



The Crime-Terror Nexus in Denmark and Sweden

- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in Denmark and Sweden, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated.
 - It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.
 - Though illicit activities are notoriously difficult to measure, the presence – or notable absence – of links between crime and terrorism can be seen in two areas:
 1. In **areas of high crime and social deprivation**, where jihadists with criminal pasts have leveraged criminal skills and connections for the purposes of terrorism;
 2. In Danish and Swedish prisons, where there is the **potential for prison radicalisation** and “networking” between criminals and extremists, though the authorities are housing and monitoring a relatively small number of radicalised inmates.
 - Our recommendations include action on prisons, terrorist financing, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.
 - Finally, while there is no inherent or automatic link between socio-economic conditions and involvement in terrorism, it seems clear that jihadist “delinquency” in Denmark and Sweden has occurred in some of the same geographical areas and demographic pools from which “ordinary” delinquency has emerged as well. Rather than further marginalising and excluding those areas, there needs to be a serious and honest discussion about the extent to which state and civil society can address the social conditions in which extremist narratives and ideologies resonate.
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1 Introduction

Denmark and Sweden are among the European countries that have been most severely affected by the mobilisation of jihadist foreign fighters since 2012. They have also both been the targets of jihadist attacks, and have experienced significant degrees of community tension. But to what extent are these phenomena linked to (non-terrorist) crime? Is there a crime-terror nexus in Denmark and Sweden? And to what extent has it created synergies between criminals and terrorists?

The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism in Denmark and Sweden, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated. It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.

The paper's empirical basis is a survey of open sources, including relevant government and inter-governmental reports, academic research, court documents, newspaper articles, as well as interviews with practitioners and subject matter experts. The research took place between May 2018 and July 2018, and was carried out by a team of Danish, Swedish, and British researchers.¹

Though illicit activities are notoriously difficult to measure and quantify, the presence of links between crime and terrorism can be seen in two areas:

1. In **areas of high crime and social deprivation**, where jihadists with criminal pasts have leveraged criminal skills and connections for the purposes of terrorism;
2. In Danish and Swedish prisons, where there is the **potential for prison radicalisation** and “networking” between criminals and extremists, though the authorities are housing and monitoring a relatively small number of radicalised inmates.

¹ The authors of this report are Peter R. Neumann and Rajan Basra. We wish to thank Ida Liboriusen and Cassandra Söderström for their research support. We are also grateful to all interviewees, whether named or anonymous.

Our recommendations include action on prisons, terrorist financing, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors. We also believe that, given the strong link between areas of radicalisation and areas of high crime and social deprivation, there needs to be a new and concerted effort to address the social conditions in which it is possible for extremist narratives and ideologies to resonate.

The paper starts with overviews of organised crime and terrorism in both countries, before exploring two areas in which potential links have emerged: a social nexus between criminals and jihadists, and in Danish and Swedish prisons. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers, security agencies, and society as a whole.

Box 1: What is the Crime-Terror Nexus?

The concept of the crime-terror nexus emerged in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of globalisation. Amidst shifting geopolitics and the birth of the information age, analysts noticed that terrorist and insurgent groups were increasingly adapting criminal modus operandi to further their aims.

Since then, scholars have identified *three types of crime-terror nexus: institutional, organisational, and social.*

Institutional

One of the pioneers was Tamara Makarenko.² On her “crime-terror continuum”, she identified three types of institutional linkages between criminal and terrorist groups:

- At one end, criminal and terrorist groups engaged in *co-operation*, either in limited, transaction-based alliances, or in more sophisticated coalitions.
- Nearing the middle, *convergence* indicated when groups adapted skills belonging to the other, resulting in “hybrid criminal-terrorist groups”.
- At the other end was *transformation*, in which a group had completely transformed into the other by way of a shift in motivation.

Among the most prominent examples have been the Taliban, which have at times depended on Afghanistan’s heroin production; the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (FARC) involvement in their country’s narcotics industry; and the smuggling of petrol and counterfeit goods by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Organisational

Writing at the same time as Makarenko, Letizia Paoli focused on the structural and organisational similarities between youth gangs and terrorist groups, which she categorised as “clannish” organisations:³

- They were involved in illegal activity, including violence;
- They required members’ “absolute commitment”;
- They offered *emotional benefits*, such as status, “brotherhood”, identity, and belonging.

continues...

2 Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, No 1, 2004, pp.129-145.

3 Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp.51-97.

In Paoli's view, drawing sharp distinctions between actors based on their stated aims – criminal versus political – could be misleading, because the distinctions might be blurred and “goals [could] change”.

As an example, she cited white supremacist gangs in the United States, which recruited their membership according to ideological principles and professed to have a political programme but were heavily involved in “ordinary” crime.

Social

In a recent study of jihadist recruitment in Europe, Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann highlighted not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as groups or organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus.⁴ Rather than formalised collaboration or even transformation, they found that criminal and terrorist groups recruited from sociologically similar pools of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps.

This “new” crime-terror nexus had four facets:

- It affected processes of *radicalisation*, because involvement in terrorism could offer redemption and legitimise crime.
- It highlighted the *role of prisons* as environments for radicalisation and networking among criminals and extremists.
- It emphasised the *development of skills and experiences* that could be useful for terrorists, particularly access to weapons, forged documents, and the familiarity with violence.
- It facilitated the *financing* of terrorism, especially through petty crime.

Despite differences in approach and perspective, the *three types of nexus – institutional, organisational, and social* – are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they provide the analytical framework of the Crime Terror Nexus Project.

