

# Terrorist Threats in Scandinavia

A comparative study of the most significant terrorist threats  
in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway between 2001-2022

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# Abstract

The Scandinavian countries have neither been a focus area in terrorism nor intelligence studies, even though the Scandinavian intelligence agencies perceive the terrorist threats as rather present in their countries. This thesis aims to examine the similarities and differences within the assessment of the most significant terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway between 2001-2022 based on the threat assessment reports published by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies. This thesis applied qualitative content analysis in combination with securitization theory to deduce the similarities and differences. The theory was operationalized to focus on the securitization requesters and their threat images and contexts. The most significant securitized terrorist threats within the threat assessment reports were militant Islamism, including terrorist threats from AQ, IS, foreign fighters, and refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, and political extremism, including right- and left-wing extremism. The Scandinavian intelligence agencies securitized the terrorist threat from militant Islamism and the related terrorist threats the most. However, in recent years, the securitization of right-wing extremism reached the heights of the militant Islamism in Sweden and Norway, while left-wing extremism has been desecuritized in Denmark and Sweden. Lastly, other terrorist threats have also been subjected to minor desecuritization attempts by the intelligence agencies.

*Key words:* Terrorist threats, intelligence agencies, Scandinavia, securitization theory, threat assessment

Words: 18 664

# Abbreviations

AQ	Al-Qaida
CTA	Center for Terror Analysis (Da. Center for Terroranalyse)
E-tjenesten	Norwegian Intelligence Service (No. Efterretningstjenesten)
FE	Danish Defence Intelligence Service (Da. Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste)
IS	Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL)
MUST	Military Intelligence and Security Service (Sv. Militära Underrättelse- och Säkerhetstjänsten)
NCT	National Center for Terrorist Threat Assessment (Sv. Nationellt Centrum för Terrorhotbedömning)
PET	Danish Security and Intelligence Agency (Da. Politets Efterretningstjeneste)
PST	Norwegian Police Security Service (No. Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste)
SÄPO	Swedish Security Service (Sv. Säkerhetspolisen)

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# 1 Introduction

Oslo – Utøya, Norway (2011)

Copenhagen, Denmark (2015)

Stockholm, Sweden (2017)

The tragic events of 9/11<sup>1</sup> marked the unpredictable terrorist threat to the western world. As a consequence of the terror attacks in the US, the threat of international terrorism became a matter of national security in many states. Even in the peaceful Scandinavian countries that experienced an invariably low level of terrorism, it became a key priority to prevent terrorist attacks by strengthening their intelligence agencies (Wyman 2009; Nielsen 2015). Regardless of the attempts to prevent terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11, significant terrorist attacks took place in each of the Scandinavian countries, as noticed and remembered above. The three events actualized the terrorist threats to the otherwise historically peaceful and harmonious corner of Europe (Ingebritsen 2006: 5).

Studying terrorist threats is not straightforward because there is no agreed definition of terrorism within the academic field and between countries and international organizations. Regardless of the increasing academic research on terrorism<sup>2</sup> post-9/11, there is still no common definition in international law nor consensus among scholars today<sup>3</sup> (Phillips 2021: 2; Silke - Schmidt-Petersen 2017: 692-693). However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in the academic debate on the definition of terrorism (for discussions on the definition of terrorism, see, for example, Wilkinson 1974; Malik 2000; Schmid 2011) because this thesis aims to study what the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies perceive as terrorist threats, which is manifested in their public threat assessment reports. The intelligence agencies' inherent purpose is to protect national security, hence constructing and presenting relevant, immediate security threats and enemy images (Kovanic 2021: 117; Crenshaw 2014: 564). Nevertheless, the lack of a universal conceptualization of terrorism has not prevented the intelligence agencies from incorporating the threat of terrorism into

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<sup>1</sup> 9/11 refers to the terrorist attacks that took place simultaneously on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, US, executed by AQ.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of classic scholarly work on terrorism, see Rapoport (1971), Wilkinson (1976), Schmidt – Jongmann (1988), and Pape (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Most definitions of terrorism include, to some extent, the use or threat of violence or fear by non-state actors aiming to reach either political, religious, or ideological goals (Persson 2017: 103). Moreover, some governments and international organizations have adopted definitions entailing politically motivated violence intentionally targeting civilians and non-combatants (Neumann 2009: 7-8).

their domain. Therefore, this thesis will take advantage of their public assessment of the terrorist threats in their online threat assessment reports.

Generally, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway appear to have suffered from lower levels of terrorism than other Western countries. This tendency has largely excluded the Scandinavian countries as objects of study within terrorism studies (Malkki et al. 2018: 761, 763). Regardless of the historically low levels of experienced terrorism in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, their national intelligence agencies have their own perception of the level of terrorist threats to the countries. Today, the Swedish and Norwegian terrorist threat level is deduced to be on level three out of five<sup>4</sup>, which corresponds to respectively an elevated and moderate threat of terrorism (PST 2022a; Polisen 2022). In Denmark, the terrorist threat level is at level four out of five, indicating a significant threat of terrorism in Denmark (CTA 2022). Therefore, the subject of this thesis is to map the similarities and differences of the most significant perceived terrorist threats presented by the intelligence agencies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway since 9/11 from a comparative perspective. The timeframe is defined by the epoch-making events of 9/11, which globally changed the perception of terrorist threats. A systematic analysis of the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports will concretize what the post-9/11 terrorist threats to the Scandinavian countries consist of by using the securitization theory to specify the terrorist threat images. Hence, this thesis aims to examine terrorist threats at a time when global threats became local.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Question

This thesis will examine the most significant perceived terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway based on its intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports. The aim is to analyze the terrorist threats between 2001-2022 from a comparative perspective focusing on the terrorist threat images presented in the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to outline the similarities and differences in the assessment of the terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The terrorist threats of interest in this study will be identified by using the theoretical framework of securitization theory and the methodology of qualitative content analysis. Thus, the research question is as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> The terrorist threat scales in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway consist of five levels: the highest level, five, indicates an extraordinary and very serious terrorist threat situation, and the lowest level, one, indicates a minimal or no identified terrorist threat.

- What are the similarities and differences within the assessment of the most significant terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway between 2001-2022?

## 1.2 Limitations

The major limitation of this study is that the analysis will only be based on publicly available material authored by the intelligence agencies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Moreover, this thesis will only include terrorist threats that pose a direct terrorist threat to Denmark, Sweden, or Norway and its interests abroad. Hence, the global terrorist threats presented in some reports will be excluded. Lastly, the study will only encounter the most significant terrorist threats presented across the threat assessment reports because of the wide timeframe and the restricted scope of this thesis. Consequently, smaller terrorist threats that do not occur consistently in the reports will not be included in the analysis.

## 1.3 Disposition

The remaining of this thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the previous research in the fields of terrorism and intelligence studies and the securitization theory relevant to this study. Next, the securitization theory and the theoretical point of departure will be introduced in chapter 3. Chapter 4 will present the comparative case study design and the applied methodology of the qualitative content analysis. In continuation thereof, chapter 5 will give an overview of the national threat assessment reports, which constitute the empirical material of this study. Chapter 6 introduces the securitization requesters and intelligence to situate the analysis presented in the following chapter. Thus, chapter 7 outlines the similarities and differences in the assessment of the most significant terrorist threats to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Finally, chapter 8 will discuss the findings of the analysis and conclude the study.



## 2 Previous Research

This chapter will present the previous research conducted in the relevant research fields: terrorism and intelligence studies and the securitization theory due to the intertwined nature of this thesis. However, the review will be conducted through a Scandinavian lens because this is the empirical starting point of this thesis. First, the research areas of terrorism and intelligence studies will be outlined, and second, the empirical and methodological use of the securitization theory will be reviewed. Lastly, this thesis's contribution to the research field will be outlined.

In terrorism and intelligence studies, the Scandinavian countries have not been a focal point. The research field of terrorism studies is a well-established area that has only expanded since 9/11 (Phillips 2021: 2; Silke - Schmidt-Petersen 2017: 692-693). However, the few articles published about the Scandinavian countries indicate that the geographical area in terrorism studies is underdeveloped. The research that has been conducted about the Scandinavia countries has mainly been concerned with counterterrorism, jihadist violence, and Anders Breivik's attack in 2011 in Norway (Malkki et al. 2018). The geographical pattern is similar in the research field of intelligence studies. Overall, the study of intelligence agencies and communities outside the English-speaking world is limited. The studies that have been conducted about the intelligence agencies in Denmark have mainly focused on the structure of the agencies (see, for example, Andersen et al. 2022), and the studies of Sweden's and Norway's intelligence agencies have mainly focused on the historical use of intelligence and their position within the democratic system (see, for example, Fredholm 2020; Riste 2007). Hence, the empirical starting point of this thesis highlights that the rather established research fields of terrorism and intelligence studies are flawed when it comes to the study of Scandinavia. Furthermore, at the intersection of research on terrorism and intelligence, studies focusing on Scandinavia are almost absent.

The theoretical framework of this thesis, the securitization theory, has been widely occupied with the empirical issue of terrorism (see, for example, Karyotis, 2007; Dixit 2016; Trédaniel – Lee 2018). The urgent and existential nature and the securitization of terrorism is, therefore, a fact within the securitization theory (Sjöstedt 2017: 10). However, the most prominent method used to study securitization processes has been discourse analysis, but a leeway for other methods, such as content analysis, has been driven forward by scholars (Vultee 2010; Wilkinson 2010; Balzacq et al. 2016). There is no established research practice yet for combining content analysis and securitization theory, but there is an outspoken curiosity for a broader application of the securitization theory (Balzacq 2011: 51). This thesis will thereby constitute an example of the application of securitization theory in combination with content analysis aiming to

contribute to the development of a broader methodological application of the securitization theory.

In conclusion, this thesis's contribution is two-fold because of its empirical and methodological contributions. The empirical contribution aims to shed light on the Scandinavian countries in terrorism and intelligence studies challenging the English-speaking world's monopoly in the fields. Moreover, a comparison of the terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway based on their intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports do not exist. The combination of securitization theory and content analysis is only explored to a very limited extent in the theoretical research field. Thus, this thesis will contribute to developing and examining this less-traveled path within the securitization theory.

## 3 (De)Securitization

This chapter will present the theory of this thesis, the Copenhagen Schools' securitization theory, which will be the basis for the analysis of the terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. In continuation hereof, the main criticism of the theory will be outlined. Lastly, the theoretical point of departure, including subsequent developments of the securitization theory, of this thesis will be presented.

### 3.1 The Copenhagen School: The Securitization Theory

The Copenhagen School has broadened the scope of security by widening the concept of threats beyond military threats and the reference object beyond the state. For the Copenhagen School, security is characterized by urgency and extraordinary means (Wæver 1995: 51-52; Buzan et al. 1998: 21, 23-24; Buzan – Hansen 2009: 36). Thus, based on the Schmittian understanding of security and exceptional politics (Williams 2003: 515; Huysmans 2006: 127-144).

Within the initial development of the securitization theory, Ole Wæver emphasized that security depends on its successful discursive construction (Buzan – Hansen 2009: 213). Hence, the securitization theory is based on security as a speech act, which is not defined by uttering the word security but rather as an existential threat that requires emergency actions and actions outside the normal political bounds put forward by a state representative. The designated threat should be accepted by an audience to be successfully securitized (Buzan et al. 1998: 21, 23-24, 27; Wæver 1995: 55; Buzan – Hansen 2009: 33-34). A threat manifests itself on the political agenda when significant political actors accept it. However, until then, the security discourse is seen as constructed through identities, and threats are seen as constituted rather than objective. Once the threat is accepted, it is seen as objective (Buzan – Hansen 2009: 25, 34, 243). Thus, security is a self-referential practice (Buzan et al. 1998: 24, 27; Buzan – Hansen 2009: 34).

Overall, the discursive power of securitization brings together the 'securitizing actors' defined as "*actors who securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened*" (Buzan et al. 1998: 36) and the 'referent objects' defined as "*things that are seen to be existentially threatened and have a legitimate claim to survival*" (Ibid.). In theory, everyone can make a 'securitizing move' defined as presenting an issue as an existential threat to the referent object.

However, the securitizing move is only successful if and when the audience accepts the issue as securitized. In practice, the most common securitizing actors are pressure groups, lobbyists, governments, bureaucrats, and political leaders, who aim to defend the security of the state, nation, civilization, and other large communities, principles, or systems constituting the reference object (Buzan et al. 1998: 25, 40-41). The complete securitization process is illustrated as follows:

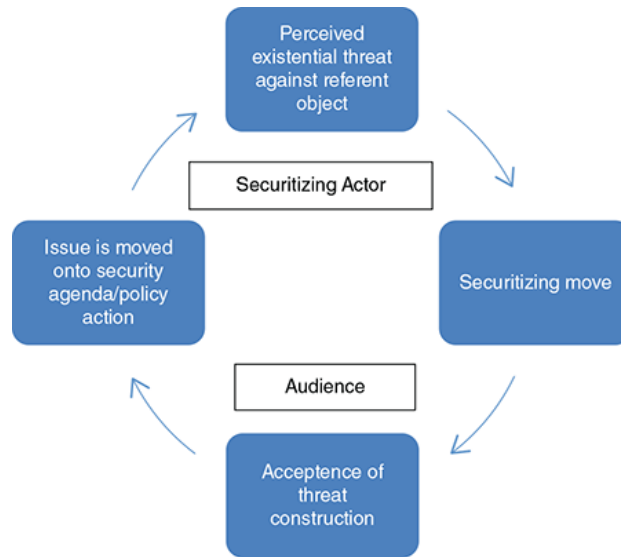


Figure 1. The securitization process (Sjöstedt 2017)

The opposite of the securitization process is desecuritization, which occurs when an issue that has been securitized moves out of the threat-danger modality and into the ordinary political sphere. Hence, the issue can now be handled by ordinary means, not emergency actions as existential threats require (Wæver 1995: 55, 58). Desecuritization is as much a political choice as the acceptance of securitization. Still, desecuritization is the optimal long-term-range because then security becomes a matter of the ordinary public sphere (Buzan et al. 1998: 29; Buzan – Hansen 2009: 216-217).

