The news framing of the ‘Syria Fighters’ in Sweden.

A frame analysis of Swedish Newspapers.

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Nyheternas inramning av ‘Syria fighters’ i Sverige.
En ramanalys av svenska nyhetstidningar.

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Abstract

This study examines the framing of Syria fighters in Swedish newspapers during selected time periods of 2016 and 2017. Syria Fighters refer to individuals who travel to Syria to join the ongoing conflict, an occurrence commonly known as Foreign Fighters. Using framing analysis and framing theory the study finds that Syria fighters and their actions are framed mainly as problematic and as a negative social phenomenon. The study also makes a comparison to similar, previous research of Dutch and Flemish newspapers and finds clear similarities as well as differences.

Keywords: Foreign fighters, Syria fighters, Terrorism, Frame analysis, Framing Theory, Swedish, Dutch, Flemish, Newspapers, Media.
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1. Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS or simply IS, and also known as Daesh) beheads (Byrne, 2016), enslaves (Barnett, 2016) and buries their victims in mass graves (Moore, 2017). Despite these atrocities, still more than 27,000 foreigners have joined such Sunni extremist groups in the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria (The Soufan Group, 2015). Roughly 7,700 individuals have traveled from Europe (Normark, Ranstorp, & Ahlin, 2017, s. 7) and of these, around 300 individuals have traveled from Sweden to join groups such as ISIS. The Swedish security service (SÄPO) estimates that about 150 of these individuals have returned to Sweden and that most of them posses the ability to commit terrorist attacks. Further they belong to a larger radical Islamic network within Sweden (Normark, Ranstorp, & Ahlin, 2017, ss. 11-12). These individuals (commonly known as foreign fighters) and the phenomena of traveling abroad to join such organizations and causes have received much attention in Swedish media and politics with fears of what they might do on their return to Sweden. In April 2016 the Swedish parliament passed a law making the practice of traveling abroad with the intent of committing or preparing terrorism illegal (Johansson & Öbrink, 2016). This media attention and change in policy reflects the subject’s rise in saliency and the idea that it is regarded as a problematic social phenomenon. However, Malet (2010, s. 97) concludes that, “Despite attention focused on recent Islamist groups, foreign fighters are a phenomenon that is neither new nor uniquely Islamic”. This begs the question, if foreign fighters are nothing new, then where does this current view of the matter come from?

1.1 Problem of Study

To understand terrorism and foreign fighters, it is vital that we understand how political and social elites, and media frame such phenomenon (Da Silva & Crilley, 2017, s. 165). This idea stems from the view that media’s representation of terrorism is central to the social construction of such phenomenon. Further, the media contribute to construct identities and threats, and they directly impact “political decisions and responses to attacks or perceived threats” (Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, & Breen-Smyth, 2011, s. 71). Also, studies on the press in Norway, Israel, The United Kingdom and The United States have shown a strong religion-based bias when it
comes to the reporting on terrorism. In addition media often present a strong link between terrorism and religion, specifically Islam (Samuel-Azran, Lavie-Dinur, & Karniel, 2015, s. 4).

Regarding medias’ portrayal of foreign fighters to the recent conflict in Syria, the literature is scarce. However, previous studies have shown that both Dutch and Flemish press frame them as terrorists and martyrs compelled by a religious duty (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, ss. 806, 809). In this previous research the individuals are referred to as ‘Syria Fighters’, and this term is used in the remainder of the current paper.

Recognizing medias’ role in the shaping of our understanding and response to these Syria fighters, and the lack of research on this matter within a Swedish context, the current study examines this subject here. This focus places the current research within the International Relations sub-field of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS). In CTS the focus is placed on “the role of language, representation, discourse and meaning in regard to security and terrorism” (Da Silva & Crilley, 2017, s. 165)

1.2 Purpose of Study & Research Questions
The purpose of this study is to analyze Swedish medias’ framing of individuals who travel from Sweden to Iraq or Syria, the Syria Fighters, to join the ongoing conflict. In doing so, the current paper aims to enhance and deepen our understanding of the phenomenon within a Swedish context and how this relates to a wider international picture. For this purpose the following research questions are answered:

RQ1: How are Syria Fighters framed in Swedish media?
RQ2: How can this framing be understood using the theoretical framework?
R32: How does this compare to the findings regarding the framing of Syria fighters in the Dutch and Flemish press found by Berbers et al (2016)?
1.3 Limitations

Capturing the entirety of a social phenomenon in one study such as this is difficult, if not impossible. The following considerations are aimed at balancing the interests of being able to make drawn conclusions fit within discussions of a wider context, and to make the task achievable within the given time frame.

Firstly, this is a case study. Case studies are not suited for studying large samples, or for deriving generalizable conclusions. Rather, it is better suited to provide in-depth understanding of smaller samples with regards to their specific contexts (David & Sutton, 2016, s. 154). The context in this study is Sweden, and Swedish media in particular. Media is however, too large a concept for a study such as this. A limitation is therefore made to newspapers. Newspapers in Sweden are on a daily basis read by 65 % of the population (TU, 2016), thus reaching a wide audience. An obvious downside to this limitation is that it misses other places of discourse, such as television or social media thus limiting the generalizability of drawn conclusions.

Secondly, this study is qualitative. Therefore, as is typical to qualitative research it does not aim to count or measure (David & Sutton, 2016, s. 83) the occurrences of frames. Rather, it aims to capture as broad a picture as possible, identifying unique frames, without giving credence to the frequency of certain frames. Although the frequency of certain frames could obviously be of interest to our understanding of the studied phenomenon, such effort does however go beyond the scope of this study.

Thirdly, the time limitations set for this paper requires that a time frame for the material be established. The study utilizes two highly noticed political events on which to center this time frame, limiting the study to news articles released from ten days before each event to ten days after. When searching for material, the current study found that this time limitation struck a functioning balance between being inclusive and manageable. This use of political events connects well to the used theoretical framework (see extramedial level, under chapter 2.2.1 Levels of framing). It also enables including a broad set of newspapers ranging on the ideological and political scales. The first event used is the law passed on April 1, 2016 regarding traveling for terrorist purposes (Johansson & Öbrink, 2016). The second being
Sweden’s financial supervisory authority’s report by Normark, Ranstorp and Ahlin released on March 9, 2017 regarding financial activities connected to Syria fighters. Although this timeframe obviously risks missing potentially interesting and deviant portrayals, it is however necessary due to time limitations. The selected events on which the gatherings of material are centered around are based on the author’s prior understanding of the studied phenomenon. The study did reveal other events around which the selection could have been done. The arrests of certain Syria fighters could for instance have been used and this could have had an effect on the results.

