



Securing the Peace: Informing Resilient Future Generations in Deterrence and Defence – Perspectives from Sweden

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ABSTRACT

SECURING THE PEACE: INFORMING RESILIENT FUTURE GENERATIONS IN DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE – PERSPECTIVES FROM SWEDEN

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As the newest NATO member, Sweden presents an interesting case study in how to communicate about crisis, war, and Alliance responsibilities. Despite its long tradition of a total defence model, Sweden faces challenges common across the Alliance: a young generation with little experience of the 20th-century's geopolitical conflict and a population with limited prior connection to national defence or NATO duties. Yet Sweden has been able to achieve high levels of individual willingness to defend the country and strong support for NATO in a short timeframe. This report argues that, while every NATO ally has distinct political cultures, histories, and security environments, the underlying logic of Sweden's total defence approach is widely applicable within NATO's layered resilience concept. The strategies outlined—clear public communication, youth-focused education, and promotion of civil-military planning—are adaptable to strengthen resilience, deterrence, and defence across the Alliance.

Keywords: Total Defence, Civil Defence, Sweden, Societal Resilience, Public Communication.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an era of renewed great power confrontation, with NATO allies face an expanding spectrum of threats, the ability of societies to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis and war has become a central component of credible deterrence and defence.

Drawing upon Sweden's total defence model and experience as a newly acceded NATO ally, this report examines how Sweden's whole-of-society approach strengthens deterrence and defence. While recognising that each NATO ally has its own historical, social, and institutional context, the report argues that the underlying logic of Sweden's total defence model can be adapted across the Alliance.

The challenges addressed in this report, including integrating civilian and military planning and ensuring continuity of vital societal functions, are shared by many Allies. Sweden presents a relevant case study in building layered resilience capacities at speed and scale. After two centuries of military non-alignment and decades of reduced defence spending and planning, Sweden is reactivating and modernising its total defence system while adapting to the requirements of NATO membership.

The report outlines the foundations and logic of Sweden's total defence model, its objectives today, and the legal framework governing total defence duty, including military conscription, civil conscription, and general service obligation. Particular focus is placed on Sweden's total defence coordination and implementation in practice; new joint planning guidance developed

by the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency provides a common baseline for preparedness and translates strategic threat assessments into concrete planning assumptions for civilian and military actors alike. Formalising scenarios in this way enables actors across society, many with limited prior experience of defence planning, to incorporate crisis and wartime conditions into their own preparedness and continuity planning. Total defence is therefore understood not only as a wartime concept, but as a continuous peacetime process.

Drawing upon previous research, the reports show that individuals' knowledge of Sweden's total defence, and an understanding of one's role within it, are decisive factors in sustaining the will to defend the country. Open and clear communication about security threats need not generate anxiety amongst the population, but rather strengthen willingness to contribute and reduce vulnerability to external pressure. Sweden's communication efforts to strengthen societal resilience, and the normalisation of crisis and wartime planning—particularly among generations with limited experience of 20th-century great-power confrontation and existential threats—are therefore examined as integral components of total defence.

The report concludes with lessons and recommendations on the elements of Sweden's approach that can be adapted by NATO allies. By investing in an informed and capable public, the civilian population becomes a resource, rather than an additional challenge to be managed, during crisis or war.

INTRODUCTION

All NATO allies have a young population that was born after “the end of history,” i.e. after the Cold War. Two generations (Millennial and Gen Z) grew up unused to great power confrontation and existential global threats.^{1 2} But the full spectrum of threats NATO faces today is also challenging portions of society that have historically little to no experience or points of contact with national security and the Alliance. How can NATO allies adapt a whole-of-society approach to resilience, deterrence and defence if substantial segments of their populations, even if wanting to contribute, are uninformed or unprepared to meet today’s security challenges?

