Russia’s Increasing Aggression in Black Sea Region Disturbs U.S. Naval Commander

The Italian frigate Virginio Fasan (F 591) approaches the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ross (DDG 71) for a replenishment-at-sea approach drill in the Black Sea during the Bulgarian-led Exercise Breeze, July 15, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Claire DuBois*

ARLINGTON, Va. — Russia’s aggressive behavior during a recent multinational exercise in the Black Sea, hosted by the United States and Ukraine, underscores Moscow’s increasingly provocative actions in the air and at sea, says the commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe and Africa.

For nearly a decade, a resurgent Russia has mounted a huge military buildup in the North Atlantic, the Eastern

Mediterranean, the Arctic and the Black Sea. “They want to be in control of those waters, for their own exclusive use,” said Adm. Robert Burke, adding “We can’t cede that to the Russians.”

Noting that Russian aircraft overflew U.S. Navy ships at dangerously low altitudes during the recently ended Exercise Sea Breeze 21, Burke said they were creating a tactical risk that could morph into a strategic issue. “And that’s a big concern with this increasing aggressiveness,” he said, adding “We’re not going to flinch and we’re not going to take the bait.”

Sea Breeze, a long-standing exercise in the Black Sea to enhance interoperability and capability among participating forces in the region, has grown from eight participants in 1997 to 32 this year. The 2021 exercise included 5,000 personnel, 32 ships and 40 aircraft supplied by from 17 NATO members, U.S. allies like Australia, and partner nations like Sweden and Senegal.

The admiral praised U.S. and allied commanders for their controlled reaction to Russian belligerence. “When a strike aircraft overflies a destroyer at 100 feet altitude, right over top, our COs are making a judgment call of whether that strike fighter is on an attack profile or not,” said Burke, who is also commander of Allied Joint Forces Command Naples. “It could be argued that they’re baiting us into shooting first. We’re not going to do that first without provocation, but I’m also not going to ask my commanding officers to take the first shot on the chin,” he added without elaboration.

When officials notified Russian authorities about their plans three weeks before Sea Breeze 21 began, the Russians reacted by closing off half of the western part of the Black Sea and announcing their own ship bombing exercise. “If it wasn’t so threatening, it would be laughable,” Burke told a livestreamed edition of the United States Navy Memorial’s SITREP speakers

series July 20.

Such “extreme bullying” at other times has led some smaller nations to avoid those areas, “which is exactly the behavior the Russians are seeking.” Burke said. China acted similarly in the South China Sea, he said, building “stationary aircraft carriers” on coral islands where ownership is disputed by neighboring countries. Elsewhere, he said, the Chinese Communist Party’s Belt and Road Initiative is seeking to expand its influence through infrastructure projects – with financial strings attached – in 52 of Africa’s 54 nations, while Chinese entities hold a controlling interest in 15 European ports.

USS Ross Completes 11th Patrol in U.S. 6th Fleet, Returns to Rota, Spain

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ross (DDG 71) returned to Naval Station Rota, Spain, following completion of its 11th Forward-Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) patrol in the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of operations, July 26, 2021. *U.S. NAVY*

ROTA, Spain – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ross (DDG 71) returned to Naval Station Rota, Spain, following completion of its 11th Forward-Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) patrol in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, July 26, 2021, Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Claire DuBois of the U.S. 6th Fleet said in a July 27 release.

Ross departed Rota on April 9, marking the beginning of patrol 11 to conduct naval operations in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations in support of U.S. national security interests in Europe and Africa.

Patrol 11 began with Ross's participation in Fleet Operational Sea Training (FOST), a two-week British-led exercise designed to evaluate and increase the warfighting abilities of any allied navies who participate. During FOST, Ross Sailors participated in multiple general quarters drills, man-

overboard drills, combat simulations, and other training scenarios.

After FOST, Ross moved on to the North Sea, and then on to the Hebrides Range to take part in Exercise At-Sea Demo/Formidable Shield (ASD/FS) in early June. During ASD/FS, Ross fired an SM-2 missile at an air target simulating incoming fire, proving the ship's ability to conduct ballistic-missile defense.

"Our Sailors have met every challenge to meet mission and successfully complete patrol," said Cmdr. John D. John, commanding officer of Ross. "I'm excited to get everyone home safe so we can reconnect with our loved ones."

After successful completion of ASD/FS, Ross moved south and joined the Moroccan-led exercise African Lion. This included multiple surface navigation exercises, as well as several weapon shoots with participating ships.

Following African Lion, Ross transited to the Mediterranean Sea, and made a stop in Souda Bay, Greece. In Greece, Sailors had a few days to experience their first liberty port since the COVID-19 pandemic began, exploring the area while adhering to local COVID-19 safety restrictions.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to see the world again and experience different cultures," said Quartermaster 2nd Class Zach Lober, "It was one of the reasons I joined the Navy, so I'm happy to have that part of the experience back."