⁴ Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

2 Organised crime

Denmark and Sweden are globally admired for their high standards of human development, though their societies are not immune to organised crime.⁵ The phenomena has a history stretching back to the 1990s, most notoriously when the *Hells Angels* and *Bandidos* motorcycle clubs (MC) waged a bloody war in the region. Over time, organised crime and the groups involved have proved remarkably resilient and adaptive, and continue to operate in both countries.

The following section provides an overview of this complex phenomenon, outlining the groups involved, their activities, and the locations in which they operate.

Groups

According to the latest Danish police statistics, there were 98 crime groups operating in the country in January 2017. An estimated 1,200 people were associated with these groups, though the number of people involved is fluid and can change rapidly.⁶ There are no national figures available for Sweden, though there are an estimated 76 criminal networks operating in the three largest cities – Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö – involving 800 young men between 15-25 years of age.⁷

There are two general subcategories of crime groups in Denmark and Sweden: “biker gangs” (otherwise known as outlaw motorcycle gangs, consisting of ostensible motorcycle enthusiasts, which have become routinely involved in crime), and “criminal gangs”. The principal biker gangs in Denmark continue to be the *Hells Angels*, who are supported by the *AK81* club, and *Bandidos*, supported by *Mexican Teamwork* club – both of which are also present in Sweden – as well as *Brotherhood Wolfpack*, *La Familia*, and the relative newcomer *Satudarah*.⁸

The biker scene is growing, with a recent influx of foreign biker groups expanding to both countries. Denmark has seen eight different groups establish themselves in the country since 2013, with the most recent being

5 The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention defines organised crime as “a network-based, profit-making criminal operation in project form that has the desire and the ability to protect and facilitate crime through unlawful influence (harassment, threats, violence, and corruption)”. See “Organised Crime”, BRÅ, n.d, available at: <https://www.bra.se/bra-in-english/home/crime-and-statistics/organised-crime.html>. In Denmark, there is no clear-cut definition of organised crime, or of the distinction between gangs and criminal groups.

6 “Bander i tal”, Danish Crime Prevention Council (DKP), n.d., available at: <https://www.dkr.dk/ungdomskriminalitet/bander/bander-i-tal/>.

7 There are 46 groups (with 300 people) in Stockholm, 12 groups (with 300 people) in Gothenburg, and 17 gangs (with 200 people) in Malmö. “Polisen: Här är de kriminella gängen i våra storstäder”, *Aftonbladet*, 26 January 2018; “800 unga män aktiva i kriminella nätverk”, *SVT Nyheter*, 26 January 2018.

8 Peter Linné, “35 mc-gäng i väst som polisen bevakar – nytt gäng oroar mest”, *Göteborgsposten*, 18 February 2018.

the German group *Guerilla Nation*.⁹ Other groups include *Gremium MC* from Germany, and *No Surrender MC* and *Satudarah MC* from the Netherlands, which have all attracted Danish recruits.¹⁰

Biker gangs typically have an internal codex of rules, and follow a strict, clear hierarchy, with each member having their own rank and status. They have also developed a set of symbols, logos, and patches¹¹ – reflective of the wider biker counterculture – and groups are often housed at specific “clubhouses”.¹²

Terrorist tactics have occasionally been used by biker gangs, with explosives, grenades, and even anti-tank weapons used to settle scores. In 2006 the leader of the Swedish *Bandidos* group used hand grenades to bomb two cars in Gothenburg, targeting witnesses who had testified against him in court. For this crime he was sentenced to nine years in prison.¹³

The *criminal gang* scene is more diverse, with a kaleidoscope of smaller groups and street gangs, typically associated with a city’s geographical areas. The most prominent criminal gangs in Denmark are *Black Army* and *Loyal to Familia*, though *Black Cobras*, *Bloodz*, and the *Blågårds Plads-gang* have also attracted notoriety.¹⁴ In Sweden, the established and well-known criminal groups, such as *Asir* and *Brotherhood Wolfpack*, formed in prisons. Other groups, such as *Naserligan* and *Original Gangsters* are based around a key person – Naser Dzeljilji from Macedonia and Denho Acar from Turkey, respectively.¹⁵ Other groups are so fluid and impermanent that they rarely take on a name.¹⁶

The *composition* of crime groups has broadly changed over time. In the 1970s and 1980s, Swedish groups revolved around common ethnic affiliations, while now common geographical or neighbourhood affiliations are important.¹⁷ Also important are “clans” and family connections, which often serve as the foundation of allegiances and affiliation, upon which geographical ties are based.¹⁸ Simply put, people who have grown up together – in the same neighbourhood – often start to commit crimes together.¹⁹

Involvement is often fluid, with members frequently moving in and out of the gang environment. Between 2009 and 2016, for example, there were an estimated 3,332 individuals involved in crime groups in Denmark, yet only 324 of them had remained involved for that entire time.²⁰

9 “Ny rockerklub er kommet til Danmark”, *Nyheder TV2*, 25 April 2017.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Det Kriminalpræventive Råd (DKR), *Forebyggelse Af Roker- og Banderelateret Kriminalitet: Perspektiver og Inspiration til Fremtidens Organisering*, DKR, 2015, p.12.

12 For more, see Tina Wilchen Christensen and Line Lerche Mørck, *Bevægelser i og på tværs af ekstreme grupper og bande- og rockermiljøet: En kritisk undersøgelse og diskussion af “Cross-over”*, DPU, Aarhus Universitet, 2017.

13 “Nio Års Fängelse För Bandidos Ledare”, *Aftonbladet*, 14 January 2009.

14 Bureau of Diplomatic Security (OSAC), *Denmark 2018 Crime and Safety Report*, United States Department of State, February 2018.

15 “De Största Kriminella Nätverken”, *Expressen*, 29 October 2008.

16 “800 unga män aktiva i kriminella nätverk”, *SVT Nyheter*, 26 January 2018.