As the newest NATO member, Sweden presents an interesting case study in how to communicate about crisis, war and NATO. Two hundred years of military non-alignment, an identity of a “third way” between two great power blocs,³ or a “moral superpower”⁴ have quickly been shed. As of May 2025, 68.7% of the Swedish population has a positive view of NATO,⁵ a swing of nearly 40 percentage points compared to the Fall of 2021.⁶ Though there are variations in demographic groups, 84% of the population is willing to contribute to the country’s “total defence” in non-combatant roles,⁷ and 93% believe Sweden should come to the defence of other NATO allies and vice versa.⁸ How has Sweden been able to achieve such high levels of support for NATO and willingness to defend the country in such a short amount of time?⁹

Like the rest of Europe, Russia’s war against Ukraine has led Sweden to make historic investments in defence. Sweden has a long tradition of its total defence model with a civilian and military component to draw upon, but is facing similar challenges as the rest of alliance: A young generation with no previous relationship to total defence or military and civil conscription, and a whole population that has little prior relationship to NATO and what it means to be an ally.

As Sweden rebuilds its total defence, a core component, and a focus of this report, is how crisis and wartime preparedness are communicated.

“You are a part of Sweden’s total defence” is therefore not only a slogan, but a core concept of total defence. Every individual is responsible for the defence of the nation – not just the military. By having civilian agencies, private business, and individual citizens understand the threats, recognize that they are part of the nation’s defence, and providing them the knowledge and tools needed for crisis or wartime scenarios, the whole society contributes to resilience, deterrence, and defence. With the general population engaged in the country’s defence, military-civilian thinking and cooperation may be bridged and normalized.

While recognizing each NATO ally has its own unique history, social, and governance structures, this report aims to show that the total defence concept and strategies currently being applied in Sweden are adaptable for Allies’ country-specific contexts and NATO’s layered resilience concept more broadly. It is worth stressing that while Sweden is focusing on building its total defence to meet the demands of war and contribute to NATO’s collective defence, total defence includes resilience and preparedness measures specifically designed to manage and respond to crises below the threshold of armed conflict. For countries on NATO’s southern flank, Sweden’s total defence concept is therefore also applicable to national and region-specific security challenges, such as the effects of climate change and other 360-degree threats.

Report Structure

This report is structured as followed: The foundations of Sweden’s total defence will first be discussed. This includes the history and logic of Sweden’s total defence model, goals for total defence today, and civil-military implementation in practice. The report will then review concrete examples of how Sweden is fostering a whole-of-society approach to resilience and defence. These will serve as a basis for the recommendations provided to NATO allies, reviewing which Swedish practices can be adopted and adapted across the diversity of NATO allies.

FOUNDATIONS OF SWEDEN'S TOTAL DEFENCE

History & Logic of Sweden's Total Defence

Sweden's total defence throughout the majority of the Cold War was conceptualized along four main lines: military defence, civil defence*, psychological defence, and economic defence. These aimed to defend against an armed attack, consequences of an armed attack for the civilian population, psychological warfare, and economic warfare.

As a small, non-aligned state, this total defence model was a necessity for Sweden. Every part of society, drawing upon the entire population, was needed to form a credible deterrence and defence against a much larger aggressor.

Swedish policy discourse at the time argued that "gaps," which could be exploited by an adversary through "small measures in one or several domains," needed be closed through a total defence that was "as effective in as many situations and against as many methods of attack as possible." These were not only military "gaps" but societal ones. "The means to exert threats or pressure on a nation are becoming more numerous and diverse," wrote a 1975 government report. Today, policy planners would use the terminology of building "resilience" against "hybrid" or "grey zone" threats.

Like many other countries in Europe after the end of the Cold War, Sweden dismantled large parts of its defence, including civil defence, and placed total defence planning on hold. In December 2015, following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea,

Swedish total defence planning resumed. Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 spurred the government to increase the pace and investment in total defence.

