USN and RN elements in the Barents Sea

On 8 May US Naval Forces Europe-Africa / US Sixth Fleet Public Affairs reported that US guided-missile destroyers and a British frigate had departed the Barents Sea that day following seven days of Arctic operations.

The surface action group (SAG) comprised US 6th Fleet (C6F) Arleigh Burke-class Aegis destroyers USS Donald Cook (DDG 75), USS Porter (DDG 78), USS Roosevelt (DDG 80), fast combat support ship USNS Supply (T-AOE 6), and Royal Navy’s HMS Kent (F 78) entered the Barents Sea on 4 May to conduct training and operations in the challenging conditions of the Arctic region. Along with the warships, US Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft (MPRA) and US Air Force RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft provided support during training and operational events.

In the words of Admiral James G Foggo III, Commander, Naval Forces Europe and Africa: ‘The Arctic is an important region and our naval forces operate there, including the Barents Sea, to ensure the security of commerce and demonstrate freedom of navigation in that complex environment. Our operations with the U.K. demonstrate the strength, flexibility, and commitment of the NATO Alliance to freedom of navigation throughout the Arctic and all European waters.’

As the Arctic continues to become more accessible to maritime traffic, naval proficiency in the region is critical to regional security, global commerce, and American national interests. The SAG’s operations provided the opportunity for Sailors to demonstrate their readiness for sustained Arctic operations in the unique and challenging environment.

Captain Joseph A Gagliano, Commodore, Combined Task Force 65, and commander, Destroyer Squadron 60 added: ‘It was great to be operating in the Barents Sea again. This is what it means to be a global Navy, sailing wherever international law allows. And it is even better that we returned with the Royal Navy by our side.’

The joint SAG, made up of approximately 1,200 Sailors from the two nations, conducted high-end, sustained operations, combined and divisional surface warfare tactics, refined coordinated operations with US Air Forces Europe, and reinforced Arctic communications capabilities, while maintaining proficiency in critical warfare areas.
Admiral Foggo added: ‘NATO Allies are working together to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, even as the Alliance continues to deliver credible and effective deterrence and defense throughout the European region.

‘Our ability to conduct maritime operations hasn’t been undermined, our forces remain ready and engaged in our critical work to ensure maritime trade continues and vital supplies are able to move where they are needed the most.’

With support from Supply, the warships maintained continuous operations through replenishments-at-sea. Conducting these complex evolutions allow US and allied ships to remain uninterrupted on station for long periods.

In conclusion Admiral Foggo commented: ‘These operations demonstrate the importance of logistics, the sixth domain of warfare, especially when operating during a pandemic, in the seventh domain.

‘We are seeing the importance of presence, as we work together to fight the coronavirus pandemic. Working with our allies and through our presence, we continue to send a power message – we’re open for business.’

Porter, Donald Cook, and Kent recently completed a bilateral naval anti-submarine warfare exercise in the Norwegian Sea. A US nuclear-powered submarine and a P-8A also participated in the exercise. This exercise reinforced the combined training that the nations received last month while participating in the UK’s Submarine Command Course.

Commander Craig Trent, CO of USS Porter (DDG 78) and surface action group commander (SAG) stated: ‘These Arctic operations in the Barents Sea demonstrate the ability of our crews to execute every mission in any maritime environment.

‘Our steady exercises, operations and presence in waters surrounding Europe and Africa have prepared our ships to work seamlessly with each other and our allies to provide maritime security.’

It was reported that US ships in the SAG have been operating with partner nations throughout European seas over the last month. Porter conducted a communications and manoeuvring exercise with Romania in the Black Sea on 13 April. Following her departure from the Black Sea, Porter rendezvous’d with Supply and Roosevelt to work with the Italian Navy in the Mediterranean and with the French Navy in the Atlantic on 27 April to conduct interoperability exercises.
Prior to joining the SAG, *Donald Cook* operated in the Baltic Sea, in company with elements of the Lithuanian Navy.

It is has been emphasised that Allied and partner navies must remain proficient in all operating environments to ensure the continued security and access to the seas. This is especially critical in the Arctic, where the austere weather demands constant vigilance and practice.

Of their tasks Ensign Jeremy Shockley, *Roosevelt*’s Assistant Chief Engineer reflected: ‘*Usually, having the midnight watch is tough as you are straining to see contacts and obstructions in the water, but it doesn’t get dark here, it just gets dim as the sun dips below the horizon for a few hours and then it’s sunrise again.*’ said.

These warships are applying lessons learned from recent operations in the Arctic while increasing their navies’ abilities in cold weather conditions. To successfully operate in the region Sailors must master navigation, logistics, and communications in the harsh environment.

The SAG operations in the High North are the latest in a series of US ships operating in the Arctic Circle. In 2018, elements of the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group and the USS Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group operated above the Arctic Circle in support of NATO exercise Trident Juncture.

In 2019, Donald Cook and a SAG from US 2nd Fleet led by USS *Normandy* (CG 60) and USS *Farragut* (DDG 99), also operated separately north of the Arctic Circle.

To quote Captain Gagliano again: ‘*One of the best attributes of our surface force is that we can aggregate at will, transitioning seamlessly from independent ships to coordinated operations.*

‘*Our interoperability with our allies is so good that we can deploy multinational naval forces with minimal notice. That's the real power of NATO.*’

The three US destroyers, based out of Rota, Spain, support NATO’s integrated air missile defence architecture and maritime security operations throughout the global commons in Africa and Europe. Commander, Task Force 65 ships consistently demonstrate the flexibility to operate throughout the waters of Europe and Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Arctic Circle, exhibiting a mastery of the maritime domain.
With HQ in Naples the US 6th Fleet conducts the full spectrum of joint and naval operations, often in concert with allied and interagency partners, in order to advance US national interests and security and stability in Europe and Africa.

Picture captions
On 5 May the RN’s Type-23 Duke-class frigate HMS Kent (F78), front, and the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) conduct joint operations to ensure maritime security in the Arctic Ocean.

US Navy photo courtesy of the Royal Navy
By Royal Navy Photographer Dan Rosenbaum

The guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) conducts a replenishment at sea with the fast combat support ship USNS Supply (T-AOE 6).

US Navy photo Yeoman 3rd Class Anthony Nichols/
Released USN ©