17 Brottsförebyggande rådet (BRÅ), *Kriminella Nätverk och Grupperingar: Polisens bild av maktstrukturer och marknader*, BRÅ, 2016, pp.43-44.

18 *Ibid.*, p.37.

19 “Polisen: Här är de kriminella gängen i våra storstäder”, *Aftonbladet*, 26 January 2018.

20 Lina Grip, “Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark”, in Nils Duquet (ed.), *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisitions of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Project SAFTE, Flemish Peace Institute, 2018, p.147.

This fluidity also exists *between* criminal groups. The *Brothas Souljaz* criminal gang, for example, saw their members join *Gremium* and *Black Jackets* biker gangs after the group was dissolved in 2016.²¹

Groups were traditionally seen as hierarchical in nature, following a rigid structure with a singular figurehead. While such groups do still exist, this thinking is largely outdated. Criminal gangs are often centred around a few key individuals and long-standing members, and look to socialise younger members through menial tasks.²² However, the structure of these criminal gangs can frequently change.²³

Swedish police consider crime groups to be “*project-based constellations*”, which feature a core of individuals involved with “loosely assembled networks with criminal individuals with various areas of expertise, who work together to achieve common goals”.²⁴ What matters is an individual’s competence, contacts, and reputation. Many of them are not career criminals, and only join projects through contacts or friends.²⁵

Activities and Locations

Criminal groups engage in a wide variety of crimes, such as extortion, theft, white-collar crime, and robberies.²⁶ Of note is their involvement in illicit trade, especially in the trafficking of drugs and firearms.

The primary organised crime activity – as seen throughout Europe – is *drug trafficking*. Cannabis (including hashish), cocaine and amphetamines are the most prevalent drugs in Denmark, whereas cannabis and amphetamines dominate in Sweden.²⁷ Cannabis and hashish are trafficked primarily from Morocco, and Latin American cocaine is imported via the Netherlands, Spain, the Balkans, and to a lesser extent by air via West Africa. Amphetamines, meanwhile, are produced in the Netherlands, Poland, and Lithuania.²⁸ There is large-scale *domestic* indoor cultivation of cannabis, and occasional examples of new psychoactive substances (NPS) being produced in the countries.²⁹ In addition, the rise of darkweb marketplaces has been observed.³⁰

Sweden has developed a reputation for easily accessible firearms and hand grenades.³¹ This has greatly contributed to the surge in violence seen in Malmö. The majority of firearms circulating in the criminal milieu originate from the Balkans, having been manufactured in the Czech Republic or

21 Tina Wilchen Christensen and Line Lerche Mørck, *Bevægelser i og på tværs af ekstreme grupper og bande- og rockermiljøet: En kritisk undersøgelse og diskussion af “Cross-over”*, DPU, Aarhus Universitet, 2017, p.47; Jan Lauridsen, “Politiet: Nattens likvidering led i bandekonflikt”, *TV2*, 17 June 2016.

22 “Polisen: Här är de kriminella gängen i våra storstäder”, *Aftonbladet*, 26 January 2018.

23 Det Kriminalpræventive Råd (DKR), *Forebyggelse Af Roker- og Banderelateret Kriminalitet: Perspektiver og Inspiration til Fremtidens Organisering*, DKR, 2015, p.12.

24 BRÅ, 2016, p.28.

25 *Ibid.*, pp.30-33.

26 *Rockere og Bander 2015*, Rigspolitiet & Politi, 2015, p.11; Brottsförebyggande Rådet, *Statistik: Organiserad Brottslighet*, 2018, available at: <https://www.bra.se/statistik/statistik-utifran-brottstyper/organiserad-brottslighet.html>.

27 *Denmark Drug Report 2018*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Awareness (EMCDDA), 2018, pp.18-19; *Sweden Drug Report 2018*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Awareness (EMCDDA), 2018, p.18.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 See, for example, Ellen Barry and Christina Anderson, “Hand grenades and gang violence rattle Sweden’s middle class”, *The New York Times*, 3 March 2018, and “Why are young men in Sweden shooting each other?”, *The Economist*, 8 March 2018.

Yugoslavia.³² They are believed to have entered the illicit market following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, with their trafficking facilitated by Balkan criminals living in Sweden.³³

Little is known about exactly how they are trafficked into the country. The exact methods and routes to traffic them into the country vary. It is estimated that there is a *high-frequency and low-volume* supply of weapons, with traffickers at times taking just a single firearm into the country. Alongside this there are alleged to be a concentrated group of traffickers with access to military-grade firearms in their countries of origin.³⁴ Police believe that arms traffickers are also usually involved in other criminal activities in Sweden.³⁵

The Danish illicit firearms market, by comparison, is considered to be modest in scale and organisation.³⁶ The main source of firearms is by theft, either from the homes of registered gun owners or shooting clubs: over 1,000 firearms were stolen in this way between 2012 and 2016.³⁷ The Danish intelligence service's Centre for Terror Analysis (CTA) estimates it is relatively easy to get a hold of a gun on the black market for would-be terrorists.³⁸ Indeed, the M95 rifle used by Omar el-Hussein during his February 2015 attack on a cultural centre in Copenhagen was stolen two years prior in a burglary of a member of the Danish Home Guard.³⁹

Shooting clubs further complicate this situation. Danish law previously allowed anyone – including criminals – to become members, although no one is allowed to take weapons home.⁴⁰ This can prove fatal. In December 2016, a 26-year-old man shot and killed a police officer in Albertslund, Copenhagen. Despite having previously been imprisoned for threats made against the police, the man was still a member of a shooting club in Rødovre, from where he stole the gun used in the attack.⁴¹ Following the shooting, stricter registration and weapons storage legislation was passed.⁴²

Sweden is currently witnessing a surge in *robberies*, especially in Stockholm. Police have noted “constellations” of criminals – each with different and complementing specialities – engaged in this crime, targeting banks, cash transportation, cash points, and currency exchanges.⁴³

Geography has an important influence on organised crime in both countries. Denmark sits close to one of Europe's busiest seaports, Hamburg, and serves as a transit point for much of the illicit trade that flows onwards to Sweden and Norway. Organised crime is concentrated in major population centres – such as Copenhagen, Aarhus, Stockholm,

32 BRÅ, 2016, p.96; “Bosnisk åklagare: ‘Sverige är Balkans största vapenmarknad’”, *Aftonbladet*, 22 January 2018.

33 BRÅ, 2016, p.96.

34 *Ibid.*, pp.96-97.