Total Defence Today

Total defence, as defined in the Swedish context, refers to the activities necessary to prepare Sweden for war. It consists of military defence and civil defence, which together form the total defence. During peacetime, total defence planning is a continual process, where all actors in Sweden are expected to take appropriate measures to maintain their operations and contribute to the objectives of total defence in the event of an armed attack.

The deteriorating security environment, and Sweden's membership in NATO, led the Swedish government to redefine the objectives for total defence in 2024. The current objectives are:

OBJECTIVES FOR SWEDISH TOTAL DEFENCE

Defend Sweden and its population against armed attacks, uphold the country's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and contribute to the defence of allied nations. Activities within total defence shall be conducted both independently and jointly with others, domestically and abroad, in accordance with Sweden's commitments as a member of NATO.

*At that time, civil defence had the primary task of protecting the population and property from damage caused during an attack. Today's civil defence has a broader range of responsibilities.

Civil Defence Objectives

Sweden's civil defence encompasses government agencies, municipalities and regions, the private sector, voluntary defence organizations, and individuals. All have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that they are able to carry out their duties in peacetime, crisis, and war. All civilian actors are essential in achieving the objective of civil defence.¹⁰

The development of civil defence aims to strengthen Swedish society and its overall resilience, which in turn contributes to NATO's deterrence and defence posture.¹¹ Civil defence objectives were revised in 2025 to meet the demands NATO membership places on Sweden's civil defence capabilities.

OBJECTIVE FOR SWEDISH CIVIL DEFENCE

- 1) Safeguard the most essential public services.**
- 2) Contribute to the military defence's capability within the framework of NATO's collective defence and other duties.**
- 3) Protect the civilian population.**
- 4) Maintain Sweden's will to defend itself and society's resilience to external pressure.**

Total Defence Duty: Citizens' Responsibility

By law, all residents in Sweden (including foreign citizens) between 16 and 70 must contribute to Sweden's resilience and defence when a state of heightened alert is declared. This is the so-called total defence duty. The obligations under the law apply equally to both women and men. Total defence duty is made up of military conscription, civil conscription and general service obligation.¹²

Those between the ages of 16 and 70 who are not covered by military or civil service are instead subject to the general service obligation. In times of heightened alert or war, individuals with a general service obligation are required to support the country so that essential parts of society continue to function. This may involve continuing to perform their regular work or carrying out other tasks that are important for total defence.¹³

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for additional details on civil preparedness and defence structure.

Military & Civil Conscription

Military conscription was reactivated in 2018 and civil conscription in 2024.

In 2025, a cohort of 110,000 youth were screened for military conscription at testing centers around Sweden. Of that number, about a quarter were called for physical and mental exams. The top third, around 8,000 individuals, were conscripted to serve between nine and fifteen months – regardless of personal preference of serving (though willingness to serve is taken into account). In 2026, the number of conscripts will increase to 9,000.¹⁴

Civil conscription is similar to military conscription but has important differences in task and scope. Civil conscription covers services vital for societal functioning. Currently, emergency services, the energy sector and cyber security are covered by civil conscription, totaling around 3,000 individuals who undergo training.¹⁵ Other areas vital for societal functioning, such as healthcare, transportation, and civil protection, are being prepared for civil conscription in the near future. To scale up, general civil conscription was activated in January 2026, with youth called in to undergo lengthy training.¹⁶ 18,000 individuals are expected to be conscripted and undergo training by 2035, primarily within emergency services.¹⁷ Importantly, civil conscription cannot be used for combat-related roles (except for civilian security and guard duties).

Coordination & Implementation

In order to coordinate planning within total defence and ensure alignment with the government's direction and new objectives for total defence, the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency and the Swedish Armed Forces were tasked to develop common planning guidance in 2025.

The official document, which is publicly available, provides concrete threat assessments for regional and local governments, the private sector, and civil society.¹⁸ The purpose of the guidance and scenarios is not to describe how to develop capabilities, but to serve as a base-line for what all civilian and military actors should be planning for.