In late June, Ross departed Greece and transited to the Black Sea, making a stop in Odesa, Ukraine to mark the beginning of its participation in Exercise Sea Breeze.

During Sea Breeze, Ross conducted surface navigation exercises, weapon shoot evolutions, and many other exercises with participating ships from 30 countries. Ross Sailors spent the Fourth of July in port, celebrating Independence Day and

recognizing Ukranian Navy Day with other Sea Breeze participants. Ross also had the opportunity to host Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenksy aboard the ship for a tour.

“It was an honor to pipe the president of Ukraine on board,” said Boatswain’s Mate 3rd Class Sean Van Horn, who was part of the receiving line. “It was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and I am privileged to have done it.”

After Sea Breeze, Ross moved on to Varna, Bulgaria, to begin participating in the Bulgarian-led exercise Breeze. During Breeze, Ross was able to take part in various exercises, including surface navigation, with 13 other NATO Allies and partners.

Following Breeze, Ross transited back to the Mediterranean Sea, beginning its journey back to Rota for the end of patrol. During this time, Ross conducted qualifications, firing its Mark 45 5-inch gun and crew-served weapons, and held a “steel beach” picnic on the ship’s flight deck.

Ross, forward-deployed to Rota, Spain, operates in support of U.S. national security interests in the Sixth Fleet area of operations.

Four U.S. Navy destroyers are based in Rota, Spain, and assigned to Commander, Task Force 65 in support of NATO’s Integrated Air Missile Defense architecture. These Forward-Deployed Naval Forces-Europe ships have the flexibility to operate throughout the waters of Europe and Africa, from Cape of Good Hope to the Arctic Circle, demonstrating their mastery of the maritime domain.

Logos Technologies Successfully Flight Tests SPRITE Multi-Sensor Pod for ONR

Logos Technologies' SPRITE pod. *LOGOS TECHNOLOGIES*

FAIRFAX, Va. – Logos Technologies LLC announced July 27 that, with the successful test flight of the Spectral and Reconnaissance Imaging for Tactical Exploitation (SPRITE) pod earlier this year, has met all the goals of its five-year contract with the Office of Naval Research.

A U.S. military version of the company's platform-agnostic Multi-Modal Sensor Pod (MMSP), SPRITE was flown on a manned Cessna 337 Super Skymaster.

"We had SPRITE flying between four and five hours a day for a whole week," said Chris Stellman, lead principal scientist and program manager for Logos Technologies. "We were able to use

SPRITE’s sensor modalities to detect signatures of interest, process that data on the fly, and stream it down in real time to users on the ground.

The SPRITE pod houses an ultra-light Logos Technologies RedKite WAMI sensor, a high-definition spotter camera, and commercial shortwave infrared hyperspectral sensor. In addition, SPRITE contained a palm-sized Multi-Modal Edge Processor (MMEP), also developed by Logos Technologies, to process the deluge of raw data being produced by all three sensors, in real time, and cross cue between the sensors.

The MMEP is the brains of the SPRITE pod,” Stellman said. “It’s what makes data actionable to the warfighter and searchable to the analyst.”

Though the Office of Naval Research contract required a specific set of sensors, the MMSP is very flexible regarding the payloads it can house. For example, instead of a hyperspectral sensor, it could include LIDAR or a signals intelligence package, depending on customer need.

MDA Test Intercepts Target with SM-6 Missiles

The U.S. Missile Defense Agency, in cooperation with the U.S. Navy, conducted Flight Test Aegis Weapon System 33 in the broad ocean area northwest of Hawaii, July 24. *U.S. NAVY*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Missile Defense Agency, in cooperation with the U.S. Navy, conducted Flight Test Aegis Weapon System 33 in the broad ocean area northwest of Hawaii, July 24, the agency said in a release.

The objective of FTM-33 was to intercept a raid of two Short-Range Ballistic Missile targets with four Standard Missile-6 Dual II missiles.

Based on initial observations, one target was successfully intercepted. At this time, destruction of the second target cannot be confirmed.

FTM-33 was the most complex mission executed by MDA (a raid of two test targets and two SM-6 Dual II salvos consisting of four missiles). It was the third flight test of an Aegis BMD-equipped vessel using the SM-6 Dual II missile.

FTM-33, originally scheduled for December 2020, was delayed due to restrictions in personnel and equipment movement

intended to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Program officials will continue to evaluate system performance based upon data obtained during the test.

The firing ship for the test was the USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114).