35 *Ibid.*, p.97.

36 Lina Grip, “Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark”, 2018, p.135.

37 *Ibid.*, p.140.

38 *Ibid.*, p.135.

39 Michala Rask Mikkelsen, “Riffel fra terrorangreb blev stjålet under hjemmerøveri”, *Berlingske*, 18 February 2015.

40 Lina Grip, “Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark”, 2018, pp.140-141.

41 Lene Koogi, “OVERBLIK: Hvad vi ved om politidrabet i Albertslund”, *DR*, 12 September 2017.

42 Mette Dahlggaard, “Kriminelle bandefolk træner i danske skydeklubber: ‘Det er en meget bekymrende udvikling’”, *Berlingske*, 17 April 2018.

43 BRÅ, 2016, p.97.

Malmö, and Gothenburg – as well as along trafficking routes.

The short trip between Copenhagen and Malmö – covering only 25km and well-connected by the Öresund bridge – is an important vein of illicit trade, used for drugs and firearms.⁴⁴ This trade can flow in both directions: just as firearms are smuggled across into Malmö,⁴⁵ firearms travelling in the opposite direction have also appeared in the Danish criminal market.⁴⁶

Overall, therefore, Denmark and Sweden have seen sustained activities by criminal gangs, which are fluid and dynamic in nature.

44 United States Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Volume 1, 2010, p.236.

45 Lina Grip, "Illegal weapons, gangs and violent extremism in Denmark", 2018, p.145.

46 *Ibid.*

3 Terrorism

Europe has witnessed a wave of jihadist terrorist attacks in recent years, ranging from coordinated bombings to vehicle-ramming and knife attacks, that have left hundreds killed and many more injured. Denmark and Sweden have not escaped this violence, with both countries experiencing jihadist attacks in the country, as well as a significant mobilisation of their nationals to Syria and Iraq as “foreign fighters”.

The greatest threat is from jihadist terrorism, emanating from groups such as Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda, while there exists a latent threat from the far-right.

Jihadism

While both countries have seen active jihadist scenes dating back to the 1990s, Denmark’s experience of jihadism began in earnest following the 2005 publication of cartoons – controversially depicting the prophet Muhammed – in *Jyllands-Posten*, one of the country’s highest selling newspapers. They became a global controversy, and were followed by a series of terrorist plots targeting those involved in their publication.

The earliest was the 2006 “Vollsmose Case” (*Vollsmosesagen*), involving four men planning an attack involving TATP (triacetone triperoxide) explosives.⁴⁷ Then in 2009 David Headley was arrested in the United States for planning attacks in Denmark, targeting *Jyllands-Posten*,⁴⁸ followed by the 2010 arrest of Loris Dukaiev, a Chechen from Belgium, who was preparing a letter bomb targeting the newspaper.⁴⁹

The cartoons became a renewed focal point in 2008, when two Tunisians were planning to kill Kurt Westergaard (who drew a cartoon of the prophet Muhammed with a bomb as a turban) and Flemming Rose (an editor of the newspaper). The men were arrested before launching their attack, and were deported from the country rather than taken to trial.⁵⁰

The cartoons were reprinted in the aftermath of the arrests, a decision which the *Politiets Efterretningstjeneste* (Danish Security and Intelligence Service, or PET) considered to have increased the threat of terrorism in the country.⁵¹

47 Mette Dahlggaard, “Tidslinje: Tidligere attentater og terrrorsager i Danmark”, *Berlingske*, 14 February 2015; Morten Skjoldager, “Terrorists lack imagination when choosing targets in Denmark”, in Magnus Ranstorp and Magnus Normark (eds.), *Understanding Terrorism Innovation and Learning: Al-Qaeda and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.236.

48 “Danske terrrorsager” webpage, *Politiets Efterretningstjeneste* (Danish Security and Intelligence Service, or PET), n.d., available at: <https://www.pet.dk/Efterretningsafdelingen/lkke-statslige%20aktoerer/Danske%20terrorsager.aspx>

49 “Bombemanden får 12 år”, *Berlingske*, 31 May 2011.

50 Morten Skjoldager, “Terrorists lack imagination when choosing targets in Denmark”, p.241.

51 *Ibid.*

The plots continued in 2010, when Muhudiin Mohamed Geele broke into the home of Kurt Westergaard and attempted to kill him with an axe. Westergaard managed to safely escape to a panic room, and Geele was arrested.⁵²

Sweden also felt the aftermath of the publications. On 11th December 2010, Taimour Abdulwahab, a 28-year-old Iraqi-born Swedish national, detonated two car bombs in Stockholm. The first explosion injured two people, while the second exploded prematurely, killing Abdulwahab, marking the first suicide bomb in the country's history.⁵³ Prior to the bombings, he had sent an email to both Säkerhetspolisen (the Swedish Security Service, known as Säpo) and a national news agency, mentioning Lars Vilks' drawings of the prophet Muhammed, and a "war against Islam".⁵⁴ It is likely that Abdulwahab was not working alone.⁵⁵

That same month, a group of four Swedish-Tunisians were arrested after driving into Denmark from Sweden via the Öresund bridge. Their car was filled with weapons and ammunition; the cell had planned a firearms assault on the Jyllands-Posten headquarters.⁵⁶

Furthermore, on the ten-year anniversary of the 11th September 2001 attacks, a jihadist cell attempted to kill Lars Vilks – who depicted the prophet Muhammed as a dog in 2007 – at the opening of his art gallery Röda Sten in Sweden. The attempt failed, and the cell-leader, Salar Mahmood, was eventually acquitted of charges of "preparation to commit murder". Mahmood had previous criminal convictions for assault, robbery, and several other crimes.⁵⁷ He received €15,500 (135,000 kr) in damages following his acquittal, and used this money to travel to Syria in 2013.