“All actors who receive this document need to analyze it in relation to their role, area of responsibility, tasks, and geographical conditions – and then incorporate it into their own planning and preparations,” writes the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency.

The scenarios are not mutually exclusive. Sweden’s total defence must be able to handle dimensions of all cases simultaneously, even if the time for preparation and adaptation is limited.

A core message is that NATO membership has fundamentally changed the conditions for Sweden’s



Figure 1. Image from the front page of the report “The Strategic Environment and Planning Assumptions for Swedish Total Defence 2025–2030”. Source: Swedish Armed Forces & Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency.

Seven scenarios are described:

1. Hybrid attacks
2. NATO Host Nation Support
3. Limited attack against northern Sweden
4. Invasion of Gotland
5. Long-distance strikes
6. Reinforcement of NATO’s northern flank
7. Reinforcing the Alliance in the Baltic Sea

total defence concept. “Defence begins at NATO’s border,” so Swedish authorities and society must take measures and carry out activities that fulfil NATO’s three core tasks. Sweden’s geography is highlighted, and therefore the civilian sector’s important role in Host Nation Support functions, such as supporting the basing and transportation of allied troops.

The common baseline is especially important for those stakeholders who do not participate in the Armed Forces’ operational planning. The scenarios may be obvious for military planners, but they are designed to raise awareness for civilians less familiar with the security threats

Sweden is exposed to. Moreover, even when such threats are already well known and publicly discussed, formalizing them into official guidance is essential. It enables government agencies and private industry to translate these scenarios into concrete measures within their own planning and preparedness processes.

To that end, the 2024 public brochure “If Crisis or War Comes” will specifically be adapted and published for private businesses in 2026. The aim is to help companies take into account the security environment in their analysis and planning in order to implement concrete measures to strengthen their own preparedness, and, where relevant, to seek cooperation with authorities and other partners. The Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency (previously the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, MSB) is also developing a contact point for information to businesses. In the event of a peacetime crisis or heightened alert, the contact point will be able to provide information on production conversion, implemented regulatory simplifications, product and service specific regulations, and other related matters.¹⁹

The new business-specific brochure and point

of contact aims to bridge the knowledge gap between military, civilian, and private sector crisis preparedness and shows the way forward for actionability.²⁰

Towards more cohesive civil-military cooperation

On January 1, 2026, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency transitioned into the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency.²¹ It is the leading agency that drives and coordinates the civil defence system, ensuring that civil preparedness planning is coherent on all administrative levels. The agency also has a specific sector responsibility for rescue services and the protection of the population.

The name change reflects a shift in focus from crisis management to civil defence. While the agency retains its mandate to support capability development across society to manage accidents and crises during peacetime,²² it has a more defined role in leading total defence planning together with the Swedish Armed Forces. The agency ensures close coordination between civil and military defence efforts at all levels of government.²³

BUILDING SOCIETAL RESILIENCE & PREPAREDNESS

The Swedish “Mind-Set”

A fundamental aspect that underpins Sweden’s total defence concept is national resolve (försvarsviljan, literally “willingness to defend”). Individual-level willingness to defend the country is high in Sweden. A 2025 Swedish Defence University survey found 84% of all respondents willing to take on a non-combatant role with no risk to life, such as distributing food or medical support, while 42% were willing to take on a combatant role (with large disparities between gender and age).²⁴ The Swedish Psychological Defence Agency found that 61% of respondents were willing to partake in civil defence and 39% in military defence.²⁵

While Sweden, and the Nordic region more broadly, has some of the highest levels of social trust in the world,²⁶ aspects like trust in institutions, political leaders, and democracy are not as correlated to national resolve as often postulated.²⁷

