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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER NATO SHIPPING CENTRE JANUARY 2019

This newsletter reflects the launch of NATO Shipping Centre and MARCOM 2019 activities after an operationally successful 2018. Please be advised that we are now re-naming our newsletters to the month in which it is promulgated rather than the month it endeavors to cover (the previous month).

NATO MARCOM intentions for 2019 are to continue Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA) tasks and monitoring threats in the NATO Area of Responsibility. Operation Sea Guardian (OSG) kept NATO units busy throughout 2018 culminating with Focused Operation (FOCOPS 18-6) for a three-week period in the Eastern Mediterranean in November and December. Following the latest FOCOPS and conclusion of a busy 2018 exercise program, the Standing Naval Maritime Groups (SNMG's) were dispersed to their respective national home ports for the seasonal holidays. The Groups have now initiated re-assembly and Force Integration Training (FIT) for the upcoming FOCOPS 19-1 and another busy exercise season throughout MARCOM's Area of Responsibility (AoR).

Maritime Security Operations

Last December, 76 warships from NATO Nations supported OSG providing various kinds of support. NATO Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft and Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) provided by Greece, Spain, Italy, Turkey, France, and USA were on station; and submarines under NATO and national operational command contributed to increase MSA.

FOCOPS 18-6, with the FOCOPS Commander embarked in the Greek frigate HS Navarino, concluded on 9 December. A total of 300 merchant vessels were hailed during the period. OSG will continue with a busy program in 2019. FOCOPS 19-1 will soon commence in order to increase NATO MARCOM's understanding of the maritime pattern of life as a basis for detecting anomalies and thus supporting NATO Counterterrorism efforts.

Standing Naval Maritime Groups

Standing Naval Maritime Group 1 (SNMG-1) operated in the Baltic- and North Sea in December with the Danish frigate HDMS Esbern Snare as flag-ship, carrying out training activities and MSA tasks. The group called at Wilhelmshaven (Germany) and Korsør (Denmark) during the period. On 16 December, flag-ship duties were handed over to HDMS Niels Juel. Command of SNMG1 was handed over to the U.S. Navy on 14 January in Copenhagen for 2019.



Standing Naval Maritime Group 2 (SNMG-2) Tactical Unit 1 (TU 01) continues its deployment in the Aegean Sea, supporting the efforts of the EU, Greece, and Turkey to control migration. SNMG-2 TU 01 command is executed from the German frigate FGS Bonn (relieving FGS Lubeck), and the group consists of Greek patrol vessels HS Blesas, HS Antititos, and HS Kasos (relieved by HS Kallistos 4 Nov), the Albanian patrol vessel ALS Lissus, and the Turkish warship TCG Tuzla (relieved by TCG Karabury 7 Dec). SNMG-2 TU 01 patrolled the areas assigned in the Aegean and sighted seven small boats with immigrants coming from Turkey in December. The movements of these small boats were reported to local authorities for further action.

Standing Naval Maritime Group 2 (SNMG-2) Tactical Unit 2 (TU 02), consisting of the Dutch frigate HNLMS De Ruyter (flagship), the Canadian frigate HMCS Ville de Quebec, and the Spanish frigate ESPS Cantabria, operated in December across the Mediterranean, calling at both Alexandria (Egypt) and Lisbon (Portugal). During the movement from the East to the West Mediterranean and on into the Atlantic, the group carried out training activities and MSA tasks, including opportunity training with the Egyptian Navy.

Standing Naval Mine Counter Measures Group 1 (SNMCMG-1), led by the Belgian Mine Countermeasure Vessel (MCMV) BNS Godetia, includes the Lithuanian LNS Kursis, Latvian LVNS Ruisis, German FGS Hamburg, and the Dutch HNLMS Makkum. The group carried out mine countermeasure operations and historic ordnance disposal in the Baltic Sea and visited Szczecin (Poland), Kiel (Germany), and Zeebrugge (Belgium). Following the holiday stand down, SNMCMG1 regrouped in Copenhagen on 14 January in conjunction with the Danish navy taking over command.

Standing Naval Mine Counter Measures Group 2 (SNMCMG-2), composed of the German FGS Rhein (flagship) and the Spanish ESPS Turia, operated in the Mediterranean during December, carrying out MSA task and an operational training program. The group visited Palma (Spain) and La Valetta (Malta). The group commenced winter dispersal in home ports 15 December and is in the process of rejoining.

MARCOM Engagements

MARCOM Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Rear Admiral Jens Niemeyer (German Navy) led a MARCOM delegation to Israel for several meetings in order to facilitate for Israeli Navy personnel to become familiar with NATO procedures to improve interoperability, logistic (medical) support, and information sharing within the framework of OSG. This was followed up by a medical support exercise during OSG FOCOPS 18-6.

NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) Updates

The NSC is monitoring the situation in the Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov and how it is affecting shipping in the area.

The NSC, in cooperation with US MARAD, continues encouraging all ships to report incidents of GPS jamming or interference in areas of the Eastern Mediterranean in order to maintain overall awareness of cyber issues that can affect safety or security of navigation. The assessment sent with October's newsletter remains valid and up-to-date.

Merchant ships are also encouraged to report any suspicious activity in the Mediterranean Sea and broader North Atlantic Region to the NSC.

2019 is aligned to be a busy and interesting year for MARCOM. Adaptation and expansion of the NATO command structure with focus on the maritime is initiated, including an expansion of the NATO Shipping Centre. This embraces a more elevated position for the Centre in the command hierarchy, improved capacity (more people) and added skill-sets (energy exploitation in the maritime, fishery and general shipping industry competence). 2019 will hopefully also include the realisation of initiatives to see NATO warships exercise the Alliance' ability to protect shipping and the all-vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), especially in the North Atlantic.

I close this Newsletter wishing the maritime community a safe and successful 2019.

Ben Lofstad

Commander, NOR N
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