Attacks, Plots, and Arrests

The 2012 onset of the Syrian civil war intensified the jihadist movement throughout Europe. Since then, there have been terrorist attacks in both countries, among other notable jihadist-related events:

- *February 2013*: Basil Hassan, disguised as a postman delivering a package, attempted to kill the author and Islam-critic Lars Hedegaard at his home in Copenhagen. The attack failed, and Hassan escaped from Denmark, reportedly using a fake passport, and eventually travelled to Syria where he joined Islamic State. He and is believed to have been killed in 2017.⁵⁸

52 "Denmark sentences cartoonist attacker to 9 years", *Reuters*, 4 February 2011.

53 "Police Say Early Detonation of Bomb Averted Disaster in Sweden", *The New York Times*, 13 December 2010;

"Man sprängde sig själv i Stockholm", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 December 2010.

54 Ibid.

55 "Terrorism expert: 'Bomber not alone?'" *Sverige Radio*, 12 December 2010.

56 "Åtals för planerad massavrättning", *Expressen*, 13 April 2012.

57 Kristina Edblom, Magnus Sandelin, and Erik Wiman, "Friades – flyttade till IS-kontrollerat område", *Aftonbladet*, n.d., available at: <https://svenskajihadister.story.aftonbladet.se/chapter/chapter-1/>.

58 Søren Astrup and Adam Hannestad, "Lars Hedegaards formodede attentatmand meldes dræbt i syriske kampe", *Politiken*, 4 September 2017.

- *March 2013*: Guleed Mohamed Warsame and Nuur Mohamed Warsame, two Danish-Somali brothers, were convicted for receiving terrorist training and planning to carry out a terrorist attack in Europe.⁵⁹ They were sentenced to three and half years in prison.
- *September 2014*: Abdul Basit Abu-Lifa travelled to Syria. Also known as Isaac Meyer, Abu-Lifa had been released earlier in the year following his involvement in the 2005 terrorism-related Glostrup Case (*Glostrupsagen*),⁶⁰ but soon after was sentenced to five months in prison for an assault. After completing that sentence, he travelled to Syria in September 2014 as a foreign fighter.⁶¹
- *February 2015*: Omar el-Hussein killed two people and injured five others in successive shootings at the Krudttønden cultural centre and the Great Synagogue in Krystalgade, Copenhagen. El-Hussein was a gang member who had been released from prison two weeks prior.
- *January 2016*: 15-year-old Natascha Colding-Olsen (known as the “Kundby Girl”) was arrested for planning a terrorist attack against her former school in Fårevejle, and a separate Jewish school in Copenhagen. The case was notable due to the apparent speed of her radicalisation, as well as her age. She was sentenced in 2017 to six years in prison. A 24-year-old man was also arrested on suspicions of giving her bomb making instructions, but was later released due to lack of evidence.
- *February 2016*: Aydin Sevinç was arrested in Sweden while preparing a suicide bomb attack. Sevinç had spoken of his desire to become a martyr, but the target of his planned attack was unknown. He was sentenced to five years.
- *November 2016*: Dieab Khadigah, a Syrian refugee, was denied entry to Denmark from Germany due to a lack of papers. Police found 17,000 matches, fireworks, two kitchen knives, and six walkie-talkies in his possession. He was arrested in Germany, and in July 2017 was sentenced to six and a half years for planning an attack targeting Copenhagen. In December 2017, his alleged accomplice, Moyed Al Zoebi, was arrested in Sweden.
- *April 2017*: Rakhmat Akilov killed five people and injured fifteen more by driving a truck in Drottninggatan, a popular shopping street in Stockholm. An improvised explosive device was later found in the truck. Akilov, an Uzbek national who had not been deported following his asylum application rejection in 2015, was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.⁶²
- *June 2017*: Denmark’s Supreme Court rules to strip the Danish citizenship of Said Mansour, a Danish-Moroccan known as the “The Bookseller from Brønshøj”. The case was the first of its kind in Denmark. In 2014 Mansour was convicted of encouraging terrorism. He had received a similar conviction in 2007.⁶³

59 Jakob Sheikh, “Analyse: Terror-mistænkt var rundet af det danske samfund”, *Politiken*, 17 February 2015.

60 Jakob Sheikh, *Danmarks Born i Hellig Krig* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt & Ringhof, 2015), p.536.

61 Ibid, p.531; Thomas Klose Jensen, “Terrordomt dansker kæmper for Islamisk Stat”, *Danmarks Radio*, 19 November 2014.

62 Stockholms Tingsrätt, DOM B4708-17, § 4.1.1., 7 June 2018, available at: https://samnytt.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/dom_B_4708-17.pdf.

63 “Efter afsonet fængselsdom: Boghandleren fra Brønshøj skal blive i fængsel”, *Danmarks Radio*, 18 February 2018.

