

U.S., Swedish Naval Leaders: Total Defense Requires a Maritime-Aware Society



Artwork marks the spot in Sweden where a Soviet Whiskey-class submarine ran aground in 1981, and was spotted by a Swedish civilian. Wikipedia / Kallegauffin

ARLINGTON, Va. – Senior officers in the U.S. and Royal Swedish navies said that even with modern systems, maritime defense is enhanced by a maritime-aware society. Security is a function of a whole-of-society approach.

Speaking Jan. 26 in an American Enterprise Institute (AEI) webinar, U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, commander, U.S. Second Fleet, and Rear Adm. Ewa Skoog Haslum, chief, Royal Swedish Navy, discussed “gray zone” threats in the maritime domain, with emphasis on the northern European waters.

“We need to think this as a total defense task to solve, because it’s not only the military force that can provide security,” Haslum said. “In Sweden we are rebuilding the total defense. We are looking at civilian authorities together with the military and together we are rebuilding a new kind of defense that really includes the whole society, because all of the agencies need to work together.”

Haslum stressed the importance of reliable and trustworthy information flow nationally and internationally, describing that flow as key to nations working together to maintain maritime security and a free flow of commerce. She also emphasized being ready to respond to unexpected scenarios, including being cut off from digital information or being subjected to manipulated information.

The moderator, AEI Resident Fellow Elizabeth Braw, recalled

the “whiskey on the rocks” incident, a surprise appearance of a Soviet navy Whiskey-class submarine that ran aground on the coast of Sweden in 1981. She noted that it was a Swedish civilian who spotted the submarine.

Lewis praised the maritime awareness of Scandinavian societies.

“We have a lot to learn, not just in our military but in our society writ large, as a seagoing nation,” Lewis said. “That’s something we can take away from our partners. That is not something quite as lost in Sweden or Norway. They are very much maritime nations.”

He cited a loss of awareness in such institutions at coastwatchers and of the loss of skill such as celestial navigation, which the U.S. Naval Academy recently restored to its curricula.

“When we lose Global Positioning [System], when we lose exquisite communications, or satellite communications – as we see in higher latitudes that’s very difficult to maintain – even when we lose line-of-sight electronic communications or digital capability, it goes back to a visual world, a world in which we need to rely upon [the] senses of our eyes and ears to do the things that we need to do.

“More and more, as the electromagnetic spectrum is infringed upon, and manipulated by nefarious actors, we have to rely upon what I would call mission orders, the way to operate tactically, operationally and strategically on intent, where you have very young operators and civilians who understand what they’re seeing and know how to report it or how to defend themselves,” he said. “That’s something we could educate our entire societies on, the existential threat to our way of life.”