1.4 Ethical considerations
One more important clarification to be made concerns an ethical consideration. This study does not aim at relativizing the actions of Syria fighters nor to answer questions regarding the legality or morality of their actions. Rather it is the framing of these individuals that is in focus. It does so from the theoretical premise, that there is never only one possible way of describing a phenomenon or event, and that each description inevitably excludes some aspects and provides saliency to some.

1.5 Outline of study
Proceeding from this introduction, the study in the next chapter continues by presenting the theoretical framework and its social constructivist base. Following this, in Chapter 3 the method used, framing analysis, is presented and discussed along with its application. In Chapter 4, a brief background, the results found and the analysis are explained. Finally, chapter 5 ends the paper with a discussion and conclusions.
2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this study is situated within the social constructivist paradigm. Further, for the more specific theoretical understanding of the construction of news stories, framing theory is used. Regarding the actual framing of Syria fighters the study utilizes a more inductive approach, where empirical findings are used to inform theory (Hay, 2002, s. 31).

2.1 Social constructivism

The core assumptions underpinning social constructivism are that: the world consists of both a material reality (i.e. mountains, buildings, computers) and a social reality (i.e. identity, culture, norms): social reality ‘takes form’, or is ‘socially constructed’ and given meaning within interactions between social actors: material reality is not socially constructed however, human perceptions of the material reality is: finally, social constructions are contingent and should be viewed as context specific (Eriksson, 2014, s. 100).

Social constructivism focuses on how identities and interests are formed (Eriksson, 2014, s. 99). In the case of Syria fighters, constructivist questions could be: why did the Swedish parliament pass the law criminalizing traveling for terror related purposes? Why do journalists frame Syria fighters the way they do? Answers to these questions could be found in the interplay of structures (i.e. ideology, institutions) and actors (individuals). For instance, the rules governing legislative work in parliament combined with a public debate and the strategic acting of political leaders could create a shared social perception of what should be done. This shared perception will exert power in the sense that it will make people act in certain ways (Eriksson, 2014, s. 100). Also, in regards to power, language is central within social constructivism. It categorizes, condemns and legitimizes (Eriksson, 2014, s. 101). In the study of media, constructivism sees both journalists and readers as actively constructing meaning and interpreting different subjects in different ways (Van Gorp, 2007). This, the current
study argues, means the study of framing within newspaper articles fits well within the constructivist perspective.

When it comes to the creation of knowledge, constructivism holds it to be possible, in a cumulative way, through empirical research. Additionally, it’s emphasis on the specifics of contexts, means that it is cautious when it comes to creating grand theories and drawing general, universal conclusions (Eriksson, 2014, ss. 102, 104). Connecting this to the current study, where a phenomenon in a specific context, is compared to the same phenomenon in a different context, makes it a cumulative and context-sensitive effort. Again, this places this research well within the constructivist perspective.

2.2 Framing Theory
According to framing theory, all acts of communication, thus journalism in newspaper form included, inevitably frame reality (Strömbäck, 2014, s. 115). By framing reality, journalism exhibits power over the thinking of people. Strömbäck (2014, s. 119) exemplifies this by referring to research showing how newspapers framing of healthcare in ethical or material terms affect the thinking of the reader. Those who read news stories framing healthcare in ethical terms where more likely, to base their judgment on ethical values and vice versa for those who read the stories using material terms. This power comes in part from the idea that journalists are neutral and objective in their reporting (Strömbäck, 2014, s. 113).

2.2.1 Levels of Framing
Framing takes place on four levels: *textual, cognitive, cultural and extramedial* (Van Gorp, 2007, s. 64). These four levels form the theoretical basis on which the analysis of the empirical findings is done.

On the *textual* level, framing can be described as a process, intended or unintended, of elevating the saliency of certain aspects of a perceived reality. This is done to present and endorse some or all of the following; a certain definition of a problem or situation; a moral assessment; an interpretation of causality; a solution (Strömbäck,
This is the constructing, or the sender side of framing, that within the context of this research takes the form of newspaper articles. Connecting this to the discussion above, about the power of journalism, it is clear that news should not be seen as mirroring reality. Rather they should be seen as partial, subjective and biased reconstructions of reality.

On the cognitive level, framing is an interpretative mental schema, or mental frame. Johnston (1995, s. 237) describes frames as “hierarchical cognitive structures that pattern the definition of a situation”. He also presents the analogy of a computer, where mental programs are used to organize, store, retrieve and encode experience (1995, s. 235). When journalists (and individuals in general) are confronted with a situation they use these mental programs, or mental frames, to interpret it. This interpretation will then form the basis for their presentation of the situation, the news story (Johnston, 1995, ss. 236-237).

To be understood by readers, the journalist’s must be sensitive to their specific cultural context. Hence, on the cultural level, Van Gorp (2007, s. 62) describes a “cultural stock” that contains ‘appropriate’ frames. Journalists are limited to this stock in their choices of how to present stories. Also, the frames utilized by a journalist in any one article, are only ever a portion of the cultural stock. This means that there are always alternative frames to be used, and using alternative frames could yield different interpretations of a situation. Here framing can be thought of as expressions for specific ways to organize information that are constructed through choices of words, facts, perspectives, sources and accentuations (Strömbäck, 2014, s. 115). The choices that journalists make when it comes to all these aspects are partly conscious. Most are however not reflected upon, rather taken for granted as being obvious. In other words they are institutionalized, routines characteristic of news production (Strömbäck, 2014, s. 114).

The extramedial level refers to events and actors (frame advocates) that could influence journalists’ choices of frames. An example of a frame advocate could be a politician, expressing an official statement, trying to convey a certain frame. It could
also be an event, such as a nuclear accident, which in turn could lead to the use of alternative frames in the media regarding nuclear power (Van Gorp, 2007, s. 68).

2.3 Critical reflections on theory
The current study has two main reflections on the theoretical framework described above. The first is that when describing framing theory and framing analysis the current study finds that the theory is hard to separate from the method. The methods chapter in this paper is thus theoretical in the sense that it complements the description of the theoretical framework.

The second reflection regards a weakness identified with framing theory in the reviewed literature. This weakness relates to the extramedial level. Here, the theory does not problematize the issue of journalists being critical of the frames expressed by frame advocates. For instance, if a journalist quotes a politician or a business leader, only to criticize their statement and tell the readers how wrong this statement is, then should the article be seen as expressing the frame of the politician? A further discussion on this is presented in the methods chapter below along with an explanation to how the weakness is dealt with.
3. Method of Analysis

This chapter starts by outlining the basic concepts of frame analysis, and the approach used in the current research. This is followed by a discussion regarding the reading of text with frame analysis and a discussion on coding. After that, an illustrative example of the coding and analysis is presented using an excerpt from the studied material. Finally the chapter presents the selection process of the used material and ends with a critical discussion of the method.