Foreign Fighters and Returnees

More than six thousand Europeans “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. Both Denmark and Sweden have been affected by this mobilisation, with estimates of 145 individuals having left from Denmark,⁶⁴ and 311 from Sweden.⁶⁵ This means Sweden has one of the highest per capita mobilisation rates in Europe.

There is collective anxiety in Europe regarding the threat from returning foreign fighters, given that many have been trained in the use of weapons and explosives, and likely remain committed to jihadist ideology.⁶⁶ Of the Danish cohort, at least 72 have returned, while 150 individuals have returned to Sweden.⁶⁷

Far-Right Extremism

The far-right extremist scene can broadly be categorised in two camps: *neo-Nazis* who follow a fascist, totalitarian ideology;⁶⁸ and *ultra-nationalists* who are characterised by their opposition to Islam. Both camps are considered dangerous, with a motivation to use violence to achieve their aims, albeit with a relatively limited threat.⁶⁹

Membership is often fluid, mirroring the situation with criminal gangs. This results in occasional crossovers between membership of biker gangs, criminal gangs, and the far-right, as seen with *Hells Angels*, *AK81*, and *Devils Choice* adopting a hardline stance against Islam.⁷⁰ Far-right groups also have an active strategy to recruit from hooligan groups, in order to attract people with aggression and low thresholds for violence.⁷¹

The most notable recent attacks took place in November 2016 and January 2017, when members of Sweden’s *Nordic Resistance Movement* carried out three bombings in Gothenburg, targeting asylum centres and a left-wing cafe. The attacks caused one injury, and were not prosecuted under terrorism legislation.⁷²

It remains to be seen whether these associations will escalate into sustained political violence. But there does exist the potential for far-right terrorism targeting religious minorities, refugees, migrants, and politicians.⁷³ There is the additional risk of “reciprocal radicalisation”, whereby extremist groups radicalise – and potentially even target – each other.

64 Center for Terroranalyse (CTA), *Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark*, PET, 12 January 2018, pp.5-6.

65 “Många våldsbejakande extremister har haft sin bas i Sverige”, SVT, 11 February 2018.

66 Center for Terroranalyse (CTA), *Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark*, PET, 12 January 2018, p.8.

67 Joana Cook and Gina Vale, *From Daesh to “Diaspora”: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), 2018, p.17.

68 *Antidemokratiske og ekstremistiske miljøer i Danmark*, Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd (SFI), 2014, p.31.

69 Center for Terroranalyse (CTA), *Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark*, PET, 12 January 2018, p.8.

70 *Antidemokratiske og ekstremistiske miljøer i Danmark*, Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd (SFI), 2014, p.31.

71 Interview with Robert Örell, Director of Exit Sweden, 5 July 2018.

72 “Three Swedish men get jail for bomb attacks on asylum centers”, *Reuters*, 7 July 2017.

73 Center for Terroranalyse (CTA), *Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark*, PET, 12 January 2018, p.3.

4 The Social Nexus

There is little evidence of an institutional nexus between organised crime and terrorism in either Denmark or Sweden. Instead, there exists a social nexus, with a partial merging of criminal and jihadist milieus, whereby jihadists are recruited from the same demographics, locations, and social conditions as criminals (see Box 1).

This connection is borne out by analysis of criminal records.⁷⁴ A recent study by Amir Rostami *et al* of 38 dead Swedish foreign fighters shows that 68 per cent were previously investigated for criminal behaviour – with 34 per cent tried for criminal offences – while one-third had no criminal history at all.⁷⁵ Overall this is likely to be an underreporting of their criminality, as most of the fighters were not born in Sweden, meaning data of their overseas convictions was not available.

The criminal activity varied, with the most common being theft and robbery, assault, and illegal possession of alcohol, drugs, and firearms. The average number of suspected crimes was 9.5, though the actual conviction rate is not known.⁷⁶ Interestingly, when compared with their co-offenders – who did not go on to travel to Syria and Iraq and are likely not jihadists – the foreign fighters were more criminally active.

There are no public statistics for Denmark, though the authorities have estimated “about half” of the country’s foreign fighters had criminal pasts – continuing a relatively long tendency amongst Danish jihadists.⁷⁷ The PET’s Centre for Terror Analysis (CTA) has stated that Danish foreign fighters are – more often than not – personally connected to the criminal milieu and gang environment.⁷⁸ These connections are often based on kinship, friendship, or neighbourhood ties.

Many had connections with criminal gangs. This is clear in the case of Omar el-Hussein, who – prior to his February 2015 firearms attacks – had been convicted for theft, robbery, and violence, and was connected to

74 Magnus Normark, Magnus Ranstorp, and Filip Ahlin, *Financial activities linked to persons from Sweden and Denmark who joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq during the period 2013-2016*, Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish Defence University, 2017, p.26.

75 Amir Rostami, Joakim Sturup, Hernan Mondani, Pia Thevselius, Jerzy Sarnecki, and Christofer Edling, “The Swedish Mujahideen: An exploratory Study of 41 Swedish Foreign Fighters Deceased in Iraq and Syria”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, forthcoming, p.3, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1463615>.

76 *Ibid.*, p.9.

77 Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, “Plebeian Jihadism in Denmark: An Individualisation and Popularization Predating the Growth of the Islamic State”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, p.103.

78 Linus Gustafsson and Magnus Ranstorp, *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An analysis of open-source intelligence and statistical data*, Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish Defence University, 2017, pp.70-71.

the *Brothas* criminal gang.⁷⁹ Ali Sakandar Malik, who travelled to Syria in 2013 to join Islamic State, was a former member of *Loyal to Familia*. Abderrozak “Big A” Benarabe, who joined Ahrar al-Sham in Syria, is a notorious criminal in Copenhagen. Ahmed Samsam, another Danish foreign fighter, was a member of *Black Army*. Individual criminals appear to have been attracted to jihadism, rather than there being any formal or institutional links between gangs and jihadists.

