside the Athens Mall in Stockholm, killing five people and injuring 15 others. Akilov, a 39-year-old ISIS sympathizer, had applied for permanent residence in Sweden in 2014. However, his bid was rejected and he was wanted by authorities for disobeying a deportation order. A Swedish police spokesman acknowledged that Akilov had been involved in an asylum process in Sweden, but that Swedish security authorities had not been involved in that process. “He was a marginal character,” said Sweden’s national police chief Dan Eliasson, and was not on any watchlists prior to the attack. Upon being ordered deported within four weeks by Sweden’s Migration Agency in December 2016, police sought his arrest, but security services did not view him as a terrorist threat. (Source: [Reuters](#) [12], [Reuters](#) [74])

On Facebook, Akilov followed a group called “Friends of Libya and Syria,” dedicated to exposing “terrorism of the imperialistic financial capitals” of the U.S., U.K., and Arab “dictatorships.” The group’s page featured two videos, one on the double standards on what constitutes terror and how Muslims are victimized, and the other about a man with his family in the Iraqi city of Mosul calling others to join ISIS. (Source: [Reuters](#) [75])

Akilov told police that he carried out his attack on orders from ISIS, was pleased with what he had done, and had accomplished what he set out to do. He allegedly told police: “I bombarded Sweden because you bomb my country.” (Source: [Express](#) [43])

- **April 7, 2017:**Uzbek-born Rakhmat Akilov drives a hijacked truck into a crowd of pedestrians outside the Athens Mall in Stockholm, killing five people and injuring 15 others. Akilov tells police that he carried out the attack on orders from ISIS.
Sources: [Reuters](#) [12], [Express](#) [43]
- **January 25, 2017:**NRM members place an explosive device at a campground in Gothenburg where migrants are housed.
The device fails to detonate. In July 2017, a Swedish court sentences three NRM members to varying prison sentences of up to eight-and-a-half years for the January 25 attack, as well as the attacks on January 5, 2017, and November 11, 2016. Sources: [The Local](#) [76], [The Local](#) [56]
- **January 5, 2017:**Three suspected NRM affiliates bomb a center for asylum-seekers in Gothenburg, seriously injuring one person.
Source: [The Local](#) [76]
- **November 11, 2016:**A bomb explodes outside a café popular with Sweden’s political left, causing no injuries. Security services suspect NRM of involvement in the attack.
Source: [The Local](#) [76]
- **October 11, 2016:**An unidentified assailant launches an arson attack targeting a Shiite mosque in Malmo, southern Sweden. ISIS claims responsibility.
Sources: [Reuters](#) [41], [Reuters](#) [42]
- **June 2, 2016:**A Swedish court convicts a 20-year-old man of building a bomb for use in a suicide attack. Swedish prosecutors believe that the man intended to join ISIS but was detained in June 2015 en route to Syria and sent back to Sweden. Sources: [Reuters](#) [13], [Newsweek](#) [77]
- **November 18, 2015:**Swedish police arrest a 22-year-old Iraqi man living in Sweden on “good grounds” of planning a terrorist attack.
After a nation-wide manhunt that puts Sweden on its highest-ever terror alert, authorities release him four days later, saying that he was no longer a suspect. The local Swedish news agency Six, citing an unnamed source, said that an Iraqi man who had received military training in Syria entered Sweden on November 17 with the intention of carrying out an attack. Sources: [Reuters](#) [78], [Reuters](#) [79]
- **December 15, 2013:**Far-right extremists clash with police, and attack 200 people legally demonstrating against racism and neo-Nazi sentiment in Stockholm.
Two demonstrators and two officers are injured and 28 people are arrested. Three members of the NRM are subsequently convicted of instigating the clash. Sources: [CNN](#) [80], [Agence France Presse](#) [81]
- **August 4, 2012:**Far-left activists attack police with bottles and fireworks while trying to break up an anti-Islam demonstration in Stockholm, organized in part by the English Defense League. Two officers are injured.

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Source: [Associated Press](#) [82]