3.1 Approach

Since one aim of the current research is to place it within a wider context by comparing it to previous findings, it takes inspiration in the method from this previous research done by Berbers et al. (2016). This, the current paper argues, should make the comparison more valid. The basic concepts within their approach are framing devices and reasoning devices. These are in turn part of a frame package that aims to “promote a particular interpretation of a topic” (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens,
Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, s. 802). In other words, frame packages consist of logically organized devices (framing and reasoning devices) and a central aim of frame analysis is the reconstruction of these packages (Van Gorp, 2007). This connects to the cognitive level of frames discussed in the theoretical chapter above. It is by analyzing texts such as news articles that one can reconstruct, to a certain degree, the mental frames, or the cognitive structures, of the communicator of the analyzed text (Johnston, 1995, s. 219). These mental frames are reconstructed and presented using the concepts described below. Also, an illustrative example is presented below in 3.4 Exemplifying the analysis.

Framing devices are expressions in a text that suggest how to think about something. They consist of “metaphors, exemplars (i.e. historical examples from which lessons are drawn), catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (e.g. icons)” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, s. 3). Reasoning devices can be manifest or latent and they suggest what to think about an issue, and also suggest what to do and justify what should be done about an issue. They do this by describing the causes (roots of an issue) and consequences (effects) of a phenomenon, and present moral assessments or claims (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, s. 802). These concepts connect to the ones presented in the theoretical framework above regarding the textual level of farming and what frames do (problem/situation definition, moral assessment, causality and a solution).

Connecting the analysis to the extramedial level of frames, the study differentiates between frames expressed by journalists and frame advocates. Further, since the timespan of the analysis centers around two political events, it pays attention to possible changes in frames before and after these events.

3.2 Reading text with frame analysis

Frame analysis views text as a holistic construct and it is the entirety of a text that forms the element of analysis (Johnston, 1995, ss. 221-222). In practicality this could mean that to understand a certain part of a sentence in an article, one must go back to previous parts of the text. For instance, phrases like ‘that place’ or ‘those people’
might not be clear to what they actually refer to without reference to previous parts of the text.

3.3 Coding and presentation of frame packages
Coding is a process done by researchers, on text, in order to connect pieces of the text so that they can be compared and examined (David & Sutton, 2016, s. 271). It also serves the purpose of lifting the material from a descriptive to a more interpreting level (Dalen, 2015).

In the coding process for the current research, the concepts discussed previously in this chapter, are used. The frames expressed, and the framing and reasoning devices used are coded for. This is done in a matrix, for each article, where the framing and reasoning devices make up the columns, and the packages (frames), are presented in the rows (see Figure 1 below.). The frames are coded on the basis of being expressed by either journalists or frame advocates. This is how Berbers et al. (2016) conduct their analysis, which in turn is inspired by the works of Gamson and Lasch (1983).

When each article has been analyzed separately, general trends are mapped out. The aggregate results are then presented in a matrix and discussed using the theoretical framework, and how it compares to previous research. When grouping frames together like this, to present aggregate results, it matters what part of the frame one is focusing on. The current paper argues that the grouping of frames in the results presented by Berbers et al (2016) is done along the line of problem/situation definition. The frames identified in the current paper are grouped according to this same reasoning.

Regarding the issue of journalists being critical of frames expressed by frame advocates, these frames are not coded for in this paper. It is the frame(s) that the journalist (or writer) is trying to convey that is of interest. The current study argues that this has bearing in the cognitive level of the theory, the critique reveals the journalists mental frames. Other than the framing concepts mentioned above, the title of the article, name of newspaper and author, and publishing date are also coded for.
3.4 Exemplifying the coding.

Figure 1 below illustrates the used coding matrix and its application on one newspaper article written by Bergkvist, Karin (2016). The article is named; Never forget who the real enemy is [Glöm aldrig vem den verkliga fienden är] and was published in the newspaper Gefle Dagblad on 2016-03-26. The example starts by presenting the reasoning devices, then the framing devices. The author to the current study has translated all quotes (they are all from the same article by Bergkvist) in the following two sections. Texts within square brackets are the quotes presented in their original language. The presentation of quotes in their original language is done to make the translation transparent. This is argued serves to reveal, to the reader, part of the process that forms the empirical results and the analysis.

In defining the problem, Bergkvist discusses the problems that Belgium has had with recruitment to jihadism as an example of what is happening in Sweden: “Belgium has large problems with the continued recruitment to jihadism even after last years terror attack in Paris” [Belgien har stora problem med att rekryteringen till jihadismen fortsatt, även efter förra årets terrordåd i Paris] and she then goes on to say “We are well familiar with this discussion in Sweden” [Den diskussionen är vi väl bekanta med i Sverige]. This problem definition is interesting because it is both a reasoning device and a framing device. It is a reasoning device because it defines the problem and it is a framing device because it does so by using an illustrative example from which lessons can be drawn. The cause is presented in a indirect wording by describing how we must not react to terrorism, in order to not contribute to the recruitment of jihadists: “By creating hatred towards Muslims and creating strong social exclusion IS can find new environments to recruit in” [Genom att skapa hat mot muslimer och skapa ett starkt utanförskap kan IS hitta nya miljöer att rekrytera i]. The second part of that sentence “…IS can find new environments to recruit in” I argue can be interpreted as a view of the recruitment being something that IS does to the
Syria fighters. In other words, IS finds the Syria fighters and recruits them, rather than the Syria fighters finding IS and joining.

The consequences are presented in explicit manners: “to partake on IS side in the killing of different minded” [för att på IS sida delta I striderna och mördandet av oliktänkande] and “Many are now asking the question what we should do to prevent Sweden from becoming the place for the next attack” [Många ställer nu frågan vad vi ska göra för att förhindra att den Sverige blir platsen för nästa attack]. The solutions are presented in explicit, although somewhat indirect manners: “States have coercive and violent means that they in the fight against terror must be prepared to use” [Stater har tvångs- och våldsmedel som man i kampen mot terorr måste vara beredd att använda].

The presented moral values (see Figure 1 above) come first in the form of a catchphrase that separates ‘us’ from ‘them’: “peace, freedom and cooperation are antitheses to terrorism” [fred, frihet och samarbete är antiteser till terrorismen]. Further, another moral value is presented in the form of a call to action, something we must do: “Our reaction can only be one, to fight terrorism” [Vår reaktion kan bara bli en, att bekämpa terrorismen]. The current study holds this last moral value to be quite absolute in the sense that it is not open to alternative options.
As mentioned earlier, the framing devices convey how to think about something. One used catchphrase tells us we should think of it as a trap: “We fight it by not falling into the trap the terrorists have set for us” [Vi bekämpar den genom att inte gå i fällan som terroristerna gillrar åt oss]. This also labels Syria fighters as terrorists and that they should be thought of as such, indirectly referring to a social myth of the archetypical terrorist. Further, by stating that they are ones who set traps, they are in an implicit manner described as deceitful. This the current research argues, is a good example of how frame analysis of text can reveal the authors cognitive frames. By labeling Syria fighters as terrorists it shows that for the writer, Syria fighters fit into a larger cognitive structure of terrorism. This combined with the reasoning devices organize the phenomenon in a cognitive hierarchical structure that connects Syria fighters to such phenomenon as terrorism and jihadism.