Explanations for this social nexus vary. One factor may be behavioural, as for those criminals seeking a change, it may be easier to move to a functionally similar group or movement – which also provides commitment, belonging, and identity – rather than rebuild one’s whole social identity.⁸⁰

Extremism can also satisfy the same violent tendencies that individuals found appealing in crime. Of note here is the proportion for violent crimes seen among the Swedish foreign fighter cohort.⁸¹ This deserves closer attention, as it is more generally understood that prior violence is a reliable indicator of future violence.

Another factor may be one of narratives, with criminals finding jihadism offers purification and redemption from errant behaviour.⁸² Simply put, it may be a chance at a clean slate. After almost a decade of criminal activity, Ahmed Samsam, for example, spoke of a desire of a new direction in life after years of moving in and out of prison. He travelled to Syria and eventually joined IS, and was later arrested in Spain and sentenced to 8 years in prison over terrorism charges.⁸³

The result is a cohort of jihadists that can draw upon the skills, networks, and opportunities afforded to them by crime. The most high-profile example of this was Omar el-Hussein using his criminal contacts to acquire the M95 rifle used in his attacks. Beyond this, the overlap with crime is also seen with jihadists using criminal fundraising.

Would-be foreign fighters have used various fundraising means: crowdfunding, taking out loans with no intention of repaying them, as well as traditional criminal techniques such as theft, robberies, drug dealing, and fraud.⁸⁴ As the Swedish National Economic Crimes Bureau has stated, many of these instances appear highly opportunistic.⁸⁵

79 “Baggrund: Her er hvad vi ved om Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein”, *DR*, 16 February 2015; “PET: Omar havde planer om at flygte efter terror-angreb”, *BT*, 4 November 2015.

80 Interview with Robert Örell, Director of Exit Sweden, 5 July 2018.

81 Amir Rostami, Joakim Sturup, Hernan Mondani, Pia Thevselius, Jerzy Sarnecki, and Christofer Edling, “The Swedish *Mujahideen*: An exploratory Study of 41 Swedish Foreign Fighters Deceased in Iraq and Syria”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, forthcoming, p.3, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1463615>.

82 For more, see Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

83 “Dansk syrienkriger på anklagebænken i Spanien: Tiltalt for at støtte IS”, *DR*, 12 June 2018; “Ocho años de cárcel para un yihadista que intentó comprar armas en Algeciras”, *El País*, 9 July 2018.

84 For more, see “Magnus Normark, Magnus Ranstorp, and Filip Ahlin, *Financial activities linked to persons from Sweden and Denmark who joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq during the period 2013-2016*, Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish Defence University, 2017.

85 *Ibid*, p.18.

Such criminal behaviour can be lucrative. A Swedish Salafi preacher, for example, funded jihadist cells in Syria by committing *carousel* or *missing trader* fraud – involving deducting VAT payments – worth approximately €710,000 (6,000,000 kr), until he was caught by security services in 2013.⁸⁶

On occasion the authorities have had counterterrorism success by pursuing “common” criminality. When police search the Gothenburg home of Al-Amin Sultan in July 2014, they were following up on reports of two stolen Rolex wristwatches and attempted blackmail of approximately €11,000 (118,000 kr). It emerged that Sultan was in possession of a hitherto unknown execution video filmed by Sultan and an associate in Syria in 2013. For his participation in the execution – even though he did not wield the knife – he was sentenced to life imprisonment.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ “Momsfiffel finansierade jihadister i Syrien”, *GP*, 28 November 2014.

⁸⁷ “Hennes pappa mördades av Svenska IS-terrorister”, *Expressen*, 16 February 2017.

5 A Potential Prison Nexus

Throughout Europe, prisons are a central feature of the crime-terror nexus. They are ideal environments for radical ideas to spread, and are where the criminal and extremist milieus are – typically – in their closest proximity. Recent years have seen examples of prison radicalisation,⁸⁸ networking amongst criminals and jihadists,⁸⁹ and of attacks planned/executed within prison,⁹⁰ or carried out shortly after release.⁹¹

Prison radicalisation has been identified as a security concern by the Danish and Swedish authorities.⁹² And as seen with the case of Omar el-Hussein in 2015 – who radicalised in prison in Denmark, and carried out a terrorist attack in Copenhagen two weeks after his release – the issue can prove deadly.

Within Swedish prisons, 80 inmates are monitored for their signs of radicalisation, or vulnerability towards extremist narratives and networks.⁹³ Of these, 65 have violent Islamist views, with the remainder having either far-right or far-left views. In Denmark, radicalisation has been noted as an area of concern for 50 individuals, 16 of which are considered serious cases.⁹⁴ These numbers are greater than the amount of inmates sentenced for terrorism-related activity, suggesting that some “common” criminals adopted extremist ideas in prison, or possibly hardened the extremist tendencies they already held when convicted.

Yet compared to other European countries, these numbers are low. British prison authorities, by way of contrast, estimate that 700 inmates are a risk due to their extremist views,⁹⁵ and in France the number is approximately 1,700,⁹⁶ and Belgian authorities consider between 230-450 prisoners to be radicalised.⁹⁷

The low overall prison population in Denmark and Sweden, a small pool of radicalised inmates, and well resourced prisons mean that prison radicalisation is much more manageable than it is in other European

88 Most notably amongst attackers: Mohammed Merah (Toulouse and Montauban, March 2012); Mehdi Nemmouche (Brussels Jewish Museum, May 2014); and Omar el-Hussein (Copenhagen attacks, February 2015).

89 As seen with Cherif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly (Paris attacks, January 2015), as well as Clément Baur and Mahiedine Merabet (foiled Marseille plot, April 2017).

