

Burke: Keflavik Important to North Atlantic Operations



Sailors assigned to Patrol Squadron (VP) 4 shovel snow away from the port engine of a squadron P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft on the the apron of Keflavik Air Base, Jan. 03, 2020. U.S. Navy / Lt. Cmdr. Ryan McFeely

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s top admiral in Europe highlighted the importance of using the airfield in Keflavik, Iceland, in the current era of great power competition, as a base for maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft.

“We need to operate there,” said Adm. Robert Burke, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa, speaking Feb. 2 at a webinar sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, funded by Huntington Ingalls Industries. “There were 12 P-8s on the ground when I

was there at the end of October. They were very busy. I can tell you it wasn't an exercise and it's not hard to imagine why."

Burke referred the listener to 2019 when "there were open-source reports of 10 Russian submarines operating in the Arctic and the North Atlantic. From there, they head into the Atlantic and they go there to exercise their ability to hold Europe and the continental United States at risk with land-attack cruise missiles."

The admiral pointed out that "[s]ome of those missiles, in the not-to-distant future, will be capable of hypersonic speeds. That's a real threat and that's something we have to be ready to address."

The international airport in Keflavik was the site of a U.S. naval air station during the Cold War, with an ASW operations center. A squadron of P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft was deployed there on a rotational basis. A detachment of U.S. Air Force F-15 Eagle fighters also was present to intercept Soviet bombers that ventured over the Atlantic.

Iceland has no armed forces other than a coast guard, but Keflavik represents an important contribution to the U.S. and NATO's capabilities with Keflavik's airfield.

With mobile operations command centers, the Navy rapidly can deploy one to Keflavik to stand up an ASW command, control, and analysis capability for deployed maritime patrol aircraft.

Two other North Atlantic nations are acquiring P-8A aircraft. The U.K. Royal Air Force already is operating its new P-8s, having reconstituted a maritime patrol capability after the 2011 retirement of its Nimrod aircraft. The first P-8A for the Royal Norwegian Air Force is now under construction to replace its P-3 aircraft. Other NATO nations including Germany, Spain, Portugal and Greece operate P-3s, and France and Italy operate

Atlantique aircraft.

Burke praised the P-8 for its “incredible legs, incredible capabilities.”

While the Russian submarine force is much smaller than its peak during the Soviet era, it has continued to push development of modern submarines, now in their sixth generation.