### 3.1.1 Main Criticism of the Securitization Theory

The securitization theory has been subjected to criticism even though it has proven beneficial in examining the construction of threat images across different issues, contexts, and actors (Sjöstedt 2017: 2, 11-12; see, for example, Banai – Kreide 2017; Hanrieder – Kreuder-Sonnen 2014; Zimmermann 2017). Ken Booth (2005; 2007) has accused the securitization theory of being a theoretical mixture and discourse-, state-, and elite-centric. Furthermore, Booth argues that the security concept entails conceptual problems and is neither progressive nor radical, which impacts the theoretical framework's sense of reality and applicability (Booth 2005: 271; Booth 2007: 106-107, 163-169, 263). Other

scholars, for example, Lene Hansen, Didier Bigo, and Jef Huysmans, have also criticized the security concept of the securitization theory. Hansen (2000) has emphasized ‘the silent security dilemma’, which criticizes the theory's inability to identify subjects with limited or no possibility of articulating their security problems. Furthermore, Hansen highlights the Copenhagen School's neglect of gender-related insecurity (Hansen 2000: 286-287). Lastly, Bigo (2002) and Huysmans (2006) argue that the Copenhagen Schools’ conceptualization of securitization undermines the role of bureaucratic routines because it does not account for the power as continuous and the institutionalization of the professional security field (Bigo 2002: 73; Huysmans 2006: 5-6).

This thesis' application of the securitization theory is underpinned by the theoretical framework's successful examination of threats and interaction between the securitizing actors and the securitizing move (Sjöstedt 2017: 12).

### 3.2 Theoretical Point of Departure

This thesis will take advantage of the almost endless list of conceptual aspects and developments of the securitization theory (see, for example, Balzacq 2005; Balzacq 2011a; Balzacq et al. 2014; McDonald 2008; Gad - Petersen 2011; Stritzel 2007; Williams 2003) to structure the empirical analysis. This study's theoretical point of departure consists of two elements of the securitization theory central to the research question: the securitizing actor and securitizing move.

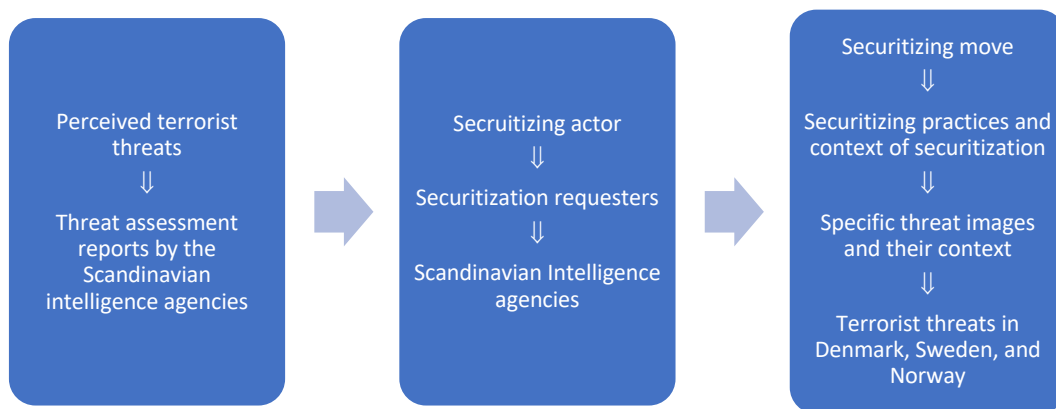
The securitization theory does not specify who composes the securitizing actor. Therefore, this thesis will draw on Rita Floyd's (2018; 2021) distinction between the so-called securitization requesters and functional actors to define the securitizing actor. According to Floyd, securitization requesters “*seek to influence the initiation of the securitisation*” (Floyd 2021: 88), while functional actors are active during the securitization and have the right to influence the process by vetoing or endorsing securitization on behalf of others (Floyd 2018: 44; Floyd 2021: 87-88). Intelligence agencies are defined as securitization requesters because they possess an informative position and can only influence decision-making. Furthermore, they cannot by themselves create a successful securitization process. The securitization requesters of this thesis, the Scandinavian intelligence agencies, will be presented in the initial analysis (see chapter 6).

The second element, and the endpoint of the analysis, is the securitizing move operationalized as “*a very specific form of labeling and communicating something as a (national) security threat*” (Eriksson 2020: 6). Thus, the securitizing move aims to guide the identification of the terrorist threats within the empirical material published by the securitization requesters. The analysis will be further deepened by focusing on securitizing practices and the context of the securitization because these are crucial aspects of the securitization move (Léonard 2010: 235-238; Sjöstedt 2017: 7). Consequently, elaborating the securitizing move initiate a focus on the security problem rather than the speech

act as emphasized by the original securitization theory (Léonard 2010: 233, 236; Balzacq 2011b: 1). This theoretical demarcation follows Thierry Balzacq's so-called sociological approach to securitization, which prioritizes practices over speech acts (Balzacq 2010). Studying practices pave the way for pinpointing institutionalized persistent or recurrent threats that are implicitly linked to urgency without the drama of securitization. Also, the securitization requesters of this thesis are, to some extent, enrolled in the security logic because not every threat is publicly justified by a security discourse with the drama of urgency. Still, the threats are defined as security (Buzan et al. 1998: 27-28). It should be noted that terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 has been securitized internationally and domestically because of its imperative emergency, which constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions for securitization (Rychnovská 2014: 10, 20; Sjøstedt 2008: 10; Balzacq 2011: 32).

The operationalization of securitizing practices and the context of securitization of this thesis follow Balzacq's theoretical insights. Balzacq defines the tool or instrument of securitization, also known by Bigo as securitizing practices (see, for example, Bigo 2000; Bigo 2001a; Bigo 2001b; Bigo 2002; Bigo 2008), as "*an identifiable social and technical 'dispositif' or device embodying a specific threat image through which public action is configured to address a security issue*" (Balzacq 2008: 79). Encountering the empirical material by the securitizing actors, which is classified as capacity instruments because it allows individuals, groups, and agencies to make decisions and carry out activities that have a reasonable probability of success, this thesis will focus on the specific threat images embedded in the policy tools (Balzacq 2008: 80, 82; Balzacq 2011b: 17). Hence, the identification of the securitizing practices are based on the specific threat images presented in the empirical material. Adding the context of securitization to the study of threat images aims to create a holistic analysis. The context is defined as the external context, which refers to the outside developments that affect the threat images (Balzacq 2011b: 12-14; Balzacq et al. 2016: 504). Summarizing, the securitizing move consists of the securitizing practices and the context of the securitization, which is operationalized as specific threat images situated in reality (see chapter 7).

Summing up, this thesis will examine the key interaction within the securitization process between the securitizing actor and the securitizing move. The securitizing actor is operationalized as the securitization requester corresponding to the intelligence agencies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway within this thesis. Moreover, the securitizing move comprises securitizing practices and its context operationalized as specific threat images and their external context corresponding to the terrorist threats and its context, which is presented in the threat assessment reports by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies. The theoretical point of departure is illustrated as follows:



*Figure 2. The operationalization of this thesis' theoretical point of departure.*

As noted above, the securitization move is the analytical endpoint of this study because this component solely relies on the securitizing actor. The comparative design and the wide timeframe do not allow an analysis of whether the terrorist threats have been accepted by the audience and moved into the political agenda. Thus, the complete securitization process is not analyzed in this thesis. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine whether the securitizing move and, in general, the securitization process is successful or a failure. In contrast, this thesis aims to grasp and situate the terrorist threats presented by the intelligence agencies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway from a comparative perspective, while also highlighting the similarities and differences within their assessment.

# 4 Comparative Content Analysis

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this study. First, the study's research design will be presented, and second, the adopted qualitative content analysis will be introduced. In continuation hereof, the relationship between content analysis and the securitization theory will be discussed.

## 4.1 Comparative Case Study Design

The research design of this thesis is a comparative case study design examining the terrorist threats in the Scandinavian countries. The definition of Scandinavia is adopted according to the historical interpretation, including Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, while excluding Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands (Rogers et al. 2013). The case selection is based on the historical, societal, and cultural coherence between Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, which was, for example, manifested by the establishment of the Nordic Council in 1945. Consequently, they have created a highly developed pattern of mutual cooperation and integration. Also, the Scandinavian countries' linguistic and religious similarities and their shared history have formed a close and complex web of inter-relations while enjoying a high level of democracy (Thomas 1996: 16-17; Economist Intelligence Unit 2021: 12). For the purpose of this thesis, it is worth noticing that the Scandinavian intelligence services are also similarly organized and operated by the same approach and values (see chapter 6) (PET 2020: 40). However, the main differences between Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are embodied in their memberships of international organizations, such as Denmark and Sweden being members of the EU, while Denmark and Norway are members of NATO.

In light of the overwhelming internal similarities between the Scandinavian countries, I will argue that it is relevant to compare the Scandinavian countries to examine whether their terrorist threat assessments are similar or different. Hence, the findings of the comparative case study might be relevant and applicable to other contexts and cases beyond the scope of this thesis (Halperin – Oliver 2017: 214). Moreover, the research design of this thesis challenges the traditional research design of studies using securitization theory, namely the single-case study design, which provides in-depth knowledge of one securitization process (Balzacq 2011: 32-34; Halperin – Oliver 2017: 154). Nevertheless, I will argue that adopting a comparative research design contributes to understanding the securitization of one issue across countries.



## 4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The overall aim of conducting a qualitative content analysis is to systematically analyze the similarities and differences between the terrorist threats and their context in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway (Halperin - Oliver 2017: 345). The definition of qualitative content analysis is “*a more interpretive form of analysis concerned with uncovering meanings, motives, and purposes in textual content*” (Halperin - Oliver 2017: 336). Hence, applying qualitative content analysis in combination with the securitization theory aims to infer the most significant securitized terrorist threats in Scandinavia, including their similarities and differences, within the intelligence agencies’ threat assessment reports between 2001-2022.

The national threat assessment reports published by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies constitute the empirical material of this thesis. They will be used to deduce the specific terrorist threat images in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (see chapter 5). The benefit of systematically analyzing the official documents from the intelligence agencies is that they provide comprehensive information about the terrorist threats, which would have been difficult to obtain through direct, personal contact. Furthermore, the textual content reduces the bias within the information and allows the adoption of a wide timeframe, which would otherwise not have been possible through, for example, interviews (Halperin – Oliver 2017: 345-346; Hermann 2008: 152). However, the extensive empirical material risk simplifying the content of the reports, hence neglecting an in-depth analysis of the terrorist threats (Hsieh – Shannon 2005: 1280; Elo et al. 2014: 8). To meet this concern, I will, in accordance with the research question only partly analyze the threat assessment reports. Specifically, I will only examine the chapters and sections of the reports that concern terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Thus, excluding the chapters on, for example, the organizational structure of the intelligence agency, counterespionage, and international cooperation. It should be noted that the country-specific terrorist threats are based on triangulation of the different national threat assessment reports. For example, the presented terrorist threats in Denmark are based on PET’s, FE’s, and CTA’s reports. Lastly, the intelligence agencies’ reports are published in Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian, but this is not seen as an obstacle because the languages are very similar, and I am comfortable with them all.

The relevant chapters and sections within the threat assessment reports will be examined inductively, also known as open coding. This methodology is chosen because any effort to establish categories of terrorism has shown to be as tricky as it has been to define terrorism historically (Masters 2008: 405; Neumann 2009: 6; Copeland 2001: 8). Some scholars have, for example, used the tactical modus operandi as a method for classification of terrorism (see, for example, Mickolus et al. 1989), while others have classified terrorism in regard to its targets (see, for example, Gross 1990). The categorization of terrorism is only limited by imagination and, thus, develops over time (Masters 2008: 405-406). Therefore,

this thesis will draw on the typology of the terrorist threats presented within the empirical material to create the most accurate analysis of the similarities and differences within the most significant terrorist threat in Scandinavia between 2001-2022. The NVivo software will assist the coding because the program allows to classify, sort, and arrange rich text-based material and uncover complex relationships across the texts (Paulus et al. 2017: 39; Al Nahyan et al. 2012: 500). The open coding in NVivo will be conducted by constant comparison, which means that during the coding, the categories will always be compared to the paragraphs that have already been coded, and thereby, already existing categories will be used. A new category will be created if no existing appropriate codes exist. Once the coding is finalized, a list of categories will be fully developed and, thus, subject to further categorizations (Halperin – Oliver 2017: 350; Bryman 2004: 183). The consequence of applying an inductive coding strategy is its possible negative impact on the reliability of the categories of the terrorist threats and, ultimately, the findings of the analysis. Since a deductive coding scheme is not used within this thesis, the coder's stability and reproducibility require awareness. The codes need to be consistently coded over time, led by the same procedures, for other scholars to be able to reproduce the categories. Hence, the coding process of this thesis aims to be as systematic and objective as possible to increase the intercoder reliability (Halperin – Oliver 2017: 354; Stemler 2000: 3).