The Swedish Defence University and Uppsala University found that national belonging as well as pride in culture and military (“even in a country such as Sweden, which often prides itself on a long history of peace”) to be strong contributors of resolve. Importantly, ethnic nationalism (as opposed to civic and cultural conception of national identity) was not found to contribute to a willingness to defend the country, and uncritical patriotism even reduces individuals’ resolve.²⁸ A separate study found that people with immigrant backgrounds sometimes showed a higher willingness to defend than native-born Swedes.²⁹

Social cohesion and sense of belonging are thus contributing factors to national resolve, but education about total defence has been found to

be one of the most decisive factors for increasing willingness to defend.³⁰

Total Defence and NATO in Schools

Communicating openly with the public about security threats and their civic duties is in itself an act that can build societal resilience. And this education starts young in Sweden. In Sweden, it is recognized that preschools and schools play a crucial role in the country’s total defence. This involves both building knowledge among all individuals in society to contribute to collective resilience, and ensuring that educational activities can continue even in case of war.

Since July 1, 2025, education about NATO and total defence has been included in the social studies curriculum for upper secondary school students in Sweden. The aim of this education is to give students a clear understanding of the purpose and tasks of total defence, as well as to show how each individual can contribute and take part. In doing so, it also seeks to foster a sense of belonging and empowerment.



The educational material consists of both lectures and practical exercises designed to increase knowledge about how Sweden's total defence functions, as well as the responsibilities and obligations it entails. The material also covers more practical elements, such as home economics lessons on how to cook during power outages, and for physical education classes aimed at improving knowledge about surviving in forests and nature, in cold or wet weather conditions.

Both the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency contribute to the educational materials. The Swedish Armed Forces also offer to visit schools to provide instruction on total defence.

Early results have proven positive with 97% of students responding they have a better understanding of total defence, why it is needed, and how it will impact them. 86% said that they were prepared to "defend our democracy and freedom."³¹

Voluntary defence organizations

Sweden has 18 voluntary defence organizations that form an important part of the total defence system. The organizations bring together volunteer citizens who, through training, exercises, and practical support, strengthen both the military and civil defence. Their tasks include for example communications, medical services, logistics, security, transport and crisis preparedness. Several of the organizations also run youth activities, which help foster early engagement, increase awareness of total defence, and strengthen future skills and secure critical competences for the future.

Psychological Defence

In response to the deteriorating security situation and rapid technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, the Swedish government has prioritized strengthening the ability to prevent, identify, analyse, and respond to information influence. This is part of maintaining the population's willingness to defend the country.

The Swedish Psychological Defence Agency (MPF) was established on January 1, 2022. Its mission is to lead the coordination and development of government agencies' and other

actors' activities within psychological defence, provide support for such efforts, and contribute to enhancing the population's resilience, both in peacetime and during periods of heightened preparedness.

A key information campaign by MPF, "*Bli inte lurad*" ("Don't Be Fooled"), aims to raise awareness of disinformation, manipulation, and information operations. It encourages individuals to think critically before sharing information and to carefully examine sources and underlying purposes. The campaign has been visible across social media, television, radio, and public posters; municipalities and schools have been provided with digital educational materials, posters, and lesson plans to support source criticism.³² The campaign was widely distributed to reach as many citizens of Swedish society as possible.

Similarly, Finland has integrated media literacy into its educational system, ensuring students become "conscious media consumers from an early age."³³

The Brochure: If Crisis or War Comes

Sweden has a long tradition of communicating to the public about crisis and wartime preparation and duties. In 2018, for the first time in 57 years, the "If Crisis or War Comes" brochure was distributed to all Swedish households. The updated version contained much of the same language and advice as the WWII (1943) and Cold War versions (1952 & 1961), with the latest edition, published in 2024, coming in reaction to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Crucially, the brochure speaks openly and plainly about the threat of war. Doing so does not contribute to a sense of panic amongst the general public, as often feared by policy makers and political leaders.³⁴ Rather, when the 2024 edition was published, the most common reaction of those surveyed was a sense of responsibility (45%). A vast majority approved of the brochure being sent to all households (82%), planned to improve their preparedness (63%), and said they would defend the country within the civil defence (73%). And while anxiety (39%) did increase compared to the 2018 release (24%), this was an expected result due to the war in Ukraine.³⁵

But communication is just the start of developing crisis preparedness planning with the public. Knowledge must be actionable.

