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High-end Warfare: U.S., NATO End Live-fire Space War/Star Wars Drills in Arctic

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"Several live-fire and simulated engagements against subsonic, supersonic, and ballistic targets demonstrations will take place during the exercise, including the first defensive live-intercept of a ballistic missile using multinational data systems to track the target. The multinational cooperation for a ballistic missile intercept in outer space is truly remarkable and proves the Alliance's commitment to interoperability and defence."

The fourth iteration of the Formidable Shield air and missile defense exercise started off Scotland's Hebrides islands on May 15 and ended in Norway's Arctic North on June 3. Europe's largest anti-missile exercise, it was led by U.S. Sixth Fleet and conducted by Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO. The two share a commander, Vice Admiral Eugene Black III. (As NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe and the commander of U.S. European Command are the same.)

Properly called Exercise At-Sea Demo/Formidable Shield (ASD/FS) 2021, it included 16 ships, 31 aircraft, and some 3,300 military personnel from ten NATO nations in the live training events: Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the U.S.

The deputy commander of Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO), Royal Navy Rear Admiral James Morley, said of the exercise that it was "one of the most complex and intensive integrated Air and Missile Defense events ever undertaken in the European theatre." And he added that it "has taken place across the maritime, air, and space domains, involving 150 warfare training serials and live events, demonstrating the resolve and capability of the NATO Alliance to provide collective defence."

The reference to space domains was not insignificant as agencies, commands and organizations participating in the two-and-a-half week maneuvers included the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, NATO's new Space Command, U.S. Navy's Task Group Integrated Air and Missile Defense, STRIKFORNATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defense, NATO's Ballistic Missile Defense Operations Centre at the Allied Air Command in Ramstein, Maritime Theater Missile Defense Forum and Program Executive Office for Integrated Warfare Systems. The U.S. Marine Corps 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted its first High Mobility Artillery

Rocket System launch in Europe during the exercise.

The flagship for the exercise was the Spanish frigate ESPS *Cristóbal Colón.* Referring to its name (Christopher Columbus in English) and improving on the claim by the STRIKFORNATO deputy commander, above, Task Force 64's commander, Jonathan Lipps, who led the exercise, said:

> "Like the namesake of this warship, you will lead an international armada at sea that will make history conducting the world's most complex joint and combined integrated air and missile defense exercise across the Maritimes. From below sea level to low earth orbit, you will reinforce the importance of mission command across all domains in high-end warfare…."

The exercise shifted to and ended at the Andøya Space (formerly named Andøya Space Center and Andøya Rocket Range) rocket launch site, rocket range and spaceport in the Arctic region of northern Norway.

One drill featured the U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Paul Ignatius* and the Royal Netherlands Navy's air defense command frigate *HNLMS De Zeven Provinciën*, with the first launching a Standard Missile-3 interceptor missile to destroy a live medium-range ballistic target. The event was described by the American military as one "mark[ing] a major milestone in the scientific effort to integrate allied space sensors into NATO IAMD, comprising rigorous engineering efforts between several countries and major contributions from the U.S. Missile Defense Agency (MDA)."

Also, U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer *USS Roosevelt* conducted a dual-layer Integrated Air and Missile Defense scenario employing two Standard Missile-3s and two Standard Missile-2s against a simulated medium-range ballistic target and what was referred to as a live raid of subsonic targets. U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer *USS Ross* conducted an air defense engagement using an SM-2 against a subsonic target as well. New systems were tested against "supersonic high-diving targets plummeting…at speeds in excess of 12,000mph – 16 times the speed of sound."

Spain's *Cristóbal Colón*, the Royal Norwegian Navy guided-missile frigate *HNoMS Fridtjof Nansen* and the Dutch *De Zeven Provinciën* frigate fired Evolved Sea Sparrow Missiles.

The U.S. has 62 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers like those mentioned above and 22 Ticonderoga-class guided-missiles cruisers equipped with the AEGIS Weapons System and capable of launching Standard Missile-3s. The land-based version, part of a program known as Aegis Ashore or European Phased Adapted Approach, have been stationed in Romania and are scheduled to be deployed to Poland as well. Four (soon to be six) Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers are based at the Naval Station Rota in Spain under joint U.S. Navy-NATO arrangements.

A comprehensive sea- and land-based system of hundreds, ultimately thousands, of Standard Missile-3's deployed by the U.S. and its allies creates the possibility of employing them for the second phase of a first-strike attack (conventional or nuclear) against the military assets of an adversary (e.g., Russia, China, Iran, North Korea); that is, using them to neutralize any missiles not destroyed in the first phase.

The Missile Defense Agency's mission director for Exercise At-Sea Demo/Formidable Shield

said of the exercise: “The MDA is dedicated to furthering the warfighter’s understanding of the ballistic missile threat, and how to negate it.…No training can replace actually detecting, tracking, and negating a ballistic missile. The more exercises of this type MDA can support, the more confident and proficient the warfighter will become in using our defensive weapon systems.”

In the words of U.S Navy Commodore Brett Lefever, Deputy Integrated Missile Defence branch at STRIKFORNATO, ahead of the event: “Several live-fire and simulated engagements against subsonic, supersonic, and ballistic targets demonstrations will take place during the exercise, including the first defensive live-intercept of a ballistic missile using multinational data systems to track the target. The multinational cooperation for a ballistic missile intercept in outer space is truly remarkable and proves the Alliance’s commitment to interoperability and defence.”

In short the exercise was used to test U.S. and NATO antiballistic missile capabilities. With nothing short of what the STRIKFORNATO official celebrated as a ballistic missile intercept in outer space.

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Featured image: Standard Missile-3 Block IIA launch (Source: Anti-bellum)

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