In conclusion, the aim of applying the methodology of qualitative content analysis is to systematically analyze the terrorist threat images and their context based on the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports. Furthermore, the purpose is that the qualitative content analysis facilitates the examination of the similarities and differences of the perceived terrorist threats in Scandinavia. Lastly, the thorough methodological practice of this thesis intends to increase its validity through transparency.

#### 4.2.1 Content Analysis and the Securitization Theory

Content analysis remains relatively unexplored in relation to the securitization theory due to its commitment to the positivist methodology different from the post-structural foundation of the securitization theory. Therefore, the content analysis is usually regarded as incompatible with the securitization theory (Balazacq 2011: 31, 46, 50-52). The vast majority of studies applying the securitization theory have fruitfully been combined with discourse analysis (see, for example, Wæver 1995; Buzan et al. 1998; Hansen 2006). However, discourse analysis and content analysis have a lot in common, but the methods tend to approach the exploration of an issue differently (Halperin - Oliver 2017: 336). Firstly, the methods share the purpose of conveying meanings and drawing conclusions from texts relevant to the research question. However, the two methods approach the texts differently. The content analysis addresses the text as an independent entity, while the discourse analysis focuses on the intersubjective context of the text (Balazacq 2011: 50-52). Secondly, the analysis' logic of

enquiry marks the major difference between content analysis and discourse analysis. The content analysis accepts that the meanings of the text can be fixed and replicated by other analysts if the data is well coded, but the discourse analysis insists on the constructed character of the meanings generated by the analyst (ibid.). Regardless of the methodological differences and the history of previous studies, this study aims to combine content analysis and the securitization theory successfully. Hence, expanding the application of the theoretical framework and answering the research question in a sufficient and sophisticated manner. An answer that would not have been uncovered by using discourse analysis. Also, according to Balazacq, securitization theory got something to learn from content analysis, which I will further explore in this thesis (Balazacq 2011: 51).

# 5 The National Threat Assessment Reports

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the empirical material of this thesis consists of the national threat assessment reports published by the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies. The national threat assessment reports are the only documents systematically published by national authorities assessing the terrorist threats toward Denmark, Sweden, and Norway and their interests abroad. The reports are, by default, published annually. The publicly available national threat assessment reports also serve as the basis for public debates, policymaking, and the perception of terrorist threats in the Scandinavian societies (Kovanic 2021: 120). Hence, the national threat assessment reports are seen as important and reliable sources when analyzing terrorist threats in Scandinavia.

This chapter will present the available Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian threat reports published by the intelligence agencies between 2001-2022<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that threat assessment reports are missing within the timeframe due to classification or it has simply not been a priority for the intelligence agencies to issue the report (for an overview, see Appendix I, and for direct links to the reports, see section 9.1). Lastly, the empirical limitations of the study will be outlined.

## 5.1 The Danish Threat Assessment Reports

In Denmark, the national threat assessment reports assessing the terrorist threats to Denmark and its interests abroad are published by PET, FE, and CTA. PET's annual reports (da. "Årlige redegørelse") are available online from 2015-2020<sup>6</sup>, and FE's yearly reports (da. "Udsyn" previously "Efterretningsmæssig Risikovurdering") are available online from 2004-2021<sup>7</sup>. Lastly, CTA's threat assessment reports about the terrorist threats to Denmark (da. "Vurdering af terrortruslen mod Danmark") are available from 2012-2018 and 2020-2022<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The availability of all the threat assessment reports is confirmed by: PET, FE, SÄPO, MUST, PST, and E-tjenesten.

<sup>6</sup> PET's reports are available here: <https://pet.dk/publikationer> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

<sup>7</sup> FE's reports are available here: <https://www.fe-ddis.dk/da/produkter/Risikovurdering/risikovurdering/> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

<sup>8</sup> CTA's reports are available here: <https://pet.dk/publikationer> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

## 5.2 The Swedish Threat Assessment Reports

In Sweden, the national threat assessment reports addressing the terrorist threats to Sweden and its interests abroad are published by SÄPO, MUST, and NCT. The annual reports by SÄPO (sv. “Säkerhetspolisens årsbok”) are available online from 2001-2003 and 2005-2021<sup>9</sup>, and the annual reports by MUST (sv. “Årsöversikt” previously “Årsrapport Säkerhetstjänst”) are available online from 2004-2009 and 2011-2021<sup>10</sup>. NCT’s threat assessment reports about the terrorist threat to Sweden (sv. “Bedömning av terrorhotet mot Sverige”) are available online from 2017-2022<sup>11</sup>.

## 5.3 The Norwegian Threat Assessment Reports

In Norway, the national threat assessment reports assessing the terrorist threats to Norway and its interests abroad are published by PST and E-tjenesten. PST’s yearly reports (no. “Nasjonal trusselvurdering” previously “Trusselvurdering” and “Åpen trusselvurdering”) are available online from 2004-2022<sup>12</sup>, and E-tjenesten’s annual reports are available online from 2011-2022<sup>13</sup>.

## 5.4 Empirical Limitations

Using the national threat assessment reports authored by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies as the empirical material poses several limitations to the analysis. First, the reports are not seen as value-neutral as they might portray the intelligence agencies’ agenda. Second, when excluding other relevant material,

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<sup>9</sup> SÄPO’s reports are available here: <https://sakerhetspolisen.se/om-sakerhetspolisen/publikationer/sakerhetspolisens-arsberattelse.html> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

<sup>10</sup> MUST’s reports are available here: <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/om-forsvarsmakten/dokument/must-arsoversikt/> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

<sup>11</sup> NCT’s report from 2017 is available here: [https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/download/18.310a187117da376c6603224/1637587068291/NCT\\_Helarsbedomning\\_2017.pdf](https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/download/18.310a187117da376c6603224/1637587068291/NCT_Helarsbedomning_2017.pdf) (retrieved 25/10/2022); and NCT’s reports from 2018-2022 are available here: <https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/verksamheten/kontraterorism/nationellt-centrum-for-terrorhotbedomning.html> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

<sup>12</sup> PST’s reports are available here: <https://www.pst.no/alle-arterikler/?v=1662102662019&FilterByValues=2&PageNumber=1> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

<sup>13</sup> E-tjenesten’s reports are available here: <https://www.etterretningstjenesten.no/publikasjoner/fokus> (retrieved 25/10/2022)

such as newspaper articles, the analysis might preclude some nuances of the terrorist threat assessment. Lastly, the missing threat assessment reports might provoke a bias within the analysis because the terrorist threats within those years will not be subject to (de)securitization. However, one can argue that the reports are irrelevant to the public if they are not publicly available.

# 6 Securitization Requesters: The Scandinavian Intelligence Agencies

This chapter outlines the securitizing actor of this thesis, which constitutes the first component of the applied securitization theory (see section 3.2). Hence, this chapter serves as the initial analysis. The securitizing actor of this study is operationalized to be the securitization requesters, thus, the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies.

First, this chapter will define intelligence because the empirical material of this thesis derives from intelligence and, thereby, is the basis of the securitizing move. Furthermore, the aim is to situate the work of the intelligence agencies to create a holistic understanding of the prerequisite of the analysis. Second, the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies will be presented to understand the organizational structures behind the threat assessment reports. This section will focus on the agencies working with counterterrorism or the like as they provide the assessments of the terrorist threats. Lastly, the similarities and differences between the Scandinavian intelligence agencies will be introduced to accommodate the comparative analysis of the significant terrorist threats in Scandinavia.

## 6.1 Intelligence in a Changing Security Landscape

There is a lacuna in a collective definition of intelligence. In temporary studies, competing definitions of intelligence exist, but they rarely refer to or take advantage of one another (Gill – Phythian 2018: 3-4). However, Peter Gill and Mark Phythian (2018) comprehensively defined that intelligence comprises “*the mainly secret activities – targeting collection analysis, dissemination and action – intended to enhance security and/or maintain power relative to competitors by forewarning of threats and opportunities*” (Ibid.: 5). Though intelligence, the intelligence agencies aim to be forward-looking enterprises protecting its citizens and providing security to their state by identifying and neutralizing relevant risks and threats before they occur or escalate within the jurisdiction of the state. Nevertheless, a complete state of security will never be possible, and states need to allocate their resources as efficiently as possible to mitigate security risks, threats, and uncertainties (Kovanic 2021: 118-119). However, intelligence

agencies need intelligence to successfully transform uncertainties and risks into concrete threats to create security. Phythian (2012) defines uncertainty as the lack of information and knowledge and risks as measurable uncertainties. Hence, the scope of the risks determines a concrete threat that is sufficiently imminent (Phythian 2012: 192-196). Based on Phythian's distinctions, intelligence is seen as risk-shifting. Thus, the intelligence agencies aim to “[...] *shift uncertainty into risk, to assess and manage probabilities, and to mitigate hazards*” (Warner 2009: 22). However, it should be noted that the formulation of concrete threats is not solely a result of intelligence work, but also a political activity warped by ideological biases (Jackson 2010: 458-459). Regardless of the essential analytical functions of the intelligence agencies, their conduct and activities should be consistent with democratic norms and standards, especially in liberal democracies, to be legitimate. Consequently, the intelligence agencies in democracies are subject to more thorough oversight to ensure they comply with democratic principles (Caparini 2007: 4).

Following the events of 9/11, the security landscape changed, which also affected the intelligence agencies. Terrorism has become a major security threat and a key priority for national governments and intelligence agencies (Bures 2016: 139). Moreover, the events of 9/11 represented a milestone in relation to the emergence of asymmetrical threats by non-state actors to national security, which according to Amitav Acharya (2014), have created an ‘age of fear’. The ‘age of fear’ refers to, among other things, the climate of fear that terrorism has created. A fear that does not only include the fear of terrorist attacks but also derives from the governmental discussions on terrorism that have, according to Acharya, eliminated other threats discursively. Therefore, a major part of the resources of the intelligence agencies has been assigned to counterterrorism (Acharya 2014: 4-5, 12, 79, 143). Hence, the intelligence agencies have experienced a broadening of their power. A power there has not been rolled back in the years after 9/11, and now has become a permanent part of the fabric of national intelligence agencies (Davis 2022: 164).

Notably, this thesis is primarily concerned with three forms of intelligence within the state sector: police, foreign, and military intelligence, because they publicly work with counterterrorism and assess the terrorist threats nationally. However, since the intelligence agencies' structures and mandates differ among countries, I will outline the country-specific features of the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies below.

### 6.1.1 The Danish Intelligence Agencies: PET and FE (and CTA)

The Danish intelligence community consists of two agencies: the police intelligence agency, PET, and the defence intelligence agency, FE. PET acts as the police criminal intelligence organization and the national security service, and works towards identifying, preventing, investigating, and responding to threats against freedom, democracy, and security in Denmark (Andersen et al. 2022: 245;



PET 2022). Complementary, FE serves as the foreign intelligence agency and provides strategic and operational intelligence for defence staff, armed services, and civil defence polity. PET and FE fall under the jurisdiction of two different departments. PET is administrated by the Ministry of Justice, while FE is administrated by the Ministry of Defence (Andersen et al. 2022: 244-245), but they both have operational departments dedicated to counterterrorism (PET 2022; FE, 2022a). Additionally, the fusion center CTA, managed by PET, consists of employees from PET, FE, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Danish Emergency Management Agency, and works as the focal point for the analysis and assessment of the terrorist threats against Denmark and its interests abroad (PET 2022). Hence, this thesis will be concerned with the public terrorist threat assessments from PET, FE, and CTA.

### 6.1.2 The Swedish Intelligence Agencies: SÄPO and MUST (and NCT)

The Swedish intelligence community consists of two branches: the national security service, SÄPO, and the defence intelligence service, MUST. SÄPO is tasked with intelligence and security activities related to protecting Swedish interests in Sweden, and MUST is the coordinating agency for the military's intelligence and security services within the armed forces focusing on obtaining intelligence information from abroad (Nilsson 2016: 11-12). The Ministry of Justice administrates SÄPO, and the authorities mandated to conduct defence intelligence, including MUST, are administrated by the Ministry of Defence (Ibid.: 14). SÄPO and MUST are both publicly dedicated to working with counterterrorism according to their annual threat assessment reports. Moreover, like in Denmark, Sweden has formed a special unit, NCT, tasked to assess the terrorist threats to Sweden and its interests abroad. The unit consists of employees from SÄPO, MUST, and the National Defence Radio Establishment (Sv. Försvarets Radioanstalt, FRA), and is categorized as a permanent working group administrated by the head of the three agencies involved (SÄPO 2022). Thus, this study includes the public terrorist threat assessments by SÄPO, MUST, and NCT.

