

Plausibly deniable state-sponsored violence

A deteriorating security situation in the surrounding world entails an increased tendency on the part of other states to engage in criminal activities, also in and against Sweden.

For the purpose of promoting their own interests, such states attempt to influence political decisions, public opinion, or spread fear among the population.

States often do so in ways that enable them to deny their involvement. This phenomenon can be referred to as

plausibly deniable state-sponsored violence, and is mainly carried out via two different modi operandi: either with the help of non-state actors working as proxies or with the help of state actors working under cover.

Acts of violence instigated or carried out by other states may be defined as terrorism if the intent and impact of the crimes fulfil the requirements set out in the Swedish Terrorist Offences Act.

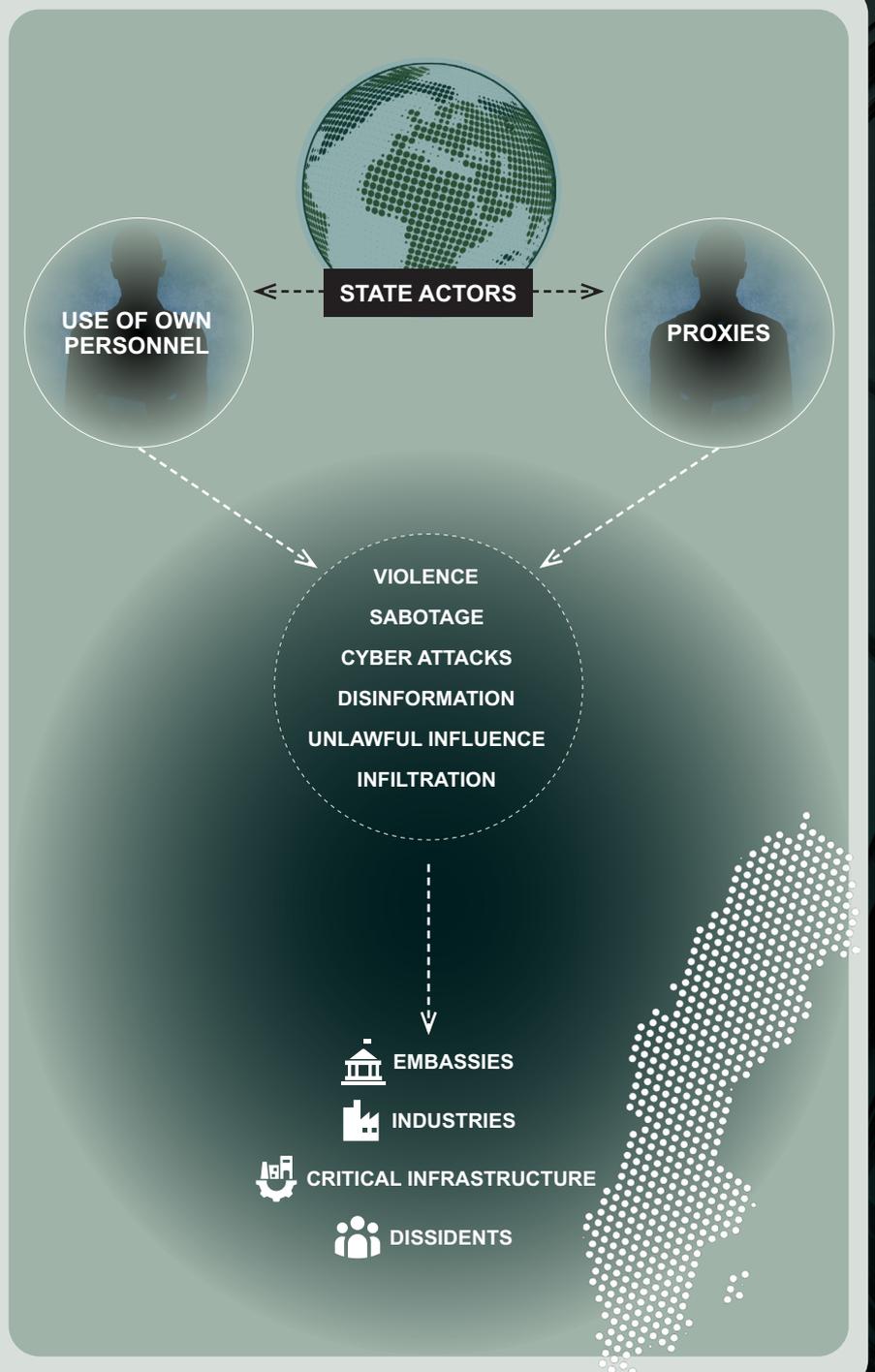
Non state actors as proxies

Proxies are independent actors with their own agendas who are used by states to carry out acts such as intelligence activities, various types of influence operations, and violent acts, in such a way that these acts remain plausibly deniable.

Potential perpetrators could be handled by a coordinator who is usually situated somewhere outside Sweden, e.g. in the instigating state. The coordinator is then able to use the proxies that are linked to a particular organisation, or proxies referred to as disposable agents, i.e. independent one-time perpetrators. A key feature of this is that the state actor is able to maintain plausible deniability by using a system comprised of a chain of proxies. Individual proxies might not know who the original taskmaster is or what the ultimate objective of their task is.

State actors under cover

State actors could also use their own personnel acting anonymously. This modus operandi enables the state to maintain greater control over the operation, but also makes it more difficult for them to plausibly deny their involvement if the operation were to be detected. For the purpose of decreasing the traceability of operations, the operations are often divided into phases that are carried out by different groups, e.g. reconnaissance, planning, facilitation, and execution.



Plausibly deniable state-sponsored violence, and the terrorist threat

Plausibly deniable state-sponsored violence is an example of how the terrorist threat to Sweden and Europe has changed into a more multi-faceted phenomenon. Attacks might now be carried out by actors who are steered by the strategic interests of foreign states rather than by strictly ideological motives.

This means that the differences between the effects of state and non-state actors on the terrorist threat are not as clear as before.

For example, in a European context, plausibly deniable state-sponsored violence could be a matter of targeted homicide or sabotage against targets such as dissidents, embassies, industries, or critical infrastructure.

Targets could also include those of symbolic significance, such as monuments and places of religious or political importance

What is considered to be terrorist crime?

Terrorist crime might be carried out by individuals or groups that, for various reasons, believe that they have the right to use violence in order to bring about a change in or destabilise society.

A terrorist crime is defined as an act that can seriously harm a country or an intergovernmental organisation and is carried out with the intention of:

- **instilling serious fear** in a population or part of a population
- **unduly coercing** a public body or an intergovernmental organisation to take or refrain from taking an action, or
- **seriously destabilising or destroying** fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures in a country or intergovernmental organisation. (Terrorist Offences Act 2022:666)



The **National Center for Terrorist Threat Assessment (NCT)** produces strategic assessments of the terrorist threat in and against Sweden. The NCT is a joint working group staffed by personnel from the National Defence Radio Establishment, the Military Intelligence and Security Service, and the Swedish Security Service.

Every year, the NCT presents its annual strategic assessment of the terrorist threat in and against Sweden. The NCT also makes continual assessments of circumstances that affect – or that could affect – the development of the terrorist threat, in order to increase knowledge and enhance the overall capability to counter terrorism at an early stage.