NORMALIZING CRISIS & WARTIME PREPAREDNESS

Messages need to be communicated in various contexts in order to reach the entire population and ensure that they are reinforced. The Swedish Government has emphasized the importance of ensuring the population's resilience and will to defend the country. Individual preparedness is also a key aspect in the event of heightened alert or war.

Both private and public actors have responded to this call, and as a result, Swedish citizens frequently encounter various types of information campaigns aimed at increasing awareness and strengthening individual resilience. Below are several examples.

Crisis Preparedness Week

Every year, Preparedness Week is conducted with the aim of raising awareness about preparedness among citizens. In addition to increasing personal awareness and individual preparedness, it contributes in the long term to the country's overall resilience. Preparedness Week is primarily carried out by municipalities, county administrative boards, government agencies, and voluntary defence organisations.



Figure 2: The theme for Preparedness Week 2025 was "You are a part of Sweden's total defence." Photo: Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency

"Seven Days" of Household Self-Sufficiency

In 2020, the Swedish government made a defence policy decision recommending that households maintain a one-week emergency preparedness. During the opening phases of a crisis or conflict, authorities will be focusing on the most critical aspects of response. Households and individuals are therefore expected to be self-sufficient for a week to allow authorities to support those most affected by the crisis or war and the most vulnerable population groups.

According to a survey conducted in 2024, approximately 27 % of the Swedish population estimate that they would be able to manage without societal support for at least one week, while 17% believe they could sustain themselves for at least two weeks.³⁶

In 2025, many households received an updated "Seven Days" brochure. The brochure gives a crisis scenario with advice and practical tips on how to survive one week without access to electricity, water and heat. Readers are encouraged to practice the scenario.

"This is Your Country"

The Swedish Armed Forces campaign "This Is Your Country" aims to increase public understanding of the security situation and strengthen citizens' willingness to defend the country. It emphasizes that Sweden and its way of life are worth protecting and that every individual has a role to play. The campaign uses social media, posters, and educational materials to reach a broad audience and foster public support for national defence.



Figure 3 "This is your country" Campaign by the Swedish Armed Forces. Source: Swedish Armed Forces

"Little Crisis Info": Communicating with Children and Youth about War

Sweden has specific resources for young children and families. "Lilla Krisinfo" (Little Crisis Info) is a homepage that provides the latest news about the national and global security situation, as well as general crisis preparedness measures, in age-appropriate language.³⁷



Figure 3: "Can there be war in Sweden?" Former Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces Micael Bydén (2024) answer's questions in SVT's "Lilla Aktuellt" children's news program. Photo: Sara Bley/SVT

But communicating to children about difficult topics like war is not limited to a homepage. For example, in January 2024, the Minister for Civil Defence Carl Oscar Bohlin and then Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces Micael Bydén gave speeches saying war could come to Sweden.³⁸ As statements sparked national debate and spread rapidly on social media, the Swedish Children's Rights Society (BRIS) received a spike in phone calls from children concerned about war.³⁹ In response, the Supreme Commander went on Swedish Public Broadcasting news show for children "Lilla Aktuellt."