### 6.1.3 The Norwegian Intelligence Agencies: PST and E-tjenesten

The Norwegian intelligence community also consists of two branches: a domestic intelligence and security agency, PST, and a foreign intelligence agency, E-tjenesten. PST is assigned to prevent and investigate serious crimes threatening national security, while E-tjenesten is tasked with both civilian and military matters, such as supplying information on external threats and high-priority interests to Norway and supporting the Norwegian armed forces. Furthermore, E-

tjenesten provides information on issues related to Norway's foreign, security, and defence policy to assist the decision-making processes. PST is subordinated to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, while E-tjenesten is under the jurisdiction of the Norwegian Armed Forces (PST 2022b). PST and E-tjenesten both work with identifying and assessing terrorist threats according to their public reports, but public sources do not define their work on counterterrorism in further detail. Moreover, there is a formal collaboration between PST and E-tjenesten in regard to analyzing and assessing the threat from international terrorism to Norway (PST 2022c). This thesis will include PST's and E-tjenesten's public terrorist threat assessment.

## 6.2 Similarities and Differences between the Scandinavian Intelligence Agencies

The Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence communities all consist of two branches, which are occupied with counterterrorism or generally the threat from terrorism: the police intelligence agencies and the defence and/or military intelligence agencies. Common for the police intelligence agencies is that they focus on the terrorist threats to respective Denmark, Sweden, and Norway and its interest abroad. Furthermore, they are subordinated to the Ministry of Justice (and Public Security in Norway). The defence and/or military intelligence agencies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway cover mainly foreign threats, but their operational area and tasks differ. The Danish and Norwegian agencies are concerned with military and civilian matters, while the Swedish agency is only concerned with military issues abroad based on public information. Also, the defence and/or military intelligence agencies are administrated differently. The Danish and Swedish agencies are subordinated to their respective Ministry of Defence, while the Norwegian agency is subordinated to the Norwegian armed forces. However, an in-depth comparison of the similarities and differences between the Scandinavian defence and/or military intelligence agencies is significantly limited by the lack of public information about their tasks and operations. Overall, PET, SÄPO, and PST are tasked to assure national security, and FE, MUST, and E-tjenesten are tasked to collect foreign intelligence. Lastly, one major organizational difference occurs between the Scandinavian countries. A special unit or center has been established in Denmark and Sweden to determine the national terrorist threats exclusively. In contrast, Norway does not have such a body. Consequently, additional threat assessment reports are available to analyze the terrorist threat in Denmark and Sweden. Below is a table illustrating the relevant Scandinavian intelligence agencies and their related units based on their categorization.

<b>Intelligence Agency</b>	<b>Police</b>	<b>Defence/ Military</b>	<b>Special Unit</b>
<b>Denmark</b>	PET	FE	CTA
<b>Sweden</b>	SÄPO	MUST	NCT
<b>Norway</b>	PST	E-tjenesten	

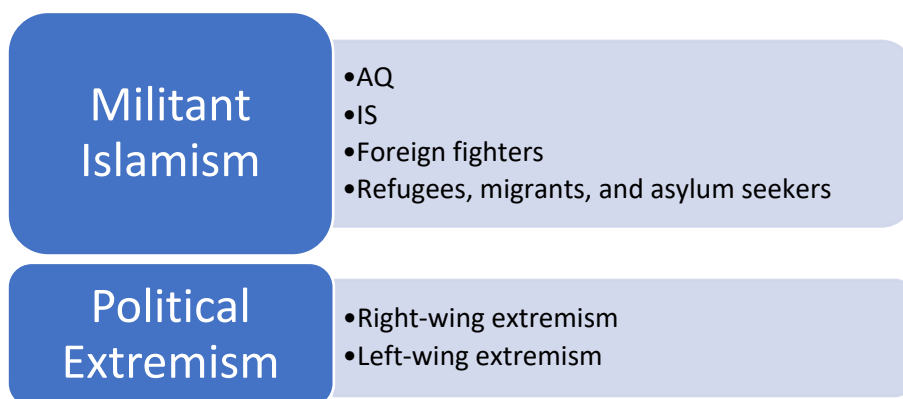
*Table 1. Overview of the Scandinavian intelligence agencies.*

The accentuation of the similarities and differences between the intelligence agencies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway aims to create a transparent analytical starting point. The analysis of the significant terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway will include the threat assessment reports from the intelligence agencies and units presented above. Hence, the country-specific terrorist threats will be assembled from the various national reports.

## 7 Significant Terrorist Threats in Scandinavia

This chapter will analyze the 108 threat assessment reports published by the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies defining the terrorist threat to their countries and interests abroad. The analysis aims to highlight the similarities and differences within the assessment of the most significant terrorist threats in the Scandinavian countries between 2001-2022. Moreover, the theoretical focus of the analysis is the intelligence agencies' securitizing move operationalized as first securitizing practices, and then threat images and their context. Hence, the analysis will pinpoint the securitization and potential desecuritization of the terrorist threats from a comparative perspective.

Overall, the inductive coding of the threat assessment reports showed that the most significant terrorist threat that occurred between 2001-2022 across the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian threat assessment reports were: militant Islamism, including the terrorist threats from AQ, IS, foreign fighters, and refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, and political extremism, including the terrorist threats from right- and left-wing extremism. The findings are based on the intelligence agencies' perception of terrorist threats. The figure below illustrates the most significant terrorist threat in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway over time. Also, the findings constitute the outline of this chapter.



*Figure 3. Overview of the most significant terrorist threats in Scandinavia.*

In continuation of the findings, it should be noted that other terrorist threats have occurred during coding the threat assessment reports, such as animal protection groups and incels. However, these terrorist threats do not appear consistently in the reports and across the Scandinavian countries. Based on the scope of this thesis, these terrorist threats are, therefore, not encountered in the analysis.

Before the analysis begins, two observations during the coding process will be presented because they have had a negative impact on the deduction of the findings. The first observation highlights that the defence and/or military intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports present limited relevant information about terrorist threats in a national context. These reports' main focus is the global terrorist threats and their developments. This shortcoming is especially present in the reports by FE and MUST. The second observation points out that the threat assessment reports generally suffer from imprecise, vague, and general framings of the terrorist threats, which is repeated in several reports. Regardless of the shortcomings of the empirical material, the number of threat assessment reports analyzed in this thesis has assured the quality of the findings.

## 7.1 Militant Islamism

The most significant terrorist threat since 2001 presented in the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian threat assessment reports derived from militant Islamism. The assessment is based on the intelligence agencies' serious assessment of the terrorist threat and the quantity of the reports dedicated to this specific threat image. Arguably, militant Islamism has been the most securitized threat since the events of 9/11. However, it should be noted that the terrorist threat mainly occurs from defined actors and individuals committed to the militant Islamist ideology. This section aims to analyze the similarities and differences of the general terrorist threat from militant Islamists in the Scandinavian countries. The following subsections examine the most significant terrorist threat related to militant Islamism, namely AQ (section 7.1.1); IS (section 7.1.2); foreign fighters (section 7.1.3); and refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers (section 7.1.4). The outline of the terrorist threats is deduced by their temporal appearance and the external context.

All the threat assessment reports have presented militant Islamism, including actors and individuals committed to that ideology, as a terrorist threat to Scandinavian countries. However, a specific terrorist threat from militant Islamists to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway occurred mainly after 2011. From 2001-2010 the terrorist threat from militant Islamism was securitized globally, indicating that it should also be securitized at the national level even though the threat images linked to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were not present in the reports. Arguably, the absence of national threat images does not imply a desecuritization of the terrorist threat. Rather it indicates a lack of articulation by the intelligence agencies. From 2011 and onwards, the terrorist threat from militant Islamism has been deemed the most prominent threat to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. However, the classification and articulation of the terrorist threat differ among the countries.

The Norwegian intelligence agency PST was the first of the Scandinavian intelligence agencies to securitize the terrorist threat from militant Islamists. In

their report from 2012, they explicitly stated that militant Islamism posed the most significant threat to national security and national interests (PST 2012). This assessment was restated in PST's reports from 2012-2019 and E-tjenesten's reports from 2013-2014 and 2022 (PST 2012; PST 2013; PST 2014; PST 2015; PST 2016; PST 2017; PST 2018; PST 2019; E-tjenesten 2013; E-tjenesten 2014; E-tjenesten 2022). However, PST already mentioned in their reports between 2008-2011 that actors inspired by a militant Islamist ideology would, in the future, become a challenge to the security of Norway (PST 2008; PST 2009; PST 2010; PST 2011). The Swedish intelligence agency SÄPO followed in 2014, classifying militant Islamism as the biggest threat to Sweden (SÄPO 2014). Hereafter, the statement was not repeated by SÄPO until between 2017-2018 and NCT between 2018-2020 (SÄPO 2017; SÄPO 2018; NCT 2018; NCT 2019; NCT 2020). The lack of articulation of the scaling of the threat image was not seen as an attempt to desecuritize the terrorist threat from militant Islamism because the content in the threat assessment reports indicated that it still posed a significant threat. Furthermore, NCT and SÄPO defined in their reports from respectively 2017-2019 and 2018 that the terrorist threat from militant Islamism was an "elevated threat" (level three out of five) (NCT 2017; NCT 2018; NCT 2019; SÄPO 2018). In 2015, the Danish intelligence agency PET also deemed the terrorist threat from militant Islamism to be the most prominent terrorist threat to Denmark (PET 2015). An assessment that was echoed in PET's reports from 2016-2020, CTA's reports from 2016-2018 and 2020-2022, and FE's report in 2016 (PET 2016; PET 2017; PET 2018; PET 2019; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022; FE 2016). However, in 2012, CTA already defined the terrorist threat from militant Islamism to Denmark as "significant" (level four out of five), which has been restated in CTA's reports until today (CTA 2012; CTA 2014a; CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022). The securitization of the terrorist threat from militant Islamism to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway took place almost simultaneously, led by Norway, and the terrorist threat has been highly securitized in all the Scandinavian countries. Nevertheless, Norway and Denmark seemed to have been more outspoken about the significance of the terrorist threat than Sweden within the terrorist threat assessment reports. However, Denmark and Sweden early scaled the terrorist threat indicating its significance.

The Scandinavian intelligence agencies offered different causes and information for the securitizing move of the terrorist threat from militant Islamism. Thus, the reason for the securitization of militant Islamism. Compared to the Danish and Swedish threat assessment reports, the Norwegian threat assessment reports provided the most detailed argumentation for the securitization of militant Islamists. The first explanation for the assessment and securitization was provided in PST's report from 2013, which stated that there was a threat to Norway from individuals and groups inspired by AQ (see section 7.1.1) (PST 2013). In 2015, PST specified that terrorist threat in their report when highlighting the extensive terrorist threats from the multiethnic circles in Eastern Norway, specifically around the Oslofjord, where several compelling individuals impacted the terrorist threats to Norway negatively due to their links to the AQ network

(PST 2015). Furthermore, PST stated in their report from 2015 that the terrorist threat from militant Islamists has intensified, and between 2016-2019 they concretely mentioned the possibility of a terrorist attack in Norway conducted by IS (see section 7.1.2) (PST 2015; PST 2016; PST 2017; PST 2018; PST 2019). It should be noted that PST in 2017 attempted to desecuritize the threat from militant Islamism by arguing that other Western countries were more exposed to terrorist attacks than Norway (PST 2017).

The Swedish intelligence agency SÄPO agreed with PST in regard to the securitization of terrorist threats from militant Islamists sympathizing with AQ-inspired ideologies in their reports from 2014 and 2017 and the terrorist threats from IS-inspired attacks in their report from 2017 (SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2017). In more general terms, NCT stated in their reports between 2017-2020 that Sweden is properly seen as a legitimate target of terrorist attacks conducted by individuals and groups committed to the ideology of militant Islamism (NCT 2017; NCT 2018; NCT 2018; NCT 2019). The threat assessment in 2018 was partly based on the terrorist attack that took place in Stockholm at Drottninggatan in 2017, where the perpetrator was motivated by a militant Islamist ideology, which actualized the securitization of terrorist threats to Sweden (SÄPO 2017). Prior to these assessments, SÄPO stated in their reports between 2013-2014 that they had identified concrete terrorist plans by militant Islamists aiming to conduct terrorism in Sweden since 2010 (SÄPO 2013; SÄPO 2014). In addition, deducing the specific threat images from militant Islamism to Sweden has been challenging from 2018 and onwards in SÄPO's threat assessment reports because the dominant, violent extremist actors, namely militant Islamists, right-wing groups, and left-wing groups, started being treated as one entity, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the individual terrorist threats (SÄPO 2018; SÄPO 2019; SÄPO 2020; SÄPO 2021).

Lastly, the motives for the Danish intelligence agencies' assessment and securitization of the terrorist threat from militant Islamism as the dominant terrorist threat to Denmark were expressed in very generic terms compared to the Norwegian and Swedish threat assessment reports. However, two motives occurred across the threat assessment reports. The first cause was stated in FE's report from 2010 and CTA's report from 2012, departing from the publication and reprinting of the cartoons of Mohammed, also known as the Muhammed Cartoon Crisis<sup>14</sup> (FE 2010; CTA 2012). The publications affected the terrorist threats from militant Islamists to Denmark and its interest abroad negatively because the cartoons were seen as an attack toward Muslims by the West and a violation of the rules of Islam, according to CTA's reports between 2012-2018 and 2020-2022

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<sup>14</sup> The Muhammed Cartoon Crisis refers to the publication of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten on 30 September 2005. The publication led to, among other things, the burning of Danish embassies in Damascus, Beirut, Kabul, Djakarta, and Tehran. Furthermore, Danish flags and posters with the, at that time, Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, were set ablaze in Pakistan and the West Bank by Muslim protesters, and boycotts of Danish companies were implemented. In total, 250 people were killed around the world in the riots (Hansen 2011: 62).