### 3.5 Material and selection

Using the media database Retriever (https://www.retriever.se), articles between March 23, to April 10, 2016, and February 28, to march 18, 2017 were collected. A search string was used to narrow down the results to relevant articles. The search string was developed by making multiple searches, using various words and phrases, until a result was reached that was inclusive and pertinent. The search string used was: (IS OR ISIS OR Daesh OR "Islamiska staten" OR "Islamska Staten") AND (terrorres* OR "reser till" OR "reste till" OR "rest till" OR "ansluter sig" OR "anslöt sig" OR ansluta OR "åkt och krigat för" OR "åkte och krigade") ANDNOT Nato ANDNOT sport ANDNOT fotboll ANDNOT Semester

The English translation for the words used in the search string are: IS, ISIS, Daesh, Islamic state, Islamic state, terror travel*, traveling to, traveled to, traveled to, joining, joined, join, went to war for, went to war, Nato, sport, football and vacation.

Johnston (1995, s. 222) recommends a selection process where a first initial reading is done to narrow the material down. This is then to be followed by a closer reading of the texts that were selected in the first reading. For the initial reading, the texts were read through, and for each article an overarching question of selection was asked. The question was: does this article mention Swedish Syria fighters? If the answer was no,
the article was excluded. This first selection process led to a total of 77 and 18 articles for the respective time periods. Other than articles not mentioning Swedish Syria fighters, I also excluded duplicates of articles that did mention them, since duplicates do not enrich the findings.

For the second reading, that aims to identify the more informative articles (informative when it comes to Syria fighters) expressing representative frames (Johnston, 1995, s. 222) a second, twofold question was asked: does this article in any way frame Syria fighters from Sweden in a unique way, or are these Syria fighters used as reasoning or framing devices framing other phenomenon? For instance, Syria fighters could be used as a consequence (reasoning device) used to frame flaws in Swedish politics. If the articles did not frame Syria fighters from Sweden, the article was excluded. Also, if an article expressed a frame that was already expressed in a previous article it was excluded, unless it added something new to that frame. This led to a total of 18 and 10 articles (see appendix I) in a total of 21 different newspapers (see appendix II).

The second reading of the material can be seen as an initial and shallow coding process. A closer and more thorough coding (as described above in 3.3 and 3.4) of the selected material then followed this initial coding. The thorough coding was done two times and the results were then compared to see if any differences were found. Where differences were found the material was read again to sort these out. This was done to ensure a consistency in the coding.

3.6 Critical reflections on method
Two main weaknesses of this method are identified. The first weakness regards the interpretation of latent parts of a text, such as the reasoning devices in the used theoretical framework. Achieving a valid interpretation requires a deep understanding of the culture the texts are presented within. Still, with this cultural understanding there is a risk that the researcher will insert meaning into the analyzed text that was never there to begin with. This calls for a reflexive and transparent analysis where interpretations of latent meanings are discussed in the paper. Such an approach ensures the credibility of the presented analysis and the validity of drawn conclusions.
Transparency can for instance be achieved by presenting quotes from the studied material and discussions on made interpretations.

The second identified weakness concerns something that is often present in newspaper articles, namely pictures or photographs. Although pictures could be seen as an important tool available to journalists when trying to frame an issue, in this particular method of analysis, they are left out. This is an obvious and unfortunate weakness of the method that the reviewed literature does not deal with. Because of this, the current paper does not analyze the pictures present in the selected material, only the written text.

4. Results
This chapter starts with a brief background to the ongoing conflict in Syria and a factual overview of the phenomenon of Syria fighters. This is done to clarify the context of the analyzed phenomenon. It then presents the frames that the current research has identified in the Swedish press and continues with an international comparison to the works of Berbers et al. (2016). The results are presented together with an analysis. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the results found.

When presenting a factual overview of a phenomenon, which the framing of is at focus in the research, it is important to be conscious in regards to choices of words and phrasing. This is because of the risk that the overview will frame the phenomenon
in a biased way affecting the continued reading of the empirical findings. It is thus important to keep this in mind when reading the following section.

4.1 Background
The ongoing conflict in Syria started in 2011 with the Arab spring uprisings and the Assad regime’s oppressive response to the protests (UCDP, n/a). Over 1000 different actors have been active in the conflict (UCDP, n/a). More than 400,000 people have died (UN, 2016) and millions have been displaced (Normark, Ranstorp, & Ahlin, 2017, s. 7).

The Soufan Group (2015, s. 4) estimates that between 27,000 and 31,000 individuals, from 86 countries, have gone to Syria and Iraq to join groups such as ISIS. From Sweden, around 300 individuals have gone to fight for ISIS. Most went during 2013 and 2014, and during 2015 the flow decreased. No official figures have been found for 2016 or 2017, but the numbers are estimated to be lower than previous years (Normark, Ranstorp, & Ahlin, 2017, ss. 7-8). On average, about 20-30 % of those traveling from western countries has returned home from the conflict (The Soufan Group, 2015, s. 4). However, of the 300 individuals traveling from Sweden about 150 have returned home, (Normark, Ranstorp, & Ahlin, 2017, s. 10) thus closer to 50 %. Compared to the Netherlands, wherefrom about 220 individuals have gone and about 40 have returned (The Soufan Group, 2015, s. 9).

Although women as well as children have gone, most of the Swedish Syria fighters are males, ranging between 18 to 30 years old. A criminal history and a low or no income is common among a large portion of them. Most are born in Sweden and most have at least one parent born in another country. Malmö, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Örebro are the Swedish cities wherefrom most of them have travelled (Normark, Ranstorp, & Ahlin, 2017, ss. 8-10).

4.2 Frames in Swedish Newspapers
In the analysis of the collected material, the current paper identifies 7 frames framing the Syria fighters (see Figure 2 and Figure 3 below). They have been named: the
deceiver, the martyr, the returning threat, the searcher, the terrorist, the victim, and the women of Daesh. The naming of the frames is based on what the study has found to be the core of the defined problem or situation in each frame. Figure 2 and Figure 3 present summaries of the aggregate results of the empirical findings. As stated earlier, frames consist of reasoning devices that tell us what to think, and framing devices that tell us how to think about an issue or situation. All quotes in this chapter have been translated from Swedish to English. The texts within square brackets are the quotes in their original language.