On the program, Micael Bydén answered questions about the security environment and "what children and youth need to understand." He reiterated that he was not worried that war will come to Sweden today, but was worried that citizens were not prepared for difficult situations and listed some simple steps to take as an example. "These are preparations that everyone can make. Adults are primarily responsible for this, but it is important that children and young people also understand what we need to do."⁴⁰ Teachers reportedly addressed their students' fears and talked about war in school. "It feels better than going to think about it on your own," said one student in a national interview.⁴¹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO MEMBERS

While Nordic “total defence” or “comprehensive security” approaches are often seen as context-specific and difficult to replicate elsewhere, the strategies documented in this report are not limited to national circumstances. Rather, they are grounded in a broader understanding of human behaviour in the face of potential threats and the capacity at both societal and individual levels to mobilize, cooperate, and provide mutual support. Every NATO ally, its leaders and institutions, are capable of adapting and implementing the strategic communications strategies Sweden is using as part of rebuilding its total defence.

Based on the above reasoning, the following recommendations are hereby presented for Allies’ consideration.



Clear Communication of Threats & Preparedness Guidance to the Population

Knowledge of security threats, and of how to respond in crises or wartime, is a central factor in building societal resilience and sustaining the population’s willingness to defend the country.

However, raising threat awareness alone is insufficient. Communicating risks without offering concrete guidance can generate anxiety, isolation, and helplessness. Populations must be equipped with practical tools that enable individuals to act according to their circumstances. Providing such tools strengthens individual agency and enhances preparedness across society.

Recent Swedish experience demonstrates that transparent communication about the threat environment can strengthen, rather than unsettle, public confidence. During recent crises, Swedish leaders have not hesitated to speak openly and present the threat landscape transparently: the Pandemic,⁴² the Russian invasion,⁴³ and the threat of war to Sweden.⁴⁴ When uncertainty is reduced, citizens are better able to prepare, respond, and recover from initial shocks. Clear information also increases societal resistance to malign information operations and foreign propaganda.

To normalize preparedness as part of everyday life, messages must be communicated consistently, and across multiple platforms and societal contexts. NATO can provide the following for Allies to adapt according to their national contexts: *

- **Develop a public repository of practical, household-level guidance,** drawing on lessons from recent conflicts, including Ukraine. This should include advice on home preparedness kits, essential medical supplies, and steps households can take to withstand disruptions.

- **Provide clear instructions on sheltering and protective measures** against modern warfare threats, where shelters exist, and how communities should respond when they do not.
- **Offer guidance for extreme but sub-threshold scenarios**, such as disruptions to critical infrastructure, severe weather events, or disease outbreaks.

Providing such tools helps citizens build personal resilience and strengthens their ability and motivation to contribute to total defence.

Provide Tailored Information for Children, Youth and Families

Building resilience and willingness to defend for future generations must be cultivated over time, beginning at a young age. Children and young people should understand, at an age-appropriate level, what to do during crises or wartime and how their families can act together. Schools are an effective setting for relaying this information: teachers understand their students and can communicate complex issues in accessible ways. To support this, Allies can develop:

- **Age-appropriate educational materials** explaining the security environment, the role of NATO, and the role of the military in defending democratic societies.
- **Age-appropriate guidance on how crises may affect daily life**, such as temporary changes to schooling or disruptions to services, and steps families can take to prepare for prolonged power outages or supply-chain interruptions.

If these issues are not addressed through trusted sources, children and youth will likely encounter them through social media, where accuracy and credibility vary widely. Proactive communication therefore plays a preventive role, reducing vulnerability to misinformation.

Joint Civil-Military Planning

Sustainable resilience that supports deterrence and defence requires a whole-of-society approach. Sweden's recent joint planning guidance for total defence issued by the Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency, provides a model for bridging gaps between civilian and military planning cultures.

Allies and NATO can adapt similar practices by:

- **Ensuring that military planners communicate relevant defence plans** (to the extent possible) to national, regional, and local authorities, as well as the private sector, which support military operations and/or deliver essential services. Understanding the expected impact of operations, including the military's need for support and resources, enables civilian authorities and businesses to integrate support capabilities and contingencies into their own plans.
- **Strengthen civil-military interactions** to ensure a shared understanding of military and societal needs, enhancing coordination and mutual support during planning and operations.
- **Establishing clear frameworks that define roles, responsibilities, and objectives** for all actors in civil defence systems, enabling agencies and private stakeholders to implement guidance according to their capabilities.*

Joint planning helps cultivate a shared vocabulary, mutual understanding, and a common culture between civilian and military communities. Sustained cooperation is essential: whole-of-society defence is not a one-off exercise but a continuous process. This collective effort strengthens societal resilience, reinforces deterrence, and supports NATO's overall defence posture.

