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# Conference Report Seabed Security

April 2025



## Seabed Security Seminar

Protecting our Critical Undersea Infrastructure Together

**TNO** Innovation  
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Cover photo: Stephanie Govaerts

This HCSS Conference Report follows the NATO Seminar on Seabed Security, organised by HCSS and TNO, in close cooperation with the Dutch Ministries of Defence and Infrastructure & Water Management, on March 27, 2025. The Seminar on Seabed Security was part of a series of NATO Summit pre-events organised by HCSS together with other partners to set the stage for the 2025 NATO summit in The Hague, on June 24 and 25.

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Ministerie van Infrastructuur  
en Waterstaat

HCSS

Lange Voorhout 1  
2514 EA The Hague

Follow us on social media:

@hcssnl

The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies

Email: [info@hcss.nl](mailto:info@hcss.nl)

Website: [www.hcss.nl](http://www.hcss.nl)

# Seabed Security

The seabed is under attack — and so is our security. Recent incursions by Russian vessels and the sabotage of underwater power and internet cables have exposed critical vulnerabilities in NATO countries' infrastructure. This threat to security, as well as societal and business continuity, demands urgent and unified action. The conclusion was from the start: We are in a de facto war; the Threats are real; the Urgency is high and the Time for talk is over.

For that reason:

- We need to develop a deterrent defence capability.
- We must improve resilience of Critical Underwater Infrastructure (balance between energy transition goals, security; and investments).
- We need to improve societal resilience.

## What if our undersea infrastructure suddenly fails?

The consequences for the economy, energy supply, and national security would be enormous. Yet, these vital systems face increasing threats due to geopolitical tensions, sabotage, and cyberattacks.

In preparation for the NATO Summit in The Hague (June 25-26, 2025), HCSS and TNO, in close cooperation with the Dutch Ministries of Defence and Infrastructure & Water Management, organised an exclusive closed doors NATO Seminar on Seabed Security, on March 27, 2025. The seminar brought together leading experts for inspiring panels to discuss topics like “The Threat Landscape – From Baltic to Global”, “Smart Responses – Innovation & Risk-Based Resilience”, and “Race to the Bottom – Collaboration Across Sectors.” At the start of the event, differences came to light about data sharing, frameworks for escalation, governance and more, but in the end, it seemed that most participants were willing to make steps towards collaboration. It is now a matter of starting and hammer it out into concrete action.

As the event went on, it became clear what the roadblocks had been, where the hesitations came from, and that collaboration is the key to going forward. It was urged to not only focus on individual pieces of the puzzle but to think about the part everyone is playing in the bigger system.

The Netherlands plays a key role in the international dialogue on **seabed security**. This seminar was the beginning of a trajectory leading to concrete action. The question is not *if* we act, but *how fast* and *with what determination*.

## What were the key takeaways that were shared during the Seminar?

- **Threats are no longer abstract.** The concept of the “gray zone” is now openly acknowledged.
- It's the entire societal system that is in danger. We need a **system-wide approach**.
- We need to **think of and plan for worst-case scenarios**.
- **Enhancement of maritime awareness** is required to better understand potential risks.
- We need **data-driven situational awareness** and **understanding**.
- We need to **understand** the four **CUI sabotage kill chain** steps better: **Reconnaissance**, **Dispatch** of forces, **Initiation** of the attack and **Destruction** of target.
- It is important to develop **robust data networks** to **share** data and **improve** the situational awareness in the face of diverse threats.
- Providing **technology** alone **doesn't** mean providing the **solution**.

- Think of **expanding** the current **Helsinki Convention** so that it also cover maritime security and maritime crimes. And there are **opportunities in UNCLOS** that we don't use.
- We need to start **experimenting**, facilities like SeaSec are available.
- We need to **encourage industry-led innovation**.
- We need to develop the **underwater 'Internet of Things'**.
- **Trust** is essential among partners.
- **The solution is in this room**, but so is the problem. We need to work together!
- **We need to overcome** interagency challenges, enhancing governance, maritime awareness, energy and critical resilience.
- We need to **conduct exercises**, joint and combined through the whole chain.
- We need to **simplify the security governance** in the North Sea.
- We need to **quickly react** to incidents.

### What is the Call for Action for the Stakeholders?

- Organise a scenario based table top with representatives of all stakeholders to establish the data exchange terms and conditions;
- Establish a government-led exercise campaign with one biannual large scale exercise and multiple small scale exercises in between;
- Organize awareness campaigns in all countries for the general public;
- Start the discussion in the UNCLOS with multiple like-minded member states to expand the Helsinki Convention.
- Plan multiple conferences like this one in regions of interest, e.g. the Baltic, the Eastern Mediterranean to broaden the support and the knowledge.

#### Seminar Closure: David van Weel, Minister of Justice and Security

*"It is the responsibility of all of us. We need each other to put the puzzle pieces together. That's why the Netherlands is putting this issue high on the international agenda—together with our North Sea neighbors, within the EU, and certainly within NATO."*



As a follow-up to the event, several experts contributed a guest paper on Seabed Security. These can be found on the [HCSS website](#).

HCSS  
Lange Voorhout 1  
2514 EA The Hague

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