4.2.1 The Deceiver
This frame focuses on what is said to be fraudulent behavior by individuals traveling to Syria and Iraq. The frame conveys us to think about this situation as a problem. The defined problem is that individuals use tax money, in the form of government grants and quick loans, to finance terrorism. The frame emerges on the same day that the report concerning the finances of Syria fighters was released. Thus it was not present in the first examined time period. The current study argues that this is a clear example of an extramedial event affecting the frames used by media. Also, members of the Swedish government are frequently quoted, for instance the minister of finances Magdalena Andersson: “I do not collect tax money to finance terrorism” [Jag tar inte in skattepengar för att finansiera terrorism] (Wallberg, 2017). This shows the affect frame advocates can have on used frames.

The causal explanation for this problem is fraudulent behavior, namely that individuals who want to go fight for the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq commit fraud to get money. This leads to a situation where money meant for social causes, is instead used to fund terrorism. As a consequence, extremist organizations gain resources and their ability to continue their cause increases. New legislation, better cooperation between different branches of government, and investigations into the finance’s of possible Syria fighters are the proposed solutions. These solutions the current research argues, clearly suggest that we should think of it as a problem for the government, not for private individuals, to fix. The moral evaluation explicitly states that the Syria fighters’ behavior is “completely unacceptable” [helt oacceptabelt] (Wallberg, 2017) and that the money they have received is not rightfully theirs.
The used framing devices convey us to think about the Syria fighters in terms of
terrorism, crime and fraud. They are presented as “ticking bombs” [tickande bomber] and “people-killing terrorists” [folkmördande terrorister] (Ismail, 2017). Further, it should be to “no surprise” [ingen överraskning] that these IS-travellers (Linder, 2017) commit fraud. These lexical choices reveals some of the author’s cognitive structures and what other social phenomenon that the Syria fighters are connected to in this structure. They are for instance connected to such phenomenon as fraud, terrorism, crime and the Islamic State, thus indirectly connecting them with Islam. The current paper argues that this framing and reasoning utilizes two social myths, one of an archetypical terrorist and one of a criminal.

4.2.2 The Martyr

The defined problem in this frame is that some young Muslims want to fulfill a religious duty. The causal explanation for this wanting is said to be a religious conviction and a wish to do the right thing for their God and religion. In this frame Syria fighters are often quoted, thus making them frame advocates. One of them is quoted saying, they must “defend women and children from the infidels” [försvara kvinnor och barn mot otrogna] (Hellberg & Malmgren, 2016). The solution to the problem of this frame is presented from the perspective of the Syria fighters. By traveling to Syria or Iraq they can join the Islamic State and become a holy warrior or martyr. The consequences are that they will likely die in combat or in a suicide attack. This frame was only present in the first examined time period and the current study has not managed to identify any clear extramedial event that could have given rise to this frame.

The moral evaluation presented by the author in one article, tells us that these individuals do not belong here: “To the width filled with a system of ideas that will never be able to coexist with developed democracy” [Till bredden fylld av ett idésystem som aldrig kommer kunna samexistera med utvecklad demokrati] (Gustavsson, 2016). The Syria fighter presents another moral evaluation: “He who resists IS resists God” [Den som gör motstånd mot IS gör motstånd mot Gud] and then goes on to say “Sweden has nothing to offer me” [Sverige har inget att erbjuda
mig] (Gustavsson, 2016). The journalist’s and the Syria fighter’s morals complement each other in the sense that they both convey a divide and difference between the west and Islam. This divide is confirmed in another article, telling the reader that one Syria fighter had guides describing how a “holy warrior, so called mujahid, survives in the western world” [helig krigare, så kallad mujahid, överlever I västvärlden] (Hellberg & Malmgren, 2016). This, the present paper argues, implicitly states that they are not adapted to the western world rather they are alien to it.

One article presents a catchphrase that describes the Syria fighters’ actions: “Not if we continue to believe that it is possible to stop this macabre death dance” [Inte om vi fortsatt tror att det är möjligt att stoppa denna makabra dödsdans] (Gustavsson, 2016). The lexical choice to call it a death dance that is also macabre, the current papers argues, makes this not only a framing device, but also a reasoning device because it presents a moral evaluation.

Here too, this all reveals the cognitive structures of the authors and shows how the Syria fighters are mentally connected to other social phenomenon. They are clearly connected to Islam, violence and extremism. They are however kept separate from the Swedish society, which in turn is connected to democracy and development.

4.2.3 The Returning Threat
In this frame, the fact that individuals who have been fighting for terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State, are now back in Sweden or Europe is presented as the problem. The causal explanation for them leaving the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq, and traveling back to Sweden or Europe, is their intent to perform terrorist attacks in Sweden or Europe. They are also presented as having a will to recruit others to join their cause. The consequences are a heightened risk of terrorist attacks in Sweden and Europe, and a risk that more will be recruited. One reader’s letter, by a politician describing himself as a secular Muslim, warns of the rise of an “underground Islamist army” [underjordisk islamistisk armé] (Hassan, 2017) in Europe as a consequence.

This frame is present in both examined time periods and seems to be culturally appropriate regardless of extramedial events or frame advocates. The presented
solutions do however vary. Some suggest sending them to jail, drafting tougher legislation and focusing more resources on this issue. Others suggest we should help them get out of extremism and do more preventive social work. In one article we are told that although they should be sent to jail, if we cant prosecute them, it is better to help them than having them “wander around society without tools to change” [traskar runt i samhället utan verktyg att förändras] (Hougner, 2016). Here an analysis of the ideological orientations of the newspapers might illuminate explanations for the variance in presented solutions. This is however beyond the scope of this paper.

The Syria fighters are in moral evaluations described as “the greatest threat to Sweden” [det allvarligaste hotet mot Sverige] and when it comes to their actions, “it is hard to imagine something more abhorrent” [det är svårt att föreställa sig något vidrigare] (Lönnaeus, 2016). In one article, an historical example from the Second World War, is used for comparison: “But now the question is how homecoming terrorists – fully comparable to Waffen SS-volunteer war criminals – should be handled” [Men nu handlar frågan om hur hemvändande terrorister – fullt jämförbara med Waffen SS-frivilliga krigsförbrytare – ska hanteras] (Stigsson, 2017). This is the only used historical example identified in the studied material. The purpose of using historical examples is, according to framing theory, that lessons can be drawn from them. They thus tell us how to think about something. For a comparison like this to actually send the intended message it does however, require from the reader a specific historical knowledge.

One thing that differentiates this frame from the Martyr frame is, that it does not separate the Syria fighters from the Swedish society. It rather connects them to it by labeling them as swedes, and by pointing out that they come from the Swedish city Gothenburg. This reveals a different cognitive structure compared to the Martyr frame.