* Building off of NATO PO(2025)0144 - Non-Binding Guidance to Support National Civilian Planning.

CONCLUSIONS

As NATO enters an era defined by great power confrontation and persistent hybrid threats, the Alliance's ability to deter and defend will increasingly depend on the resilience of its societies. Younger generations, with little experience of the 20th century's geopolitical conflict, must be empowered with the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to navigate crises and contribute meaningfully to national and collective defence. Sweden's experience demonstrates that this is both possible and achievable within a short timeframe when clear communication, practical guidance, and whole-of-society engagement are prioritized.

Sweden has shown that resilience is not an abstract concept, but an outcome that can be built: through transparent communication about threats; through education that equips people of all ages with actionable knowledge; through structures that bind civilian, military, and private actors together in shared planning; and through sustained efforts to normalize preparedness as a civic responsibility.

Crucially, Sweden's total defence model

underscores that individuals are not passive recipients of security – they are participants in it. When populations understand their role, they develop agency, resolve, and a sense of belonging to a collective effort.

These lessons are not unique to Sweden. While every ally has distinct political cultures, histories, and security environments, the underlying logic of Sweden's approach is widely applicable. The strategies outlined in this report—clear public communication, youth-focused education, and structured civil-military planning—are adaptable frameworks for strengthening resilience across the Alliance. They help societies withstand shocks, deny adversaries the ability to exploit societal vulnerabilities, and reinforce NATO's deterrence posture.

By investing in informed and capable populations, NATO allies strengthen the credibility of collective defence and ensure that democratic societies remain secure, cohesive, and prepared for the challenges ahead.

APPENDIX 1

Civil Preparedness Structure

The Swedish system for civil preparedness and civil defence comprises multiple actors, each with distinct responsibilities and operating at various levels of society.

Sweden has a system of 12 so-called civil preparedness sectors**. Within each sector, there is a lead agency coordinating a network of supporting agencies. In total, there are 67 civil preparedness agencies, of which 21 are regional governments.

The lead agency in each sector is responsible for developing their area of civil preparedness, supporting the national civil preparedness agencies and ensuring coordination and cooperation with other relevant actors, such as private business.⁴⁵ The civil preparedness sectors, to a large degree, overlap with NATO's Seven Baseline Requirement areas, which is why some sector responsible agencies also represent Sweden in planning groups within the Resilience Committee.⁴⁶

Civil preparedness responsibility is also divided geographically. Sweden consists of 290 municipalities. These municipalities are divided between 21 county administrative boards. Regional coordination is enabled by six civil areas led by a governor, with clear missions to plan and prepare

for heightened alert and war. These interface with both national level and local level, as well as with regional military commands.⁴⁷ In addition to this structure, there is a separate regional division comprising of elected regional councils responsible for key public services such as healthcare, transport infrastructure, and cultural initiatives.

Other key actors in the system include private-sector stakeholders that own and operate large parts of Sweden's critical infrastructure, as well as voluntary organizations whose contributions remain essential for training, capability development, and support during crises.



Parliament and Government

Government agencies

The County Administrative Boards

Regions

Municipalities

Trade and industry

Voluntary organisations

Individuals

** The civil preparedness sectors are Energy supply, Food supply and drinking water, Electronic communications and postal services, Transport, Health, medical care, and welfare, Public order and security, Civil Protection, Economic Security, Financial Services, Basic Data, Industry, Construction & Commerce, International Trade.

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