- **September 11, 2011:** Swedish police arrest four people on “suspicion of preparing a terror attack” on an arts center in Gothenburg and attempting to kill Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks. Three of the men are later freed. Sources: [France 24](#) [83], [U.S. Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Committee](#) [9], [Radio Sweden](#) [84]
- **December 29, 2010:** Police in Denmark arrest four people on suspicion of planning to attack a Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, that printed cartoons perceived as having insulted the prophet Mohammed. Authorities seize an automatic weapon, a silencer, ammunition, and plastic handcuffs. The individuals arrested are residents of Sweden who had entered Denmark. Swedish police arrest an alleged accomplice, a 37-year old Swedish national of Tunisian origin living in Stockholm. Source: [Guardian](#) [85]
- **December 12, 2010:** A car bomb explodes in a busy shopping area in Stockholm. A second blast occurs nearby that kills the bomber, 28-year old Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, of Iraqi origin, and wounds two other people. Al-Abdaly attended the Luton Islamic Center but left when other attendees accused him of having a “distorted view” of Islam. Prior to the bombing, a Swedish news outlet received an audio recording which stated, “Now the Islamic state has been created. We now exist here in Europe and in Sweden. I don’t want to say more about this. Our actions will speak louder than our words.” Sources: [BBC News](#) [86], [Reuters](#) [87], [Reuters](#) [88], [Associated Press](#) [89]
- **July 2007:** Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks is identified as a target of Muslim radicals worldwide for his depictions of the Islamic prophet Mohammed when the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, puts a bounty on his head: “We announce a reward during this generous month of Ramadan of \$100,000 for the one who kills [Vilks].” Sources: [Daily Mail](#) [90], [CBS News](#) [91]
- **August 1991 - January 1992:** Swedish national John Ausonius, using a rifle equipped with a laser sight, shoots 11 immigrants—one fatally—in and around Stockholm between August 1991 and January 1992. In 1994, he is sentenced to life in prison. Ausonius was a successful stock trader who, after running into financial difficulties, began to rob banks and target immigrants out of “deep-seated hatred.” He is said to be autistic and have personality disorders. In November 2012, he was denied early release from prison for the third time. Sources: [Telegraph](#) [92], [The Local](#) [93]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

To prevent terrorist attacks, the Swedish Security Service works in cooperation with other domestic agencies, including the Military Intelligence and Security Directorate (MUST) and the National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA). The Swedish Security Service also works with the Migration Board and local police authorities. Cooperation between these agencies principally involves the exchange of information. (Source: [Swedish Security Service](#) [94])

The amount of terrorist prosecutions in Sweden has been small due to the relative absence of terrorist attacks there compared to elsewhere in Europe. On December 14, 2015, the District Court in Gothenburg sentenced two individuals to life in prison for the crime of terrorism after they were shown in a video taking part in the beheadings of two individuals in Syria. The verdicts marked the first time foreign fighters were convicted in Sweden of terrorist acts committed abroad, and the first time individuals were convicted specifically for the crime of terrorism. (Source: [U.S. Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Committee](#) [9])

On June 7, 2017, the Swedish government and opposition lawmakers agreed on measures to strengthen anti-terrorism laws in the wake of the April 2017 Stockholm attack. The measures included increased surveillance of terrorism suspects, greater information-sharing between security agencies, and safety improvements at certain public venues seen as likely terrorist targets. Minister of Home Affairs Anders Ygeman said: “The most important thing is that we are united against terrorism across the political spectrum. We are making it more difficult for terrorists...in our country.” As of summer 2017, Sweden was fast-tracking legislation to outlaw membership in a terrorist group. The existing law, implemented in 2010, makes it illegal to recruit or encourage people to commit acts of terrorism. In 2016, this was extended to include traveling abroad to commit acts of terrorism or undergo military training, and the financing of such trips. The government also tightened rules on Swedish passports after reports of widespread misuse of supposedly “lost” passports, so that Swedes are now limited to three passports every five years and children are now required to get new passports more often. Sweden also expanded its powers of data surveillance and improved cooperation between the police and the Swedish Tax Agency to better uncover terrorist financing. (Source: [Reuters](#) [4], [Reuters](#) [95], [Reuters](#) [96])

The tightened anti-terror laws were agreed to between the Social Democrat-led government and most of the opposition. “In a time of concern and terror, it is even more important that Sweden can show a broad unity over measures to ensure order, safety and security against the threat of terrorism,” said Home Affairs Minister Anders Ygeman. The 2016 measures were

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approved in part due to a botched suicide bombing in Stockholm in 2011 and the 2012 conviction of three Arab Swedes and a Tunisian for plotting to kill people at a Danish newspaper that published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad. In that incident, the perpetrators were caught on police surveillance tapes discussing whether to behead or shoot their intended victims, according to the chief prosecutor. The plot, regarded by security experts as the most serious in modern Danish history, was foiled in late 2010 by a joint operation by Danish and Swedish police, who had been monitoring the group for weeks. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [96], [Reuters](#) [95], [Reuters](#) [97], [Reuters](#) [98])

In an August 28, 2015, article in the daily *Dagens Nyheter*, Ygeman said that the tightened anti-terror laws were part of a wider effort to counter radicalization. “The security police point to an enhanced knowledge of and potential to commit terrorist acts here too, when and if these people return [from Iraq and Syria],” Ygeman said. “Therefore, we must make travel for terrorist purposes illegal, take pre-emptive and preventative measures, and make acts of terror more difficult to commit.” Ygeman also said that Sweden was stepping up efforts to help local authorities counteract radicalization, such as setting up a hotline for those worried that relatives may be planning to travel abroad to fight. (Source: [Reuters](#) [99])