4.2.4 The Searcher
In this frame, young individuals who are lost and that long for a belonging and a purpose in their lives are the defined problem. The cause for this longing is described to be the will to contribute something to this world and a wish to matter, to have a
meaning. Experienced social exclusion is said to contribute to them feeling out of place in the Swedish society. As one article puts it: “people, who are born or grow up here, still feel that they don’t belong to this country” [människor, som är födda eller växer upp här, ändå känner att de inte tillhör det här landet] (Svensson & Kjelby, 2017). These young individuals find the solution to this problem in the Islamic State and the holy war. So they travel to Syria or Iraq and join this group where they can contribute to the fighting and become part of a community. For the Swedish society the solution to this problem lies, according to this frame, in breaking segregation.

Another consequence out of this is that the extremist views held by the Islamic State finds its way to lower aged segments of the population. One journalist describes the rise of a youth culture where jihad is seen as something cool. He quotes one IS-warrior as describing the situation in Syria: “If you only knew how much fun we are having here, this is the real Disneyland” [Om ni bara visste hur kul vi har, detta är det riktiga Disneyland] (Hyllengren, 2016).

The moral assessment ends in the conclusion that these young individuals are not evil, they are a lost and “impatient generation” [otålig generation] (Hyllengren, 2016). However, everyone is responsible for his or her own actions. A comparison is also made, to individuals leaving their homes to help people living in refugee camps. The urge to help refugees is said to stem from the same root cause as the urge to fight for the Islamic State: “it is about giving ones mediocre life content. To turn oneself into someone who does something” [Det handlar om att ge sitt mediokra liv ett innehåll. Att förvandla sig själv till en sån som gör något] These actions are however not seen as being “equally ethically defendable” [lika etiskt försvarbar] (Johansson A. , 2016).

This frame plays on the social myth of a lost and searching young individual. This guides the readers thinking. So that rather than picturing a bearded man of Middle Eastern descent, that would be a typical depiction of a terrorist, they might instead picture, as one article puts it: “ordinary young swedes” [vanliga unga svenskar] (Johansson A. , 2016).
4.2.5 The Terrorist

In this frame the defined problem is that individuals, from Sweden, go to join terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State. Three causal explanations for this problem are presented: criminal background, religion and social exclusion. The criminal background of these individuals is said to be a gateway into extremism and terrorism. Religion is said to play a role in the sense that extremist interpretations of Islam is used to indoctrinate these individuals and justify their actions. One article expresses the explanation as a combination of both these factors: “The step from the boys or girls room to the mass murderers of Daesh certainly goes via religious indoctrination but it also goes via a criminal career” [Steget från pojk- eller flickrummet till massmördarna I Daesh går förvissa via religiös indoktrinering men även via en brottslig karriär] (Olsson, 2016). Another article however claims that the “road to the large scale violence does not go via religion any more” [vägen till det storskaliga våldet går inte ens via religion längre] (Braw, 2016). Social exclusion is said to create an environment where the Islamic State can find recruits.

All of these factors lead these individuals to reject the welfare state to go “live in a medieval caliphate” [leva i ett medeltida kalifat] (Kriss, 2016), because they prefer a “violent social system” [våldsamt samhällssystem] (Perlenberg, 2016). The consequences of this is that ISIS receives more recruits and resources, perpetuating the conflict, the killing of different-minded and the terror. It also leads to an increased risk of terrorist attacks in Sweden and Europe. The proposed solutions vary between a need to do more social work and a need for harsher laws and penalties.

The moral values, although they differ between articles in choice of words, the current paper argues that they all convey the same disapproving message: the Syria fighters are not normal people, they are at odds with society, their actions are beyond vile and calculated and they deserve the harshest penalties possible. Furthermore, they are labeled in overall negative terms: terrorists, the enemy, murderers, narcissists, jihadists, terror warriors, IS-follower, terror travelers and religious fanatics. These labels the present paper suggests, indicate the cognitive connections that are made to the Syria fighters. Finally, like the Martyr frame, this frame presents a divide between The West and Islam. This divide is captured well in the following question (that the
current research claim is a leading one) posed in one article: “Can deeply conservative Salafists at all be integrated into Europe’s individualistic democracies?” [Kan djupt konservativa salafister över huvud taget integreras I Europas individualistiska demokratier?] (Kriss, 2016).

4.2.6 The Victim
This frame suggests that the Swedish Syria fighters are young Muslims that are exploited and lured by extremists, using drugs and false promises, into joining ISIS. This exploitation is the core of the defined problem. Rather than being vile and deserving of punishment, as the Terrorist frame suggests, this frame tells us that these young Muslims are lost and need help. The fact that they are lost, combined with a feeling of alienation towards Muslims, makes them easy to manipulate and susceptible to extremist propaganda. If they manage to get to Syria or Iraq and join ISIS, the likely consequences are that they will either die as suicide bombers or have their dreams of the caliphate shattered and become traumatized. If they return home they are described as a danger to themselves and a challenge to the Swedish society.

The solutions that are presented, the present paper claims, take responsibility away from these young Muslims and place it on the extremists, and society at large. Investigating and examining those who exploit them is one suggestion. In another article a Muslim theologian is interviewed, he holds that: “we should not walk into that trap” [vi ska inte gå I den fällan] where we create social divisions “between Muslims and others” [mellan muslimer och andra] because “An alienation of Muslims might be a factor for why people choose to cut themselves of from society” [En alienation av muslimer kan vara en faktor kring varför folk väljer att avskärma sig från samhället] (Haglund & Eriksson, 2016). We are also told that stopping radicalization amongst young people is everyone’s responsibility, not just Muslim’s.

When it comes to Islam, this frame clearly states that organizations such as ISIS and the acts they perform, have nothing to do with Islam. The young Muslims that are lured into joining ISIS are claimed to be unaware of this as they are “hardly any ideologists” [knappast några ideologer] and we should not think that they “have any knowledge of Islam or other religions” [har några kunskaper om islam eller
religioner] (Holmberg, 2016). These reasoning and framing devices display a cognitive structure that explicitly separates Syria fighters from Islam. In addition, it guides the reader into viewing them as victims.

4.2.7 The Women of Daesh

In this frame the defined problem is that Swedish women and girls want to contribute to the caliphate and the holy war. The presented causal explanation tells us that they want this because these girls and women are attracted to the Islamic State and the IS-warriors. Also, they want to get engaged in something purposeful. In this frame, like in the Martyr frame, the solution is presented from the perspective of the Syria fighters: they will travel to Iraq or Syria and form a family with an IS-warrior and fight the holy war.