(CTA 2012; CTA 2014a; CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022). The second reason was based on the terrorist threats from individuals and groups committed to the ideology of militant Islamism, which was stated in PET's reports between 2015-2020, CTA's reports between 2016-2018 and 2020-2021, and FE's report in 2016 (PET 2015; PET 2016; PET 2017; PET 2018; PET 2019; PET 2020; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; FE 2016). In CTA's reports between 2015-2018 and 2020-2022, it was the commitment to IS there was perceived as the largest threat to Denmark and its interests abroad, and in CTA's reports between 2021-2022, the commitment to AQ included (CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022). Hence, the threat from foreign fighters (see section 7.1.3) was crucial.

In conclusion, the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies have highly securitized the terrorist threat from militant Islamism to their counties and interests abroad based on their threat assessment reports. However, the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies have reasoned their securitization based on both similar and different threat images. Common for the Scandinavian countries was that they all deemed individuals and groups committed to the ideology of AQ and IS central to their securitizing move. However, the Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies accounted for country-specific events, respectively, the Muhammed Cartoon Crisis and the terrorist attack in Stockholm, in their threat assessment reports. In contrast, the Norwegian intelligence agency PST attempted to desecuritize the terrorist threat. The latter is not reflected in the Danish and Swedish threat assessment reports.

Interestingly, in PST's reports between 2020-2022 and SÄPO's reports from 2021, they revoke the monopoly of militant Islamism as being the most prominent terrorist threat to their countries. Now, right-wing extremism (see section 7.2.1) was, according to PST and SÄPO, also the most prominent threat to their counties (PST 2020; PST 2021; PST 2022b; SÄPO 2021). However, the terrorist threat from militant Islamism was not lowered but complemented by another terrorist threat. The terrorist threat from right-wing extremism in Denmark has not received a similar classification in recent years. The securitizing move of right-wing extremism by PST and SÄPO does not indicate a desecuritization of militant Islamism. Instead, it emphasizes the immediate terrorist threat from both ideologies.

### 7.1.1 AQ

The militant Islamic actor AQ and its associated individuals and groups have been an object for the securitizing move across the Scandinavian threat assessment reports. The terrorist threats from individuals and groups sympathizing with AQ or its ideology were generally tied to AQ's local and regional developments and their modus operandi. Beyond the scope of this thesis, the threat assessment reports emphasized the global threat of AQ. However, this section will focus on



the direct terrorist threat from AQ and its related groups and individuals to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway and its interests abroad, aiming to pinpoint the intelligence agencies' (de)securitization of AQ.

The Swedish and Norwegian intelligence agencies initiated a securitization of the terrorist threat from AQ in their threat assessment reports between 2001-2011, but the securitizing move is inconsistent and sporadic. However, from 2012 and onwards, the securitization of AQ became more apparent and comparable among the Scandinavian countries. The first securitization of AQ was presented in SÄPO's reports between 2001-2002. The reports highlighted links between Swedish residents from North Africa and the Horn of Africa and central AQ figures. Furthermore, SÄPO observed that some of these individuals have participated in Osama bin Laden's, the founder of AQ, armed training camps in Afghanistan (SÄPO 2001; SÄPO 2002). In 2002, SÄPO wrote that American, British, and Israeli interests in Sweden might be an object for a terrorist attack by AQ. Still, Swedish interest would most likely not be an object for such attacks (SÄPO 2002). PST securitized AQ in their reports between 2004-2005 because of published statements by Ayman al-Zawahiri, the vicechair of AQ, in 2003 and 2004, which directed a terrorist threat towards Norway and Norwegian interests. Thus, Norway was seen as a legitimate target for AQ. In the wake of these statements, some Norwegian embassies were temporarily closed due to terrorist threats (PST 2004; PST 2005). The urgency of the threat from AQ to Norway and its interests were restated in PST's report from 2006 (PST 2006). In 2011, E-tjenesten emphasized that they knew individuals and groups in Norway linked to AQ with terrorist plans (E-tjenesten 2011). The early securitization of AQ by the Swedish and Norwegian intelligence agencies initiated that there was a terrorist threat from AQ to their respective countries, but the magnitude of the terrorist threats was unclear based on the threat assessment reports.

AQ was securitized in Denmark in 2012 when CTA articulated a terrorist threat from AQ to Denmark. CTA uttered that AQ had a strategic focus on Denmark regardless of their loss of central, leading figures (CTA 2012). E-tjenesten also pointed out in their reports between 2012-2016 that AQ's organization was weakened. Opposite CTA, E-tjenesten concluded that the general likelihood of terrorist attacks by AQ had decreased due to their internal weakening (E-tjenesten 2012; E-tjenesten 2013; E-tjenesten 2014; E-tjenesten 2015; E-tjenesten 2016). This can be seen as an attempt of desecuritization by E-tjenesten. However, this inference was contradicted in their rapport from 2012, where they stated that AQ followers in Norway were not dependent on AQ's centralized management to operate, which made the terrorist threat from the AQ sympathizers in Norway rather fragmented. Also, E-tjenesten deduced that the AQ networks in Norway had the intention and capacity to fulfill terrorist attacks, but not necessarily in Norway (E-tjenesten 2012). SÄPO, like CTA, reported between 2012-2014 that there was a substantial terrorist threat from AQ-inspired groups to Sweden. However, different from CTA's assessment, SÄPO argued that the assessment of the terrorist threat was based on known plans by AQ sympathizers aiming to conduct a number of terrorist attacks in Sweden and Denmark since 2010 and the presence of Swedish troops in Afghanistan (SÄPO 2012; SÄPO

2013; SÄPO 2014). The military engagement by Denmark and Norway in the international coalition against IS and AQ in Syria and Iraq was also highlighted in CTA's report from 2014 and PST's report from 2015 as a catalyst for terrorist attacks directed toward Denmark and Norway and their interests abroad conducted by individuals sympathizing with AQ (CTA 2014b; PST 2015).

From 2013 and onwards, the threat image of AQ became more mainstream and static across the Scandinavian threat assessment reports. However, the assessment of the terrorist threat from AQ slightly differed among the threat assessment reports. A common feature in the Norwegian and Swedish threat assessment reports was that they portrayed themselves as an enemy of AQ, which increased the likelihood of being a target for a terrorist attack conducted by AQ. PST stated in their reports between 2013-2015 and 2019 that it was especially Norwegian actors and symbols there were subject to alienation by individuals and groups inspired by AQ (PST 2013; PST 2014; PST 2015). SÄPO articulated in their report from 2013 that they were associated with the oppression of Islam, exemplified by the publication of caricatures of prophet Muhammed, which affected its reputation among AQ sympathizers negatively (SÄPO 2013). This concern was repeated in NCT's report from 2019 (NCT 2019). Also, the Norwegian and Swedish intelligence agencies shared a similar terrorist threat assessment of AQ to their respective states. In the reports by E-tjenesten between 2016-2017 and 2022 and PST's reports from 2018 and 2022, the Norwegian intelligence agencies articulated that Norway was a legitimized target for AQ. However, Norway was not a prioritized target (E-tjenesten 2016; E-tjenesten 2017; E-tjenesten 2022; PST 2018; PST 2022b). NCT raised a similar terrorist threat assessment of AQ to Sweden in its reports from 2019 and 2021-2022 (NCT 2019; NCT 2021; NCT 2022). These assessments can be seen as a small attempt of desecuritization of the terrorist threat from AQ to Norway and Sweden because they eliminate the immediate terrorist threat. Nevertheless, NCT stated in their reports from 2017 and 2022 that there was a general risk of AQ-inspired attacks in Sweden, which contradicted the attempted desecuritization of AQ in Sweden (NCT 2017; NCT 2022). The Danish intelligence agencies' terrorist threat assessment of AQ after 2013 differed from the Norwegian and Swedish threat assessments because they lacked depth and context. According to PET's report from 2017 and CTA's report from 2021, the terrorist threat to Denmark from AQ came from individuals committed to the ideology of AQ (PET 2017; CTA 2021). However, in CTA's report from 2021, they emphasized that the ability of AQ to conduct terrorist attacks in Denmark was limited (CTA 2021). The Danish interests abroad, especially Danish diplomatic representations, companies, NGOs, and tourists, also experienced a terrorist threat from individuals and groups committed to the ideology of AQ, according to PET's and CTA's reports from 2016 and 2018 (PET 2016; PET 2018; CTA 2016; CTA 2018). The securitization of AQ post-2011 by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies highlighted that AQ was a securitized actor. However, in Norway and Sweden, the threat image was contextualized to a larger extent and desecuritized to a limited extent. In contrast, the threat image in Denmark was frank and less contextualized and only objected to securitization by the intelligence agencies.

This section has analyzed the terrorist threats from AQ to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The securitization of AQ imbued all the Scandinavian threat assessment reports. However, the magnitude and framing of the recognized terrorist threats vary across the Scandinavian countries and times. Objectively, the Danish intelligence agencies securitized the terrorist threat from AQ later than the Norwegian and Swedish intelligence agencies. However, the terrorist threat was not desecuritized before it occurred as a terrorist threat in 2012 because it was never securitized. Still, the terrorist threat post-2012 was presented as more serious because there was no attempt at desecuritization, as seen in Norway and Sweden. However, the attempted desecuritization of the terrorist threat from AQ in E-tjenesten's, PST's, and NCT's reports were somehow contradicted by themselves. Lastly, the similarities between the threat assessments for Norway and Sweden were more apparent due to the provided context.

### 7.1.2 IS

IS became a securitized actor in the Scandinavian threat assessment reports in the wake of the civil war in Syria when they began to pose a terrorist to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. However, there was a tendency in the threat assessment reports to address the terrorist threat from IS to the West and not specifically to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. This section will solely analyze the terrorist threats from IS to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway and their interests abroad in accordance with the aim of this thesis.

The Danish intelligence agencies securitized IS the most based on the quantity of coded information from the threat assessment reports. Furthermore, CTA moved IS into the sphere of urgency as the first among the Scandinavian intelligence agencies in 2014. CTA and FE described in their reports between respectively 2014-2017 and 2015-2016 that the terrorist threat from IS to Denmark and its interests abroad was related to the Danish participation in the international coalition against IS and AQ in Syria and Iraq because IS encouraged terrorist attacks in counties participating in the coalition (CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; FE 2015; FE 2016). A similar assessment was made in E-tjenesten's reports between 2015-2016 and PST's reports from 2015 and 2017 based on Norway's participation in the international coalition (E-tjenesten 2015; E-tjenesten 2016; PST 2015; PST 2017). As noted in the previous section (see section 7.1.1), the Danish and Norwegian engagement in the international coalition has also posed a terrorist threat from AQ to Denmark and Norway. Hence, the Danish and Norwegian military engagement has entailed a terrorist threat to their countries and interests abroad from both AQ and IS.

Common to the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies was that they have all securitized the terrorist threat from individuals sympathizing with IS. However, the securitization has been based on different causes and threat images of IS. In Denmark, CTA stated in their reports from 2014, 2016, and 2020-2022 that there was a link between the terrorist threat from individuals and the

propaganda published by IS because the propaganda influenced individuals in Denmark to conduct terrorist attacks in Denmark (CTA 2014b; CTA 2016; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022). Moreover, PET observed in 2015 and CTA in 2016, 2018, and 2020 that there also was a terrorist threat from individuals committed to IS traveling to Denmark to conduct terrorist attacks (PET 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2018; CTA 2020). SÄPO and NCT stated in their reports from respectively 2015 and 2017 that individuals supporting IS in Sweden had the capacity to carry out terrorist attacks in Sweden, which posed a terrorist threat to Sweden (SÄPO 2015; NCT 2017). Furthermore, SÄPO highlighted in their report from 2015, and NCT echoed the assessment in their reports between 2017-2018 and 2022, that Sweden was a legitimized target for terrorist attacks conducted by individuals committed to IS. However, other countries had a higher priority for IS (SÄPO 2015; NCT 2017; NCT 2018; NCT 2022). NCT explained in their report from 2021 that Sweden and its interests abroad were a legitimized target because they had been pinpointed as a country that permits the oppression of Islam (NCT 2021). However, it should be noted that NCT argued in their report between 2018-2019 that most activities by individuals sympathizing with IS in Sweden directly or indirectly support IS's terrorist activities through funding, recruitment, and radicalization (NCT 2018; NCT 2019). The Norwegian securitization of individuals sympathizing with IS took place in PST's report from 2015, where they emphasized that individuals committed to IS's ideology would eventually pose a terrorist threat to Norway or its interests abroad (PST 2015). Moreover, PST stated in their reports from 2015, 2019, and 2022 that Norway and its interests abroad were a part of IS's enemy picture, which increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks in Norway committed by individuals sympathizing with IS (PST 2015; PST 2019; PST 2022b). Alike SÄPO and NCT, E-tjenesten's reports between 2016-2017 and 2022 and PST's reports from 2016 and 2022 also argued that Norway was a legitimate target of terrorist attacks for IS, but not a prioritized target (E-tjenesten 2016; E-tjenesten 2017; E-tjenesten 2022; PST 2016; PST 2022b). In 2018, PST stated that Norway was not explicitly mentioned as a target within the propaganda published IS, which underpinned that they were not a prioritized target (PST 2018).