90 “Soon-to-go-free jail convicts snared in French attack plot probe”, *Reuters*, 10 October 2017.

91 See the example of Benjamin Herman, who stabbed two police officers to death in Liège, Belgium, in May 2018. Herman was on temporary leave from prison.

92 Interview with Danish prison official, 5 July 2018; Interview with Swedish prison official, 6 July 2018.

93 Interview with Danish prison official, 5 July 2018.

94 *Ibid.*

95 “Government bolsters crackdown on extremism in prisons”, Ministry of Justice press release, 11 April 2018.

96 “40 détenus radicalisés devraient être libérés d’ici 2019, un ‘risque majeur’ selon François Molins”, *LCI*, 28 May 2018.

97 Interview with Belgium’s Extremism Cell (“CelEx”), 22 February 2018.

countries.⁹⁸ Whereas Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands have experimented with isolating radicalised inmates from the general prison population – by concentrating them in special wings or prisons – Denmark and Sweden have not been compelled to change their general dispersal model. While they look to separate extremist networks that may develop, this is done on an ad-hoc basis.⁹⁹

This is not to say that there are no areas of concern. The Swedish prison services have witnessed approximately ten cases where extremists have attempted to radicalise other inmates, and this may rise with the anticipated imprisonment of ideologically committed jihadist returnees following Islamic State's loss of its physical territory in Syria and Iraq.¹⁰⁰ Denmark's PET's Center for Terror Analysis (CTA) has also warned of an increased risk of radicalisation, due to a growing number of individuals sentenced for terrorist-related offences.¹⁰¹

And despite the small prison population, there have been novel developments. In April 2018, extremist material – including videos of beheadings – was found on the PlayStation games consoles of four inmates in Nyborg Fængsel, a Danish prison. It is possible that the extremist material was smuggled in using USB sticks.¹⁰² Here a weakness was exploited, as prison officials were not able to totally secure the consoles.

The prisons agency Kriminalforsorgen in turn decided to remove all consoles from every security level (except for the open prisons, which hold low-risk inmates), and the four inmates have been charged.¹⁰³ The Swedish Prison and Probation Service has also excluded them from the wider prison community, and the online network used by inmates has been shut down, which as disrupted online study and education programmes.¹⁰⁴

98 Interview with Swedish prison official, 6 July 2018.

99 Ibid; Interview with Danish prison official, 5 July 2018.

100 "80-tal svenskar i fångelser riskerar att radikaliseras", *SVT*, 27 May 2018.

101 "Radikalisering i fængsler bekymrer efterretningstjeneste", *Jyllands-Posten*, 12 January 2018.

102 Mette Mayli Albæk, Louise Dalsgaard, and Emma Tøft, "Flere hundrede playstations inddraget i fængslerne: Ekstremistisk indhold fundet", *DR*, 2 May 2018.

103 Anna Gottschalck, "Efter fund af ekstremistisk materiale: Nu inddrages alle Playstations fra fængslerne", *Berlingske*, 3 July 2018.

104 Ibid.

6 Recommendations

This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Denmark and Sweden. While there are no institutionalised links between organised crime and terrorist groups in either country, there are areas of concern, especially when it comes to the merging of criminal and jihadist milieus in areas of high social deprivation – the so-called social nexus (see Box 1). One is the potential for individuals with criminal backgrounds to use their skills – be it in forging documents, procuring firearms, or raising money through criminal means – to facilitate terrorist activity. Another area of concern is the potential for the radicalisation of criminal inmates within prisons, and the “networking” that may happen between criminals and extremists.

To prevent such links from re-emerging or becoming further entrenched, we recommend the following actions and/or good practices:

1. Effective monitoring

We recommend that authorities continue to periodically review their statistics on organised crime and terrorism, and consciously monitor them for emerging linkages between the two phenomena. Some areas – such as the link between drugs and terrorism – may require further research.

2. Re-thinking radicalisation

Given the partial merging of terrorist and extremist milieus, core assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered. The behaviour of jihadists with criminal pasts often contradicts the notion that extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Where needed, we recommend that authorities update their checklists, indicators, and training materials in order to reflect changing patterns and profiles.

3. Safer prisons

The authorities in Denmark and Sweden have recognised the importance of prisons as potential incubators of links between crime and terrorism. We encourage them to move forward with entrenching systematic efforts to make prisons safer from crime, terrorism, and any links between them. It is also important to systematically measure and assess the impact of these changes, and consider post-release arrangements, which involve re-integration as well as monitoring.

4. Countering all streams of terrorist financing

Efforts to countering terrorist finance have excessively focused on the international financial system – with meagre results. In light of both countries' global commitment to counter the financing of terrorism, we recommend that authorities broaden their efforts at countering terrorist finance to include small-scale and petty crime, such as drug dealing, theft, robberies, and the trafficking in goods.

5. Information sharing

As the lines between terrorism and “ordinary” crime have become increasingly blurred, relevant agencies need to become more effective at sharing relevant information across departments and “disciplines”, as well as forming new “coalition” of individuals and institutions that may not be used to working with each other.

We recommend that governments continue to review existing channels and systems of information exchange, explore creating new partnerships (such as with local authorities, civil society, and the private sector), and make appropriate changes reflecting the new – and multi-dimensional – nature of the threat.

6. Addressing social conditions

While there is no inherent or automatic link between socio-economic conditions and involvement in terrorism, it seems clear that jihadist “delinquency” in Denmark and Sweden has occurred in some of the same geographical areas and demographic pools from which “ordinary” delinquency has emerged as well.

Rather than further marginalising and excluding those areas, there needs to be a serious and honest discussion about the extent to which state and civil society can address the social conditions in which extremist narratives and ideologies resonate.



Crime Terror Nexus

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