In recent years, Sweden’s permissive immigration policies have also received greater scrutiny. Whereas in 2014 and 2015 Sweden accepted more than 80,000 and 160,000 asylum-seekers, respectively, that number dropped to only 30,000 in 2016 due to tightened procedures. Political parties that favor tighter immigration policies have seen their popular support increase over the last decade, from 3 percent of the vote in 2006 to 13 percent in 2014 elections. In the wake of the April 2017 vehicular attack at a shopping mall in Stockholm, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven pledged to crack down on illegal immigration, vowing to deport migrants whose asylum applications are disapproved. Lofven said, “We must stand up for the right of asylum but if we don’t handle this situation so that people feel safe we will end up in a situation where people do not want to receive refugees at all.” (Sources: [New York Times](#) [100], [Express](#) [101])

At a news conference on November 19, 2015, Sweden Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said, “Sweden has probably been naïve. Maybe it has been hard for us to accept that there are in our open society, right in our midst, people—Swedish citizens—who sympathize with the murderers in [ISIS].” Lofven’s comments followed an announcement days earlier by Swedish security police that nearly 300 Swedish passport-holders had gone to fight with ISIS and about 120 of them had returned to Sweden. “Sweden will never become a safe-haven for terrorism and terrorists,” Lofven said at the news conference. “The message to those who travel from Sweden to commit crimes against humanity in other countries is that if they return they will be met by police, prosecuted and punished.” (Source: [Reuters](#) [16])

Sweden offers returning jihadists generous services and benefits to support reintegration. Since October 2016, in the city of Lund, as an alternative to prosecution, former ISIS fighters and other extremists receive housing, employment, education, and financial aid. Local authorities say that they aim to reintegrate the jihadists into society and to prevent them from returning to their former terrorist networks. At least three other Swedish cities—Malmö, Borlänge, and Örebro—were considering similar initiatives. However, at other times, Sweden’s generous social benefits have been abused. For example, a March 2017 report co-authored by terrorism expert Magnus Ranstorp found that some of the estimated 300 Swedes who had fought in Syria and Iraq between 2013 and 2016 were able to continue to draw welfare payments while abroad, often with the help of individuals still within Sweden. (Sources: [Independent](#) [102], [Newsweek](#) [28], [Express](#) [103], [Daily Caller](#) [104])

Despite government largesse aiming to ease their return, the lives of returning jihadists are not without difficulties. In April 2017, a Swedish newspaper published a story about 150 interviews conducted with returning jihadists and their struggles after ISIS. Some complained of difficulty finding jobs after having posted to social media pictures of themselves with weapons or in battle, or when unable to explain their absence from Sweden. “I just want to forget everything,” said Walad Yousef, 27. “I apply for a lot of jobs, but I can’t get any because my pictures are out there.” Yousef had posted images of himself in Syria on Facebook, posing with an automatic weapon at a training camp. One returning fighter said that potential employers feel fighters might commit attacks or help others to commit them. (Source: [Newsweek](#) [28])

In October 2019, the Swedish government proposed draft legislation to criminalize collaboration with terrorist organizations. Additionally, another law was drafted to authorize law enforcement access to encrypted data on electronic devices. Parliament is set to debate the laws in 2020, but given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the laws have yet to be discussed. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [105])

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International Counter-Extremism

Sweden has not fought a war since 1814, but its military has taken part in U.N. peacekeeping missions in a number of conflict zones in recent years, including in Iraq, Mali and Afghanistan. More recently, countries like Sweden and Denmark have given up traditional Scandinavian neutrality to participate with much of the world community in military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [87], [Reuters](#) [95])

Sweden is a signatory to at least 20 international conventions combatting terrorism and, in accordance with those conventions, provides information to foreign partners to assist in preventing or investigating terrorism. Such information mainly concerns Swedish nationals suspected of involvement in terrorism or foreign nationals suspected of terrorism who are located in Sweden. The Swedish Security Service represents Sweden in counterterrorism dialogue abroad, including in the Counter-Terrorist Group (CTG), the EU Terrorism Working Group (TWG), the Police Working Group on Terrorism (PWGT), and Europol. (Sources: [Terror-Alert.com](#) [106], [Swedish Security Service](#) [94]).