According to this frame, these women and girls will as a consequence die in conflict and they will also contribute to undermine their own rights. One article describes one of these girls as a “hero in the fight against her own rights” [hjälte I kampen mot sina egna rättigheter] (Osman, 2016). This the current papers suggests, implicitly, although quite obviously, states that they do not really understand what they are doing. The current study argues that the emphasis in this frame, on the female gender of these individuals, reveals a cognitive structure that contains two separate types of Syria fighters: one female and one male. Here, a feminist gender-sensitive analysis might contribute to our understanding of why this separation is made and why the genders of Syria fighters are of interest.
In regards to the examined time periods this frame was only identified in the first period. Two different extramedial events can be identified as having influenced this frame. The first was the sentencing of a 17-year-old Swedish girl, to one year in prison for trying to join ISIS. The second was the release of a book, a biography by a woman who had married and lived with, what the journalist terms, Islamic extremists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasoning Devices</th>
<th>Framing Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of problem</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Deceiver</td>
<td>Individuals use tax money, government grants and quick loans to finance terrorism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Muslims want to fulfill a religious duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Martyr</td>
<td>Individuals, who have been fighting for terrorist groups such as the Islamic State, are back in Sweden/Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young individuals search for a purpose and belonging in their lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: matrix layout as done by Berbers et al. (2016)
### Figure 3. Framing matrix for frames 5-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasoning Devices</th>
<th>Framing Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frame</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition of problem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. The Terrorist</strong></td>
<td>Individuals go to join terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. The Victim</strong></td>
<td>Young Muslims are exploited, lured into joining the Islamic State by extremists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. The Woman of Daesh</strong></td>
<td>Swedish women and girls want to contribute to the caliphate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** matrix layout as done by Berbers et al. (2016)

### 4.3 An international comparison to frames in Dutch and Flemish newspapers

Berbers et al. (2016, s. 806) identified in their analysis of Dutch and Flemish newspapers five frames depicting Syria fighters: *the terrorist, the victim, the adventurer, Don Quixote and the martyr*. Like the current research, Berbers et al. examined newspaper articles. In contrast though, Berber’s analysis was quantitative, while the current analysis is qualitative. This the present study argue does not make the comparison less valid, because the identification of frames is based on the same theoretical premises. Below, brief presentations of the results of Berbers et al. are
accompanied by discussions on similarities and differences to the results of the current study.

4.3.1 The terrorist frame
This frame centers on a national security agenda focused on radicalization of Muslims and preventing terrorist attacks. Muslims, who are radicalized, are described as rejecting democracy in favor of a fundamentalist Islamic rule wanting to spread their extremist worldview to others. Further, those who return from Syria are described as a security risk, because of their gained experience and knowledge. The solution is presented as first, via restrictive policy, to stop them from going, second to stop them from returning, and finally to detain them (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, s. 806).

This frame reminds of a combination of the terrorist frame and the returning threat frame that the current study has identified in the Swedish newspapers. One clear difference though, is the Swedish press’ focus on social solutions, in addition to legal ones. Although it would be possible to group the returning threat frame with the terrorist frame to create a broader and more inclusive one, the current paper reasons that it was analytically meaningful to keep them separate. It allows for a more nuanced description of the empirical findings.

4.3.2 The victim frame
This frame centers on the manipulation of vulnerable young people, by Islamic extremists. This indoctrination changes the young, from being normal to fundamentalist Muslims. Them traveling to Syria is described not as a choice, rather as the result of regrettable circumstances they are in. The presented solution is to help and support these young individuals to make them less vulnerable to such recruitment (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, ss. 806-809). This frame is very similar to the victim frame identified in the Swedish newspapers. The current study does not identify any significant differences other than variances in lexical choices. This difference might however be due more to the translations done in the research processes than it is due to actual variances in lexical choices.
4.3.3 The adventurer frame
This frame describes the individuals who go to Syria as not understanding what it is they are getting involved in. They look for excitement and their view of the armed conflict is romanticized. The problem is thought to solve itself when these individuals face the reality of the armed conflict (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, s. 809). Although the present paper identifies this sort of reasoning in the Swedish press, on one occasion, it was used as part of the victim frame. The youths are in the Swedish newspapers portrayed as victims of their own ignorance in the sense that they do not understand the consequences of their actions. This might be a sign of differences in the cultural stocks of available frames. However, since neither the current nor Berbers’ research empirically examines the cultural stocks this is merely speculative. Still, this identified difference together with the theoretical framework, would nonetheless be an interesting point of departure for future research.

4.3.4 The Don Quixote frame
In this frame individuals who travel to Syria are described as being driven by a will to help the people of Syria. Their will stems from a humanitarian, not religious, commitment. This help is however misguided because it instead serves the interests of an extremist and violent cause (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, s. 810). The current research does not identify this frame in the Swedish press. Again, this might be an indication towards a difference in the cultural stocks of available frames.

4.3.5 The martyr frame
This frame describes, from the viewpoint of conservative Muslims, a perceived ongoing secularization of the Muslim community as a problem that can be solved on the battlefield. The individuals who go to Syria go because of a religious commitment, to build an Islamic state. Dying for this cause is seen as an honor and the west is depicted as the enemy. (Berbers, Joris, Boesman, d'Haenens, Koeman, & Van Gorp, 2016, s. 810). This frame in large part resembles the martyr frame identified in the Swedish press. The religious commitment as a driver, the view of the
west as the enemy and the presentation from the viewpoint of Muslims all coexist in both cases. One difference is the perceived secularization of the Muslim community, which is not explicitly present in the Swedish press. However, since this secularization is considered a threat, to the Muslim community, it has its similarities in the Swedish press. In the Swedish press the interviewed Muslims express a clear will to save Muslim women and children from the infidels, indirectly inferring that they are under threat.

4.2 Summary of results
The current study identifies 7 different frames used in Swedish newspapers framing Syria fighters. This stands in comparison to the 5 frames identified by Berbers et al. (2016) in their examination of Dutch and Flemish newspapers. Berbers’ results showed two frames that are not identified in the Swedish newspapers, the Don Quixote frame and the adventurer frame. The Don Quixote frame depicts Syria fighters as being driven by a humanitarian, not religious commitment. This sort of reasoning and framing is not found to be present in the Swedish newspapers. The adventurer frame depicts Syria fighters as simply looking for excitement. The Swedish newspapers contained some similarities to this sort of reasoning and framing, although not as whole frames. Rather, they were identified as parts of other frames.

The Swedish newspapers are found to utilize two frames not identified in the Dutch and Flemish newspapers: the searcher frame and the women of Daesh frame. The searcher frame describes Syria fighters as young and lost individuals who are searching for purpose and meaning. The women of Daesh frame describe women as one kind of Syria fighter, in some sense different to the male Syria fighters. Both studies however frame Syria fighters as terrorists and martyrs compelled by a religious duty.