IS's military defeat and territorial losses from 2018 and onwards impacted the threat image of IS in the Danish and Norwegian threat assessment reports. FE's and PET's report from 2018 argued that IS was significantly weakened after losing the vast majority of its self-proclaimed caliphate, which reduced its ability to carry out major attacks in the West (FE 2018; PET 2018). Also, PET highlighted in their report from 2019 that the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of IS, further reduced their capacity to conduct terrorist attacks (PET 2019). These two developments indicated a light desecuritization of the terrorist threat from IS to Denmark due to its reduced capacity. CTA's reports from 2018 and 2020-2021 and PET's report from 2018 articulated a similar conclusion (CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; PET 2018). Nevertheless, the terrorist threat from IS to Denmark was still present, just slightly lowered. It should be noted that the desecuritization of the terrorist threat from IS was partly based on the securitization of IS's extensive capacity to conduct terrorist attacks the years

before. IS's capacity was manifested by IS's terrorist attacks in Denmark in 2015<sup>15</sup>, Paris in 2015, and Brussels in 2016 (FE 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; PET 2016). In Norway, E-tjenesten's reports between 2018-2020 posed a similar terrorist threat assessment of IS. However, the assessment was mainly based on regional developments. E-tjenesten also added that the propaganda from IS would continue unchanged, which could constitute a terrorist threat to Norway (E-tjenesten 2018; E-tjenesten 2019; E-tjenesten 2020). In contrast, Sweden continued securitizing the terrorist threat from IS. NCT's reports from 2018 and 2022 claimed that regardless of IS's territorial losses in Syria and Iraq and the caliphate's collapse, they would still use their ideology to legitimize terrorist attacks in Sweden and inspire individuals in Sweden to conduct terrorist attacks (NCT 2018; NCT 2022). Hence, the Danish and Norwegian intelligence agencies lightly desecuritized the terrorist threat from IS based on regional development and its capacity, while the Swedish intelligence agencies upheld the same threat image.

In conclusion, the terrorist threat from IS was securitized by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies in the wake of the civil war in Syria. Especially the terrorist threat from individuals sympathizing with IS was securitized in the threat assessment reports. A threat image that the Scandinavian intelligence agencies securitized equally. However, the causes of the securitization varied. As the last section concluded, the Danish and Norwegian intelligence agencies mildly desecuritized the terrorist threat from IS post-2018, while the Swedish intelligence agencies repeated the securitized threat image of IS. It should be noted that the Danish and Norwegian desecuritization was not complete because the terrorist threat from IS still occurred in the sphere of urgency. Hence, the desecuritization should be understood as an attempted downscaling, at that time, of the terrorist threat from IS.

### 7.1.3 Foreign Fighters

This section examines the terrorist threat from foreign fighters in the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian threat assessment reports. Foreign fighters have systematically been securitized to various degrees by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies, mainly in relation to IS (see section 7.1.2) in Syria and Iraq, but also other actors and conflict zones.

Sweden was the first country to make the securitizing move of the terrorist threat from foreign fighters among the Scandinavian countries. SÄPO mentioned foreign fighters for the first time in their report from 2008. In this report, they stated that they had observed individuals traveling to conflict zones from Sweden

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<sup>15</sup> The terrorist attack in Denmark in February 2015 took place in Copenhagen, targeting the cultural center Krudttønen and the Great Synagogue in Krystalgade. The terrorist attack was conducted by an IS sympathizer (FE 2015).

to participate in armed training or battles, which they deduced might pose a terrorist threat to Sweden (SÄPO 2008). The observation was restated in SÄPO's reports between 2009-2011 (SÄPO 2009; SÄPO 2010; SÄPO 2011). In 2009, SÄPO noted that the destinations of a number of individuals were Somalia to support al-Shabaab in terror-related activities (SÄPO 2009). In 2012, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, were also mentioned as destinations for Swedish foreign fighters joining AQ-inspired groups (SÄPO 2012). In Norway, PST noticed for the first time in 2009 that individuals traveled to conflict areas to participate in training camps to gain combat experience. However, at that time, PST believed that foreign fighters were only a threat to Norwegian interests abroad (PST 2009). In the following years, from 2010-2012, PST assessed in their reports that the foreign fighters now constituted a terrorist threat to Norway due to their gained armed experiences and ideological commitment to militant Islamism (PST 2010; PST 2011; PST 2012). PST's report from 2010 provided a list of destinations for foreign fighters, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia (PST 2010), and in their report from 2011, they added Yemen to the list (PST 2011). The list of destinations was affirmed in PST's report from 2012 (PST 2012). In Denmark, the securitizing move of the terrorist threat from foreign fighters was made by CTA in their report from 2012. CTA stated that there was a terrorist threat from foreign fighters traveling to conflict zones to Denmark because the militant training or participation in armed battles gave individuals skills to conduct terrorist attacks. CTA primarily highlighted Somalia and Pakistan as destinations for the Danish foreign fighters (CTA 2012). Hence, the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian intelligence agencies all securitized the terrorist threat from foreign fighters before IS was created. The common destinations for foreign fighters before the establishment of IS across the Scandinavian countries were Somalia and Pakistan.

In the following years, the terrorist threat from foreign fighters was almost exclusively connected to IS in Syria and Iraq as a consequence of their short-term success. However, individuals have also joined other militant Islamist groups, such as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, in Syria. The Danish intelligence agencies securitized the terrorist threat from foreign fighters in relation to IS the most based on the quantity of information provided in their threat assessment reports. In CTA's reports between 2013-2018 and 2020-2022, PET's reports between 2017-2020, and FE's reports between 2014-2017, the terrorist threat from foreign fighters to Denmark was explicitly mentioned (CTA 2014a; CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022; PET 2017; PET 2018; PET 2019; PET 2020; FE 2014; FE 2015; FE 2016; FE 2017). Moreover, in CTA's reports between 2013-2018 and 2020 and FE's reports from 2015 and 2017, it was explicitly stated that the returned radicalized foreign fighters from IS in Syria and Iraq constituted a terrorist threat to Denmark because they might have been either instructed to carry out a terrorist attack or wanted to carry out a terrorist attack on their own initiative with their newly acquired armed skills (CTA 2014a; CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; FE 2015; FE 2017). It was also stated in CTA's reports between 2012-2016 and 2020 that Danish foreign fighters residing in Denmark's neighboring

countries or other European countries posed a terrorist threat to Denmark (CTA 2012; CTA 2014a; CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2020). Nevertheless, the Danish foreign fighters staying in the conflict zones did also constitute a terrorist threat to Denmark and its interests abroad because they had the capacity to plan a terrorist attack, according to CTA's reports from 2016, 2018, and 2020-2022 and PET's reports between 2019-2020 (CTA 2016; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA2022; PET 2019; PET 2020). Hence, the Danish intelligence agencies have securitized the threat images of returned foreign fighters, foreign fighters residing in Europe, and foreign fighters in conflict zones. The Norwegian and Swedish intelligence agencies echoed the securitized threat images of returned foreign fighters and foreign fighters in conflict zones. E-tjenesten emphasized in their reports between 2014-2018 and 2022 and PST in their reports between 2012-2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021-2022 the terrorist threat from returned foreign fighters to Norway because of their ability, capacity, and will to conduct terrorist attacks in Norway either instructed by others or on their own initiative due to their ideological beliefs (E-tjenesten 2014; E-tjenesten 2015; E-tjenesten 2016; E-tjenesten 2017; E-tjenesten 2018; PST 2012; PST 2013; PST 2014; PST 2015; PST 2017; PST 2019 PST 2021; PST 2022b). The Swedish intelligence agencies presented a similar threat image of the returned foreign fighters. SÄPO wrote in their reports between 2013-2016 and 2018-2021 and NCT's wrote in 2017 that some foreign fighters returning to Sweden constituted a terrorist threat to Sweden due to their armed skills (SÄPO 2013; SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2015; SÄPO 2016; SÄPO 2018; SÄPO 2019; SÄPO 2020; SÄPO 2021; NCT 2017). In regard to the foreign fighters in conflict zones, E-tjenesten and PST stated in their reports from 2015 that there was a terrorist threat from foreign fighters in conflict zones because they were able to guide, encourage, or call for terrorist attacks (E-tjenesten 2015; E-tjenesten 2019; PST 2015). Also, SÄPO articulated in their report from 2015 that there arose a terrorist threat from foreign fighters in conflict areas because they could inspire terrorist attacks in Sweden (SÄPO). In contrast to the Danish and Norwegian intelligence agencies' assessment of the terrorist threat from foreign fighters, the Swedish intelligence agencies had some reservations about their securitization of foreign fighters. SÄPO estimated in their reports from 2014 and 2016-2018 and NCT in 2022 that the terrorist threat from returned foreign fighters was limited because they did not necessarily intend to conduct terrorist attacks. Furthermore, SÄPO added that some of the returned foreign fighters might have been disappointed or traumatized by their experiences with IS, which also lowered the terrorist threat from foreign fighters to Sweden (SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2016; SÄPO 2017; SÄPO 2018; NCT 2022). Overall, the securitization of foreign fighters turned out to consist of three threat images: returned foreign fighters, foreign fighters residing in Europe, and foreign fighters in conflict zones. The threat images of returned foreign fighters and foreign fighters in conflict zones were presented across the Scandinavian threat assessment reports, while the Danish intelligence agencies were the only ones presenting the terrorist threat from foreign fighters residing in Europe. Moreover, the Swedish intelligence agencies showed reservations within their threat assessment of foreign fighters, which should not be confused with the

desecuritization of the terrorist threat. Rather, it indicated that the terrorist threat was less securitized than in Denmark and Norway.

In the Scandinavian threat assessment reports, other threat images also occurred in relation to the terrorist threat from foreign fighters. These threat images included previously convicted individuals or criminals and female foreign fighters. CTA assessed in their reports from 2013 and 2015-2017 that foreign fighters that have been previously convicted posed a significant terrorist threat to Denmark upon their return (CTA 2014a; CTA 2015; CTA; 2016; CTA 2017). Moreover, PST stated in their report from 2015 that the majority of the Norwegian foreign fighters had a criminal background (PST 2015), and SÄPO estimated in their report from 2015 that a third of the Swedish foreign fighters had a criminal background (SÄPO 2015). Thus, the Scandinavian intelligence agencies securitized the threat image of previously convicted or criminal foreign fighters. The Scandinavian intelligence agencies also portrayed a terrorist threat from female foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq. Generally, foreign fighters were assumed to be men. CTA stated in their reports between 2021-2022 that those women residing in conflict zones posed a terrorist threat to Denmark upon their return (CTA 2021; CTA 2022). In contrast, SÄPO observed in their reports between 2012-2016 and PST in their report from 2015 that they had female citizens traveling to Syria and Iraq joining the armed conflict. However, they did not present a concrete terrorist threat from these women to their countries (SÄPO 2012; SÄPO 2013; SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2015; SÄPO 2016; PST 2015). Hence, female foreign fighters were mainly securitized in Denmark, while the Swedish and Norwegian intelligence agencies lightly securitized the presence of women in conflict zones. Overall, the two additional threat images posed nuances to the threat image of foreign fighters.

This section has shown that the threat image of foreign fighters is securitized across the Scandinavian countries, and the terrorist threats from foreign fighters consist of different threat images. However, the degree of securitization varies across the Scandinavian countries. Even though the Swedish intelligence agencies made the securitization move of the terrorist threat from foreign fighters first, they have securitized the terrorist threat the least because of their reservations, compared to the Danish and Norwegian intelligence agencies. Especially the Danish intelligence agencies have highly securitized the terrorist threat from foreign fighters without any reservations.

#### 7.1.4 Refugees, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers

The threat images of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers committed to militant Islamism have been highlighted within the Scandinavian threat assessment reports as a terrorist threat. However, the terrorist threat does not appear to be significant, but it was presented systematically in some of the threat assessment reports.



The threat images of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers varied between the Scandinavian countries, and the intelligence agencies made the securitization move at different times. SÄPO was the first intelligence agency to securitize the terrorist threat from refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. Continuously in SÄPO's reports from 2003 and 2005-2021, they mentioned that there might be individuals linked to terrorist groups that would try to enter or apply for residency in Sweden (SÄPO 2003; SÄPO 2005; SÄPO 2006; SÄPO 2007; SÄPO 2008; SÄPO 2009; SÄPO 2010; SÄPO 2011; SÄPO 2012; SÄPO 2013; SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2015; SÄPO 2016; SÄPO 2017; SÄPO 2018; SÄPO 2019; SÄPO 2021). However, SÄPO did not specify the threat image until 2014-2015, when they securitized the terrorist threat of individuals arriving from Syria and the neighboring region connected to militant Islamist and AQ-inspired groups (SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2015). PST securitized the terrorist threat image of asylum seekers and other types of immigrants sympathizing with militant Islamism and supporting terrorist groups abroad in their report from 2006 (PST 2006). Hence, the Swedish and Norwegian intelligence agencies made the securitization move of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers earliest among the Scandinavian intelligence agencies. However, the threat image appeared broad and general.