In June 2014, Sweden signed onto a proposal—drawn up by France and Belgium and broadly supported by Germany, Denmark, Britain, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Spain—to step up intelligence-sharing and take down radical websites in the aim of stopping European citizens going to fight in Syria and bringing violence back home with them. (Source: [Reuters](#) [107])

Sweden participates in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental body established in 1989 “to promote the effective implementation of legal, regulatory, and operational measures for combatting money laundering, terrorist financing, and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.” As of April 2017, FATF assessed that Sweden had a “strong regime to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing, but needed to improve its national policy coordination.” Although Swedish authorities prioritize countering terrorism financing, FATF saw potential for Sweden to more effectively implement targeted financial sanctions to freeze terrorist assets. (Source: [FATF](#) [108])

In February 2017, while participating at a U.N. Security Council High-Level Open Debate on “Protection of Critical Infrastructure Against Terrorist Attacks,” Sweden’s U.N. Ambassador Olof Skoog said, “There must be accountability for all acts of terrorism, including by holding perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of terrorist attacks responsible. Measures to counter terrorism must be taken in accordance with international law, including human rights law and international humanitarian law.” (Source: [Government of Sweden](#) [109])

Coalition Against ISIS

On April 9, 2015, the Swedish government announced plans to send armed forces to Iraq to support international operations against ISIS in response to a request from the Iraqi government. Thirty-five Swedish soldiers would be sent to join international forces in northern Iraq to help train Iraqi forces battling ISIS. “Cooperation against terrorism is the key to success. Sweden will continue to support these common efforts,” Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom and Minister of Defense Peter Hultqvist said in a signed article in the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [110], [Congressional Research Service](#) [111])

In July 2016, Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist said Sweden was considering a request by the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition to double its troop deployment in Iraq to 70 soldiers. Swedish troops were also helping to educate Kurdish soldiers on urban warfare, health care, protection against chemical weapons, and other topics. Before increasing its deployment, however, Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom sought assurances that strategies against ISIS would eventually extend beyond military action. “It is also important to consider what happens after a military operation or if we manage to take out ISIS’s military. How do we ensure that there will be stability and reconstruction in countries such as Iraq and Syria?...We have to try to get an answer — what is being considered and how we can contribute to a sustainable solution,” said Wallstrom on March 22, 2017, ahead of an anti-ISIS coalition meeting in Washington, D.C. As of 2017, the Swedish deployment in Iraq consisted of 70 personnel. (Sources: [The Local](#) [112], [Radio Sweden](#) [113], [Swedish Armed Forces](#) [114])

As of February 2017, Sweden’s contribution to the coalition was “broad and multi-faceted.” Sweden is a “major bilateral donor” that, since August 2015, has participated in the military training mission in Iraq. Sweden also had contributed \$4 million to a U.N. for stabilization in Iraq and \$5 million to fund recovery efforts in areas of Syria liberated from ISIS. In

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addition, Sweden has provided \$350 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq and Syria since 2011. “Sweden’s commitment to the Global Coalition is broad and long-term,” said Foreign Minister Wallstrom. “With other coalition partners, we aim to pursue a path to long-term stability in Iraq and Syria through a multi-faceted contribution including extensive political, military, and development support.” (Source: [The Global Coalition website](#) [115])

Public Opinion

Sweden’s immigration policies have been relatively open and permissive compared to the rest of Europe. Opinion polling has shown that these permissive immigration policies are perceived as important contributors to the challenge of Islamic extremism now prevalent in the country. (Source: [Express](#) [101], [Pew Research Center](#) [17])

In a spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey completed by the Pew Research Center, Sweden was ranked in the lower half of list of countries whose citizens held negative views of Muslims in the country. Approximately 35 percent of Swedes polled viewed fellow Muslim citizens negatively. Only the United Kingdom (with 28 percent), as well as France and Germany (both with 29 percent), ranked lower. Sweden also had one of the largest gaps (21 percentage points) between left-wing and right-wing negative attitudes toward Muslims (21 and 42 percent, respectively). Sweden also ranked high in terms of the percentage of people (36) who believed that an increasingly diverse society makes their country a better place to live. In Sweden, merely a quarter (26 percent) of those surveyed believed that shared traditions and customs are important to national identity. About 57 percent of Swedish citizens polled believed that increased immigration makes terrorist attacks inside Sweden more likely, while 40 percent believed that it has no impact on the likelihood of terrorism. (Source: [Pew Research Center](#) [17])

An survey of 20,000 Swedes conducted in the fall and winter of 2016, carried out before the April 7 deadly truck attack in Stockholm, found that 48 percent were “very concerned” about terrorism. Thirty-seven percent were equally concerned about increasing numbers of refugees flowing into Sweden. After the truck attack, Sweden’s anti-immigration Sweden Democrats enjoyed record support in a survey—19.2 percent compared to 13 percent in the general election in 2014—possibly denying any center-right or center-left coalition from forming a government without them. Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Akesson said that the fact that the Stockholm truck attacker was a failed asylum-seeker was a “massive scandal” for which there should be “political consequences.” (Sources: [The Local](#) [18], [FreeWestMedia](#) [116], [Reuters](#) [117])