The results in the current study show that the overall framing of Syria fighters in the Swedish newspapers is expressed in negative terms. Further the Syria fighters and their actions are viewed as problematic. This is similar to the findings in the Dutch and Flemish newspapers. In both the current and Berbers research, the results show that the use of historical examples in framing is rare within the examined newspapers.
Another commonality is of religious character. Both studies show the presence of reasoning and framing that describes a divide between the western world and Islam. Finally, both studies show that the newspapers present a link between terrorism and Islam.

5. Discussion
The purpose of this paper is to enhance and deepen our understanding of the framing of Syria fighters within a Swedish context. It enhances our understanding of the phenomenon by examining something that previous research has neglected. It deepens our understanding of the phenomenon by analyzing it using a theoretical framework not previously employed onto it in the given context. Further, the comparison to research on the framing of Syria fighters in another context gives some guidance to the generalizability of the current study’s drawn conclusions.

5.1 The outset
The current study holds that to understand foreign fighters, it is vital that we understand how political and social elites, and media frame such phenomenon. This idea stems from the theoretical assumption that media’s framing of foreign fighters, or Syria fighters as they are refereed to in the current research, is central to the social construction of such phenomenon. Syria fighters are according to this reasoning socially constructed. Additionally, as mentioned before, this study claims to situate itself within the field of Critical terrorism Studies (CTS), which is a constructivist approach.

The current research’s examination of framing exemplifies a focus that is placed on the role of language and presentation, which is at the core of CTS. Another core part of CTS is its focus on security and terrorism. So does the current paper focus on security and terrorism? Are the Syria fighters terrorists? Are they a security issue? The results of the current research show that Swedish newspapers present a link between Syria fighters and terrorism, often describing them as terrorists and security threats. Does evidence of this framing then make Syria fighters a terrorist and security related issue? From a social constructivist standpoint, where medias representation contributes to construct identities and threats, then yes, it does. The framing does not
however establish factual evidence that Syria fighters are terrorists, if they are threats and who and what it is they threaten.

5.2 Connections to previous research
As mentioned earlier, previous research has concluded that media often present a strong link between terrorism and religion, specifically Islam. Also, previous research has shown a strong religion-based bias when it comes to the reporting on terrorism. The current research identifies a link being presented between terrorism and Islam that is in some cases explicit and in others implicit. However, the current study does not conclude whether this link is strong or weak. This reveals a weakness of the current study’s qualitative method. Since it does not count or measure this link, it cannot empirically establish the strength of it. Nonetheless, the current study presents an in depth analysis of this link. Regarding the religion-based bias found in previous research, the current research does not conclude whether this is present within the examined Swedish newspapers. The current study argues that to draw such a conclusion it would have to examine and factually establish: the religious belongings of journalists, the religious orientation of newspapers, and the connection between reported terrorist acts and religion.

5.3 Limited results
The limitations of the current study leave the generalizability of its drawn conclusions lacking. First, the study examines the framing of Syria fighters within a certain type of media. Future studies on this subject would hence do well by focusing on for instance television or radio. However, a focus on such traditional media risks capturing only the framing done by elites, thus missing the framing done by the public. Therefore a focus on for instance social media could contribute to enhance our understanding of how the framing done by elites compares to the framing done by the public. Such broadening of the examination could serve to inform legislators on how to discuss this phenomenon with the public. Were such a study to reveal disconnects between the public’s views on the matter and the facts it could serve as basis for formulating
public information on the issue. Second, the current study is limited to examining material from a certain time period. Changing the time period would most likely have provided different material to be examined. This of course could have affected the results. Had more time and resources been available for the current research, a wider scope would have been used for the gathering of material. An extension of the study would also have been done adding a quantitative analysis. This would help enhance the study’s generalizability.

Relating these limitations to the first research question of this paper: how are Syria fighters framed in Swedish media? The ability to draw generalizable conclusions based on the current study’s findings thus depends on the representativeness of the examined newspaper articles on Swedish media as a whole. It also depends on the validity of the study’s conducted analysis and drawn conclusions. This validity in turn hinges upon the degree to which the described theoretical and methodological frameworks have been utilized in a systematic manner.

5.4 Moving forward
The results revealed interesting findings that the theoretical framework of this study does not manage to explain. The first is the differentiation of male and female Syria fighters. For this issue a feminist approach, were sensitivity to gendered language is applied, would be suited. The second finding is the variance in suggested solutions for defined problems. For this an examination of the ideological orientations of the newspapers and journalists might be enlightening. Both of these findings and the other findings in this paper connect to our society’s ability to respond and handle such phenomenon as Syria fighters. If our understanding of this phenomenon is distorted by a gender-biased or politically biased reporting in media, then our response risks being biased and ill informed. Also, if our responses are ill informed, they are not likely to have the intended results.

5.5 Expectations
Should the found results of this study be surprising? Considering results of previous research, the current study argues no, they should not. Are the found differences and
similarities between the framing in Swedish and Dutch and Flemish newspapers of significance? To this the current study has no final answer. What can these combined findings say that is of value about a broader context? Perhaps, it is reasonable to expect that the European commonality between the studied cases render the results, to at least some degree, generalizable to the rest of Europe. As far as the rest of the world goes, the field is so to say, open.

References


Neuman, P. R. (2015). Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s. ICSR, Department of War Studies. London: King's College London.


TU. (2016). Branschfakta 2016. TU Medier i Sverige. TU.


Appendices

Appendix I. List of analysed articles.
Texts within square brackets are the authors translated versions of the titles.

First period: 2016, 03 23 – 2016, 04 10

Bene Perlenberg, Csaba. (2016, 03 31). Terrordomarna visar att rättsväsendet fungerar. [The terror sentences show that the justice system is working]. GT, 2.


Friborg, Charlotta. (2016, 04 05). Gå till botten med hoten. [Go to the bottom of these threats]. Uppsala Nya Tidning, 10.

Gustavsson, Andreas. (2016, 03 24). Vi måste tro att det är möjligt att stoppa terrorn. [We must believe that it is possible to stop the terror]. Dagens ETC, 2-3.


Kriss, Lars. (2016, 04 09) Vi måste våga prata om salafismen. [We must dare to speak of Salafism]. Strömmstads Tidning, 2.


Osman, Bilan. 20116, 03 28). “Kvinnans viktigaste uppgift är att bilda familj. [The woman’s most important task is to form family]. Expo, 13.


Second period: 2017, 02 28 – 2017, 03 18


Appendix II. List of examined newspapers.

Aftonbladet
Arbetarbladet
Blekinge Läns Tidning
Borås Tidning
Dagens ETC
Dagens Nyheter
Expo
Expressen
Gefle Dagblad
Gotlands Allehanda
GT
Göteborgs-Posten
Hallandsposten
Järfälla Tidningen
Kvällsposten
Landskrona Posten
Norrbottens-Kuriren
Norrköpings Tidningar
Strömstads Tidning
TT Nyhetsbyrå
Uppsala Nya Tidning