Two similar threat images occurred in the Scandinavian threat assessment reports in regard to the terrorist threat from refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. The first threat image was established in the wake of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015<sup>16</sup>. CTA stated in their reports between 2016-2018 and 2022 that IS and other militant Islamist groups took advantage of the influx of refugees and migrants to bring individuals to Europe that could conduct terrorism in, for example, Denmark (CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2022). SÄPO and PST presented a similar terrorist threat to their countries in respectively 2015 and 2017 (SÄPO 2015; PST 2017). The second threat image emphasized the terrorist threat from asylum seekers in particular. PST mentioned in their report from 2017 that radicalization among asylum seekers in Norway constituted a terrorist threat to Norway (PST 2017). The Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies focused more on the bureaucratic process for asylum seekers. CTA observed in their report from 2018 that refusal of asylum could contribute to the radicalization of individuals, which could trigger acts of terrorism (CTA), and NCT noted in their reports between 2018-2019 that individuals that have experienced setbacks in their asylum process could be triggered to commit a terrorist attack in Sweden (NCT 2018; NCT 2019).

The first securitized threat images of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers presented by the Swedish and Norwegian intelligence agencies pinpointed a general concern about the connection between these individuals and militant Islamist groups. Later, all the Scandinavian intelligence agencies securitized a more specific threat image of the terrorist threat from refugees and migrants due

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<sup>16</sup> The refugee crisis in Europe refers to the more than 911.000 refugees and migrants that arrived in Europe in 2015, mainly as a consequence of the conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Spindler 2015).

to IS's hijacking of the influx of refugees to Europe in 2015. Furthermore, asylum seekers have, in particular, been securitized because they, according to the Scandinavian intelligence agencies, constituted an isolated terrorist threat.

## 7.2 Political Extremism

The second most significant terrorist threat that occurred in the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports was the terrorist threat from political extremism, including individuals and groups committed to extreme right- and left-wing ideologies. First, this section will analyze the overall terrorist threat from the phenomenon of political extremism toward Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Next, the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism (section 7.2.1) and left-wing extremism (section 7.2.2) will be examined.

SÄPO made the first securitizing move of political extremism in their report from 2005, where they stated that there was a low terrorist threat from political extremism to Sweden (SÄPO 2005). In contrast, SÄPO emphasized in their reports from 2007 and 2009-2016 that there was no terrorist threat from political extremism to Sweden (SÄPO 2007; SÄPO 2009; SÄPO 2010; SÄPO 2011; SÄPO 2012; SÄPO 2013; SÄPO 2014; SÄPO 2015; SÄPO 2016). Thereby, SÄPO desecuritized the terrorist threat from political extremists to Sweden. However, NCT securitized the terrorist threat again in their reports between 2017-2018 when they argued that the terrorist threat from political extremism to Sweden was low (level two out of five) (NCT 2017; NCT 2018). Moreover, SÄPO emphasized in their report from 2018 that political extremist groups in Sweden, in general, had the ability to conduct actions that could be classified as terrorism (SÄPO 2018). As mentioned in the section on militant Islamism (see section 7.1), from 2018 and onwards, it became difficult to distinguish between the terrorist threats from violent, extremist groups in Sweden, namely militant Islamists, right-wing groups, and left-wing groups, because they started being treated as one entity in SÄPO's reports. Nevertheless, SÄPO argued in their report from 2019 that all extremist groups posed a terrorist threat to Sweden (SÄPO 2019). Hence, the Swedish intelligence agencies' threat image of political extremism has been unsteady over time because, first, they securitized the terrorist threat, then they desecuritized it, and then again securitized the terrorist threat. The threat assessment by the Danish and Norwegian intelligence agencies has been more stable over time yet vaguer. The Danish intelligence agencies assessed that there was a limited terrorist threat from individuals and groups identifying themselves with an extremist political ideology to Denmark, according to CTA's reports between 2013-2018 and PET's reports between 2016-2018 (CTA 2014a; CTA 2014b; CTA 2015; CTA 2016; CTA 2017; CTA 2018; PET 2016; PET 2017; PET 2018). In 2020, CTA also stated that there was a terrorist threat from political extremists, but the right- and left-wing groups posed different terrorist threat levels to Denmark. (CTA 2020). In Norway, political extremism was

securitized for the first time in PST's report from 2012. PST emphasized that there was a low terrorist threat from political extremism to Norway regardless of the recent terrorist attacks in Oslo and Utøya in 2011 (PST 2012). Hence, the terrorist threats from political extremism to Denmark and Norway had been securitized even though political extremism only constituted a limited terrorist threat.

Today, the terrorist threat from political extremism is securitized in all the Scandinavian countries. Previously, the Swedish intelligence agencies desecuritized the terrorist threat because they assumed that there was no terrorist threat from political extremism to Sweden. However, the general terrorist threat assessment of political extremism is leveled low or limited by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies.

### 7.2.1 Right-Wing Extremism

The terrorist threat from right-wing extremism to the Scandinavian countries has intensified in the past decade. Furthermore, the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports present right-wing extremism as a more significant terrorist threat than left-wing extremism (see section 7.2.1). It should be noted that the securitization of the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism took place after the Scandinavian intelligence agencies manifested that there was a threat of violence from right-wing extremists.

Compared to the Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies, the Norwegian intelligence agencies have securitized the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism the most based on the quantity of coded intelligence. Moreover, PST was also the first intelligence agency to securitize the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism in Norway when they, in their report from 2010, classified the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism as limited (PST 2010). This assessment was restated in PST's report from 2011 (PST 2011). In contrast, the Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies, for the first time, securitized the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists in their countries in 2017. CTA and PET stated explicitly in their reports from 2017 that the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism to Denmark was "limited" (level two out of five). A similar assessment was made by NCT in their report from 2017, deeming the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism to Sweden a "limited threat" (level two out of five) (NCT 2017). However, the assessment of the terrorist threats from far-right actors changed over time. Today, the Scandinavian countries heightened the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists as a consequence of, among other things, the right-wing terrorist attacks that took place in the West, including Norway, in 2019. Thus, the intelligence agencies intensified the securitization of the terrorist threat. In Norway, PST assessed in their report from 2022 that there was a "moderate threat of terrorism" (level three out of five) from right-wing extremism in Norway. Moreover, since 2020 the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism has been as significant as the terrorist threat from militant Islamism in Norway

(PST 2020; PST 2021; PST 2022b). Between 2020-2022, NCT presented the same terrorist threat assessment for Sweden, stating that the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists was at the same level as militant Islamism (NCT 2020; NCT 2021; NCT 2022). In the most recent assessment of the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists to Sweden, SÄPO classified in their report from 2020 that there was an “elevated threat” (level three out of five) of terrorism from right-wing extremists to Sweden (SÄPO 2020). In contrast, the Danish intelligence agencies did not raise the terrorist threat level from right-wing extremists to Denmark to the heights of militant Islamism. CTA assessed in their report from 2022 that the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists to Denmark was “general” (level three out of five), which was an elevated assessment compared to CTA and PET assessment in 2020, where they concluded that the terrorist threat was “limited” (level two out of five) (CTA 2022; CTA 2020; PET 2020). Hence, the Scandinavian intelligence agencies enhanced the securitization of the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism over the past decade. However, the Norwegian and Swedish intelligence agencies securitized the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists more than the Danish intelligence agencies based on their concluded terrorist threat level from right-wing extremism.

The outspoken securitization of the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists to Norway was proven legitimate due to the three terrorist attacks by far-right extremists that took place in Norway in the past decade. The first two terrorist attacks took place in Oslo and Utøya in 2011. Even though PST argued in their report the following year that the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists to Norway did not change because of the terrorist attacks, they mentioned in their report from 2013 that the terrorist attacks could be an inspiration for future attacks (PST 2012; PST 2013). Furthermore, E-tjenesten stated in their reports between 2013-2014 that the terrorist attacks brought attention to the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists in Norway (E-tjenesten 2013; E-tjenesten 2014). CTA already raised their concern about the terrorist attacks being inspirational for other far-right actors in their report from 2012 (CTA 2012), and the Swedish intelligence agencies did not comment on the terrorist attacks within their threat assessment reports. The third terrorist attack in Norway was directed toward a mosque in Bærum in 2019, and the perpetrator was, among other things, inspired by the far-right terrorist attacks in New Zealand earlier in 2019 (PST 2020; E-tjenesten 2020). As mentioned above, the terrorist threat level from right-wing extremists increased following the terrorist attacks in 2019. Moreover, NCT assessed in their report from 2020 that the terrorist attacks in 2019 might inspire individuals in Sweden to commit terrorist attacks, and also it raised awareness of the serious terrorist threat from right-wing extremists in Sweden (NCT 2020). Hence, the terrorist attacks in Norway strengthen the awareness and securitization of the terrorist threats from right-wing extremists. However, the terrorist attacks in Norway and the West in 2019 had a larger impact on the other Scandinavian intelligence agencies’ threat assessment than the terrorist attacks in Norway in 2011.

The terrorist attacks in Norway were conducted by solo terrorists and, thereby, highlighted the apparent terrorist threat from individuals committed to right-wing

ideologies. The threat image of far-right solo terrorists was presented across the Scandinavian threat assessment reports. The Norwegian intelligence agency PST was the first intelligence agency to securitize the terrorist threat from individuals. In 2013, PST observed in their report that the biggest terrorist threat to Norway regarding right-wing extremism derived from individuals (PST 2007). Moreover, they specified in their reports between 2013-2015 and 2017-2021 that the terrorist threat came from individuals and groups committed to right-wing ideologies operating independently (PST 2013; PST 2014; PST 2015; PST 2017; PST 2018; PST 2019; PST 2020; PST 2021). E-tjenesten confirmed this threat image in their reports between 2020-2021 (E-tjenesten 2020; E-tjenesten 2021). CTA securitized the threat image of individuals and groups to Denmark for the first time in their report from 2020. Thus, in their reports between 2020-2022, they argued that the most likely terrorist attack from right-wing extremists in Denmark would be carried out by individuals or small groups (CTA 2020; CTA 2021; CTA 2022). CTA added in their report from 2021 that the terrorist threat to Denmark arose mainly from right-wing extremists in the periphery or outside the right-wing extremists' circles but still somehow committed to the right-wing ideologies (CTA 2021). NCT also stated in their reports between 2017-2022 that individuals and smaller groups in the periphery of the right-wing extremist networks were capable of conducting terrorist attacks in Sweden (NCT 2017; NCT 2018; NCT 2019; NCT; 2020; NCT 2021; NCT 2022). Furthermore, MUST argued in their report from 2021 that the biggest terrorist threat to Sweden came from individuals and groups inspired by accelerationism<sup>17</sup> (MUST 2021). E-tjenesten also pinpointed that individuals and groups committed to the ideology of accelerationism posed a terrorist threat to Norway in their report from 2022 (E-tjenesten 2022). Hence, all the Scandinavian intelligence agencies securitized the threat image of individuals and groups committed to the right-wing ideology. However, the terrorist threat was more apparent in the Norwegian and Danish threat assessment reports.

The terrorist threats from individuals and groups committed to right-wing extremist ideologies have been connected to online radicalization in some of the Scandinavian threat assessment reports. The securitization of online radicalization in Norway occurred in E-tjenesten's report from 2020 and PST's reports between 2021-2022 (E-tjenesten 2020; PST 2021; PST 2022b). In Sweden, the threat image occurred in MUST's and SÄPO's reports from 2021 and NCT's report from 2022 (MUST 2021; SÄPO 2021; NCT 2022), and in Denmark, the threat image was presented in CTA's reports between 2021-2022 (CTA 2021; CTA 2022). The Norwegian and Swedish intelligence agencies further argued, based on PST's report from 2021 and NCT's report from 2022, that radicalization increased during the Covid-19 pandemic because of the social isolation causing negative psychological effects, which increased the likelihood of individuals seeking extremist fora online (PST 2021; NCT 2022). Consequently, the online

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<sup>17</sup> Accelerationism is a right-wing ideology emphasizing the means of terrorist attacks and societal collapse to start a racial conflict and destroy the existing social system (NCT 2022).

radicalization of individuals also occurred as a threat image within the terrorist threat from individuals supporting extreme right-wing ideologies. According to the Norwegian and Swedish intelligence agencies, the Covid-19 pandemic stressed the terrorist threat from individuals radicalized online.

In conclusion, the terrorist threat from right-wing extremists has been securitized across the Scandinavian threat assessment reports. The terrorist threat appeared to be most securitized in the Norwegian threat assessment reports based on the articulation of the terrorist threats. However, the terrorist threat was deemed equally significant in the Norwegian and Swedish threat assessment reports, which differed from the lower assessment of the terrorist threat within the Danish threat assessment reports. Moreover, the threat image of individuals and groups appeared to constitute the largest threat within the general terrorist threat from right-wing extremism in the Scandinavian countries.

## 7.2.2 Left-Wing Extremism

Left-wing extremism has been perceived as a terrorist threat by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies in the past decade. However, the intelligence agencies do not present the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism in the Scandinavian countries as a significant terrorist threat. Like the right-wing extremist (see section 7.2.1), the threat assessment reports recognized the violent practice of left-wing extremists before they constituted a terrorist threat. Hence, this section will only focus on the terrorist threats from left-wing extremism to the Scandinavian countries in accordance with the scope of this thesis.

