



HEADQUARTERS, ALLIED MARITIME COMMAND

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NATO SHIPPING CENTRE NEWSLETTER MAY – JUNE 2019

Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) conducted a change of command ceremony on 20 May at Northwood Headquarters to mark the change of senior leadership at the command. General Tod D. Wolters, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, presided over the ceremony as Vice Admiral Keith E. Blount, CB OBE assumed command from Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, KBE CE who led NATO's only standing Maritime Component Command since 2015.



NATO MARCOM continues its operational activities highlighted by the training activities of NATO's Standing Naval Forces and Maritime Security Operations.

Maritime Security Operations

During May and June 2019, 68 and 56 warships respectively, from France, Turkey, Spain, Greece, Canada, Albania, the Netherlands, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Germany took part in **Operation SEA GUARDIAN** in the Mediterranean, supported by flights of NATO Airborne Early Warning (AEW) and Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA). The AEW flights were provided by NATO's own assets, while the MPA flights were provided by Greece, Spain, Italy, Turkey, France, Portugal and USA. Submarines under NATO and national operational command have also provided critical support to this Maritime Security Operation.

Operation SEA GUARDIAN is an effective way for NATO to maintain maritime situational awareness in the Mediterranean, through the knowledge of the Maritime Pattern of Life and detecting anomalies to fight crime and counter terrorism at sea. A total of 402 Motor Vessels were hailed by NATO during May 2019 and 488 during June 2019.

Focused Operation 19-3 took place in the Western and Central Mediterranean from 13 to 28 June 2019, led by Commander Cardona on board Spanish frigate Reina Sofia and supported by warships from the UK and France, along with air assets and submarines.



Standing NATO Naval Maritime Forces

Standing Naval Maritime Group 1, led from USS Gravelly, participated in the NATO exercise BALTOPS after completing patrols in the Baltic and operational training activities. The Group is comprised of frigates and destroyers from the USA, the UK, Spain, Poland, and Turkey, as well as one auxiliary ship from Germany. The Group conducted opportunity training activities with the Swedish and Finnish Navies and visited Stockholm, Helsinki, Kiel and Harstad. After June, frigates and destroyers from the USA, the UK and Turkey will remain in the group.

Standing Naval Maritime Group 2, Task Unit 1, continues to support operations in the Aegean Sea, as the EU and Turkey strive to control migration. The Group is now led from German frigate FGS Hessen and consists of patrol vessels from Albania, Turkey, and Greece. The Group patrolled the areas assigned and sighted two migrant boats during May and three migrant boats during June, reporting the sightings to local authorities for further action.

Standing Naval Maritime Group 2, Task Unit 2, command of which was transferred from the Dutch frigate HNLMS Evertsen to HMCS Toronto on 15 June, continued participation in exercise MARE APERTO that ended on 10 May. Following the exercise, the Group operated in the Adriatic Sea, visited Split and Durres, and participated in exercise Joint Stars 2019 hosted by the Italian Navy in the waters of Tyrrhenian and Sardinia. Afterward, the Group patrolled the Ionian and Aegean Sea and visited Palermo, Souda Bay and Izmir.

Standing Naval Mine Counter Measures Group 1 is led from the Danish command vessel HDMS Thetis and also comprised of mine countermeasure vessels from the UK and Belgium. During May and June, the Group expanded to include Norwegian, Dutch, and German mine countermeasure vessels and visited Klaipeda, Gdynia and Bremerhaven. From 6 to 16 May, the Group participated in the exercise Open Spirit 2019 led by the Lithuanian Navy, and then joined Standing Naval Maritime Group 1 for BALTOPS, also visiting Kiel and Harstad.

Command of Standing NATO Maritime Group Two was formally transferred from Commodore Boudewijn Boots of the Royal Netherlands Navy to Commodore José Kurtz of the Royal Canadian Navy in a ceremony held aboard Royal Netherlands Navy frigate HNLMS Evertsen on 16 June 2019. The Group is now led from the Italian Vesuvio and includes a French mine countermeasure vessel. Turkish and Spanish mine countermeasure vessels left the Group in late May after participating in the Spanish Navy exercise MINEX around the Balearic Islands and the Italian Navy exercise MINEX in the Ionian Sea. The Group visited Palma and Catania in May and June and is currently visiting Izmir.

NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) Updates

The NSC Director attended the International Shipowners Security Forum (ISSF) at the Chevron headquarters in London on 24 April. Senior security representatives from the UK national authorities and several shipping organizations and companies were gathered to discuss maritime security matters of mutual interest.

From 6 to 10 May 2019, the NATO Shipping Working Group (NSWG) had its yearly meeting hosted by the Belgian Navy at the Navy Barracks in Bruges. The NSWG is attended by NATO- and Partner Nations and Commands, on this occasion also including participation from Brazil. The NSWG is tasked to initiate and develop standardization in order to enhance interoperability of NATO and Allied forces and to develop procedures for the cooperation with shipping. The chairmanship of the NSWG is informally linked to the position of Director of the NATO Shipping Centre, and at the conclusion of the meeting in Bruges, the Chairmanship was handed over from Commander (NOR Navy) Ben Lofstad to Captain (DNK Navy) Peter Tolderlund.

The NSC Director also attended a Symposium on Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea in the IMO headquarters in London on 4 June, where senior representatives from UK national authorities and several shipping organizations and companies gathered to discuss the situation and to improve maritime security in the area.

On 20 June, the NSC hosted the MARCOM Maritime Security Symposium (MMSS) in Northwood. Security issues in the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Guinea and the Gulf of Oman were discussed, including background information and possible solutions. Global Shipping Organizations, National Shipowner Associations, insurance clubs and companies were represented at the event.

The NSC continues to monitor the situation in the Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov and the impact the activities are having on shipping in the area. These reports and assessments are forwarded to SHAPE to support NATO strategic awareness.

Although it is outside the NATO area of responsibility, the NSC is closely monitoring the situation and recent incidents in the Persian Gulf and is establishing knowledge of the current situation in the area and also following the impact to the Shipping Industry.



Photo from the MARCOM Maritime Security Symposium on 20 June

Also outside the NATO area of responsibility, the NSC is closely monitoring the situation in the Gulf of Guinea. Several incidents have been reported to the NSC and promptly handled, including one incident that resulted in intervention by a Spanish frigate. The NSC is establishing as much knowledge of the current situation in the area as possible and following the impact to the Shipping Industry.

The NSC, in cooperation with the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD), continues to encourage all ships to report incidents of GPS jamming or other interference (i.e. rogue GSM-towers) in the Eastern Mediterranean. GPS Jamming has happened recently and is a threat to shipping security. The reporting enables MARCOM to maintain overall awareness of cyber issues that may affect safety and security of navigation.

Merchant ships are encouraged to report any suspicious activity in the Mediterranean Sea and broader North Atlantic Region, including the Baltic Sea, to support NATO's maritime situational awareness. The NSC is likely to approach shipping more directly in the future in such cases.

Peter Tolderlund

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