During the past decade, the Scandinavian intelligence agencies effectively securitized the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism in their countries by concluding its terrorist threat level. The Norwegian intelligence agency PST was the first intelligence agency across the Scandinavian countries to scale, thus, securitizing the terrorist threat from left-wing extremists to Norway in their report from 2016 (PST 2016). Between 2016-2022, PST assessed in their reports that there was a “low threat of terrorism” (level two out of five) from left-wing extremism to Norway (PST 2016; PST 2017; PST 2018; PST 2019; PST 2020; PST 2021; PST 2022b). The following year, the Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies also explicitly scaled and, thereby, securitized the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism in their countries. CTA assessed in their reports between 2017-2018 and 2020-2021, and so did PET in their reports between 2018-2020, that the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism was “limited” (level two out of three) to Denmark (CTA 2017; CTA 2018; CTA 2020; CTA 2021; PET 2018; PET 2019; PET 2020). However, in 2022 CTA stated that the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism to Denmark was reduced to the extent that the general assessment was lowered to “minimal” (level one of five), meaning that there were no indications of a terrorist threat from left-wing extremists to Denmark (CTA 2022). CTA then desecuritized the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism to Denmark by degrading the terrorist threat to the lowest level on their terrorism threat scale.

A similar assessment was presented in Sweden, but the timing was staggered. NCT wrote in their report from 2017 that the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism posed a “limited threat” (level two out of five) to Sweden, but in their report from 2019, they lowered the terrorist threat assessment to “no identified threat” (level one out of five) (NCT 2017; NCT 2019). Overall, the Norwegian intelligence agency upheld the limited securitization of the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism in Norway. In contrast, the Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies desecuritized the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism to their countries by placing the terrorist threat at the lowest level of their terrorism threat scales.

The most securitized threat image of left-wing extremism within the Scandinavian threat assessment reports was individuals and groups committed to left-wing ideologies. Again, PST was the first to securitize that threat image in its threat assessment reports. In their reports between 2013-2015, PST specified the potential terrorist threat from individuals or small groups from the left-wing circles that had the capacity to act independently (PST 2013; PST 2014; PST 2015). Furthermore, they added in their report from 2015 that only individuals in the periphery of the extreme left-wing circles posed a terrorist threat to Norway, while the movement at large only constituted a minor terrorist threat to Norway because of their loose organization (PST 2015). In 2017, PST further pinpointed that the movement was weakened because it lacked a unified ideology and strong leadership (PST 2017). However, PST stated in their report from 2019 that the left-wing extremists had increased their recruitment in recent years and become more active (PST 2019), and in 2022 they deduced that there were few active left-wing extremists groups in Norway (PST 2022b). The Swedish intelligence agencies’ threat assessment complied with PST’s threat image between 2013-2015. NCT wrote in their reports between 2017-2019 that there were individuals and groups within the left-wing extremist movement in Sweden that had the ability to carry out acts of violence that could be classified as terrorist attacks (NCT 2017; NCT 2018; NCT 2019). SÄPO confirmed in their report from 2018 that the main terrorist threat came from individuals or smaller groups in the periphery of the left-wing extremist circles (SÄPO 2018; SÄPO 2021). Moreover, SÄPO observed in their reports between 2019-2020 that there was increased support for left-wing extremism in Sweden because of the rising polarization in the Swedish society, which increased their capacity and ability to conduct terrorist attacks in Sweden (SÄPO 2019; SÄPO 2020). It should be noted while SÄPO securitized the terrorist threat from left-wing extremists, NCT desecuritized the general terrorist threat assessment of left-wing extremism to Sweden. Compared to the Norwegian and Swedish interpretations of the threat image, the threat image presented by the Danish intelligence agencies was rather poor. CTA only mentioned the terrorist threat from individuals and smaller groups shortly in their threat assessment reports between 2020-2021. In those reports, they observed that the most likely terrorist threat related to left-wing extremism came from individuals and smaller groups who were members of left-wing extremist groups (CTA 2020; CTA 2021). Hence, the threat image of individuals and groups connected to left-wing extremism was securitized across the Scandinavian threat

assessment reports. Furthermore, the intelligence agencies claimed that the most prominent terrorist threat in relation to left-wing extremism came from individuals or groups. However, the threat image was more securitized in Norway and Sweden based on the elaboration of the terrorist threat.

In conclusion, there was friction between the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' assessment of the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism. The latest threat assessment from the intelligence agencies pinpointed that the terrorist threat from left-wing extremists only was securitized in Norway while desecuritized in Denmark and Sweden. However, the threat image of individuals and groups within the left-wing extremist circles was securitized in all the Scandinavian countries, constituting a possible terrorist threat. Lastly, I will argue that the Danish and Swedish intelligence agencies have ultimately desecuritized the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism when placing the terrorist threat at the lowest level possible on their terrorism threat scales. This is the only significant terrorist threat in Scandinavia that has been moved into complete desecuritization.



## 8 Concluding Discussion

This thesis examined the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian national threat assessment reports to pinpoint the similarities and differences within the assessment of what the intelligence agencies perceived as the most significant terrorist threats between 2001-2022. By using the securitization theory and subsequent developments, this thesis was able to analyze the similarities and differences within the assessment of the terrorist threats between the Scandinavian countries across the broad timeframe.

The analysis of Scandinavian threat assessment reports showed that the most significant terrorist threats to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were identical. Thus, the similarities and differences of the perceived terrorist threats were in the detail of the intelligence agencies' assessment. The most significant terrorist threats securitized by the intelligence agencies to the Scandinavian countries and their interests abroad were: militant Islamism and political extremism. Moreover, the terrorist threats consisted of related threat images, which caused an independent terrorist threat to the Scandinavian countries. The terrorist threat from militant Islamism included the threat images of AQ, IS, foreign fighters, and refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, and the terrorist threat from political extremism included the threat images of right- and left-wing extremism. The similarities and differences of the terrorist threat assessments were manifested by the intelligence agencies through the time of the securitizing move, the level of securitization, and the infrequent desecuritization. Namely, the level of securitization and desecuritization of the terrorist threat has been of most interest in this thesis because that clearly showed how the Scandinavian intelligence agencies (de)securitized the terrorist threat over time compared to the other Scandinavian countries. The deduction of the level of (de)securitization was based on the quantity of the threat assessment reports dedicated to the terrorist threat in combination with the terrorism threat scales used by the intelligence agencies. Moreover, the act of desecuritization was only accomplished when the intelligence agencies explicitly stated that the terrorist threat was partly or entirely eliminated. The lack of articulation of terrorist threats was not seen as an attempt of desecuritization because the terrorist threats actively needed to be moved out of the sphere of immediate urgency. However, it should be noted that the findings have been limited by only examining what the Scandinavian intelligence agencies perceive as terrorist threats to their country and interests abroad within their national threat assessment reports. Furthermore, the perceived terrorist threats should be contextualized to the role of the securitization requesters, who aim to influence the political decision-making processes (Floyd 2021: 88). The intelligence agencies' assessment might, therefore, exacerbate the terrorist threats in their threat assessment reports to accelerate the securitization process by, for

example, the political leadership. Also, the intelligence agencies can be seen as risk-averse, manifested through the relatively high level of perceived terrorist threats to their countries and interests abroad. Nevertheless, it was apparent in the Scandinavian threat assessment reports that they reflected domestic, regional, and international events and developments which affected the terrorist threat levels in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

The terrorist threat from militant Islamism emerged as the most significant terrorist threat to the Scandinavian countries and their interests abroad because of its extensive securitization within the threat assessment reports. However, Norway lightly desecuritized the terrorist threat in 2017 because the intelligence agencies argued that Norway was not a prioritized country for terrorist attacks conducted by militant Islamists. Still, the terrorist threat from militant Islamism was highly securitized in the Norwegian threat assessment reports. The thorough securitization of the terrorist threat from militant Islamism was closely connected to the securitization of the actors: AQ and IS. The Scandinavian intelligence agencies securitized the terrorist threat from AQ before the terrorist threat from IS due to its more recent establishment. The securitization of the terrorist threat from AQ imbued the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian threat assessment reports, especially post-2011. The terrorist threat from AQ appeared most serious in Denmark because it was sporadically desecuritized to a limited extent in Sweden and Norway from 2016 and onwards, as their intelligence agencies argued that they were not prioritized targets for terrorist attacks by AQ. However, the securitization of the terrorist threat from AQ was generally upheld in the Swedish and Norwegian threat assessment reports. The terrorist threat from IS was highly securitized in the wake of the civil war in Syria by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies. Notably, the threat image of individuals sympathizing with IS was largely securitized. After 2018 the Danish and Norwegian intelligence agencies marginally desecuritized the terrorist threat from IS due to their decline in Syria and Iraq, but at the same time, they still securitized the terrorist threat. Moreover, the Scandinavian intelligence agencies have mainly securitized the terrorist threat from foreign fighters in relation to IS, but the phenomenon was even securitized before its establishment. Based on the threat assessment reports, Denmark seemed to securitize the terrorist threat from foreign fighters the most, but neither Denmark nor Norway had any reservations in their assessment. In contrast, Sweden presented reservations within the assessment, which lowered the securitization of the terrorist threat. The last and least securitized terrorist threat presented in relation to militant Islamism was refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. The securitization of this terrorist threat was primarily linked to IS because they hijacked the influx of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2015. Moreover, the most securitized threat derived from asylum seekers as they constituted an isolated terrorist threat in the Scandinavian countries. Overall, the securitized terrorist threats within the scope of militant Islamism were highly securitized in the threat assessment reports by all Scandinavian intelligence agencies. Regardless of the minor differences within the (de)securitization between Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, the terrorist threat assessments by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies were generally aligned.

Political extremism occurred in the Scandinavian threat assessment reports as the second most securitized terrorist threat in the Scandinavian countries. However, compared to the terrorist threat from militant Islamists, the phenomenon of political extremism was only securitized by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies to a limited extent. Furthermore, in Sweden, the terrorist threat was desecuritized between 2007-2016, but thereafter, the terrorist threat was securitized again. The terrorist threat from right-wing extremism has been more securitized by the Scandinavian intelligence agencies than the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism. All the Scandinavian intelligence agencies have securitized right-wing extremism, but it appeared most significant in Norway. Nonetheless, in recent years, the terrorist threat has been deemed as significant as the terrorist threat from militant Islamists in Norway and Sweden. In contrast, the securitization of the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism was almost absent in Scandinavian threat assessment reports due to the minimal securitization. Today, left-wing extremism is still securitized in Norway but desecuritized in Denmark and Sweden. The desecuritization in Denmark and Sweden has been complete because they degraded the terrorist threat to the lowest level at their terrorism threat scales, which means that there is no identified terrorist threat from left-wing extremism. Overall, the securitization of political extremism points to an increasing securitization of the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism, especially in Norway and Sweden, and a desecuritization of the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism in Denmark and Sweden.

The analysis has proven that the securitization theory, in combination with qualitative content analysis, successfully fulfilled the purpose of this study. Thus, examining the similarities and differences within the assessment of the most significant terrorist threat in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. However, the analysis was challenged by inconsistent intelligence of varying relevance within the threat assessment reports. Especially, the defence and/or military intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports provided limited insights. Furthermore, the missing reports challenged the analysis of the terrorist threats over time because none of the Scandinavian intelligence agencies provided threat assessment reports for the entire timeframe. The missing reports were not seen as an attempt of desecuritization by the intelligence agencies but rather as a lack of articulation of the terrorist threats to their countries and interests abroad. Regardless of the challenged, inconsistent content of the threat assessment reports, this study has shown that there is a potential to widen the methodology of the securitization theory. Hence, focusing on content rather than the discursive framings of threats.

In conclusion, the most significant terrorist threats to the Scandinavian countries and their interest abroad have been securitized to varying extents by the intelligence agencies. Also, some of the terrorist threats have, within the timeframe, been subjected to minor desecuritization attempts, except for the terrorist threat from left-wing extremism in Denmark and Norway, which has been completely desecuritized. Thus, it moved from the sphere of urgency into the ordinary political sphere. The most securitized terrorist threat within the Scandinavian intelligence agencies' threat assessment reports has been militant Islamism, including the terrorist threats from AQ, IS, foreign fighters, and

refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. However, the Swedish and Norwegian intelligence agencies have heightened the securitization of the terrorist threat from right-wing extremism in recent years, so it is at the same level as militant Islamism. Lastly, the securitization of the most significant terrorist threats in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have been relatively similar. Hence, the differences have mainly been manifested through the desecuritization of the terrorist threats.

## 8.1 Future Research

Overall, this thesis has discovered room for research within the fields of terrorism and intelligence studies in Scandinavia. Moreover, future studies could focus on studying the complete securitization process to deem the success or failure of the securitization of terrorist threats in either Denmark, Sweden, or Norway encountering the political decision-making processes and the acceptance by the audience. Furthermore, this thesis paves the way for a small-N comparative study of some of the terrorist threats presented in this study. Lastly, this thesis could also be a stepping stone for other studies combining the securitization theory and content analysis.

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# Appendix I: Overview of the National Threat Assessment Reports

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>DENMARK</b>																						
PET																						
FE																						
CTA																						
<b>SWEDEN</b>																						
SÄPO																						
MUST			*																			
NCT																						
<b>NORWAY</b>																						
PST																						
E-fjenesten																						

	Reports available online
	Reports not available online (confirmed)
	Will be published online (but is not online yet)