The SM-6 Dual II missile is designed for use in the terminal phase of a short-to- medium-range ballistic missile trajectory.

USS Mustin Returns to San Diego after 15 Years of Service in Japan

Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89) returned to San Diego, July 22, after 15 years serving in the Forward Deployed Naval Forces in Japan. *U.S. NAVY*

SAN DIEGO – Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89) returned to San Diego, July 22, after 15 years serving in the Forward Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) in Japan, commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, said in a July 23 release.

Mustin executed a change of station to the United States to conduct a planned depot modernization period and will be replaced by Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114), which will depart its homeport of Everett, Washington.

"Planned maintenance availabilities like these are critical to ensuring ships are maintained and equipped to perform combat-ready tasking when called upon and achieve their expected service life," said Cmdr. Robert Briggs, commanding officer of

USS Mustin.

Mustin arrived in Yokosuka, Japan in July 2006 and has participated in multiple humanitarian efforts in the Indo-Pacific region while assigned as a FDNF ship. In 2008, as part of USS Essex Amphibious Ready Group, Mustin provided aid to Myanmar in response to Cyclone Nargis. The ship earned the Humanitarian Service Medal for response to the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami as well as Typhoon Haiyan. Also in 2011, at the request of the government of Thailand, Mustin provided aerial surveillance support following flooding.

While taking precautions against COVID-19 at the onset of the global pandemic, Mustin successfully participated in a number of training exercises and operations including Integrated Ship and Air Team Training, Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training, Freedom of Navigation Operations, and carrier strike force operations with USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) and USS Nimitz (CVN 68).

“I couldn’t be more proud of Mustin’s accomplishments,” said Briggs. “As we transition into the maintenance phase over the following months, the crew is focused on upgrading the combat systems and engineering plant, and eventually returning this warship back to sea.”

Commissioned in San Diego nearly 18 years ago on July 26, 2003, Mustin spent three years assigned to Destroyer Squadron 23 as part of U.S. 3rd Fleet before joining the FDNF as part of Destroyer Squadron 15 based out of Yokosuka, Japan, with U.S. 7th Fleet.

Forward deployed naval forces improve the ability for the U.S. to protect interests while reassuring their friends and allies in the region of their commitment to peace, stability, and prosperity with unfettered access to the sea lanes for all nations in the Pacific.

Sea-Air-Space 2021 Prequel: Post-Columbia Sub Construction Capacity Will Help Relieve SSN Shortage

An artist's rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines. *U.S. NAVY*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The nation's submarine construction capacity built up for the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) program eventually will help the U.S. Navy to increase production of attack submarines (SSNs) to alleviate a shortage of attack boats, according to Navy and shipbuilding officials.

Under current planning, the Navy's force structure studies have shown a need 70 SSN. The service currently fields about 50 SSNs, which are heavily used by regional combatant commanders, being only able to meet about 50% of their deployment requirements.

The Navy is building two Virginia-class attack submarines per year, and soon both, in the Block V version, will be equipped with the Virginia Payload Module, which will add cruise missile capacity and hypersonic missile capability to the force, among other payloads.

The Navy would like to procure three SSNs per year but currently is constrained by budget capacity to two per year while the Columbia-class SSBN is under construction. The Columbia program is a once-in-a-generation recapitalization program for the nation's strategic deterrent force.

"We're working very closely with industry to make sure we're making the right long-term decisions, said Rear Adm. Bill Houston, director, Undersea Warfare, Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, who has been selected to be the Navy's next commander, Submarine Forces, speaking in a pre-recorded webinar of the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space Prequel.

"We also have to look at it from a budget aspect [and] maintenance capability," Houston said. "What our concern is that if you go to three [SSNs] per year in trying to peak out [the submarine force] with Virginia – with a 33-year life of ship – when you start building three per year, you're ending up with a force structure of 99. So, as we're reconstituting Columbia, and building two Virginias per year, when [construction of] the last Columbia hull commences in '35, we're going to have significant capacity then. So, we have the capability to go to three per year right now. The issue is that we've got Columbia under construction, so we're just doing that balancing right now. Working with industry right now to make sure that stability that's out there for

[submarine builders], we're trying to avoid those peak/troughs.

"As part of our private [shipyard submarine maintenance] plan, that workforce is highly skilled and we can't go from periods when we have the private industry doing maintenance and then it's not doing maintenance, because that is a fragile skillset," he said.

Houston pointed out that stability in work orders is key to shipyard health and performance.

"We're capable of going to three Virginias [per year] right now, [but] it would impact Columbia, so we're concentrating on doing the Columbia and two Virginias per year," he said. "We're looking [at] how we can get up to three, but we're sure that when that last Columbia hull is under construction, we're going to have significant capacity."

Houston noted that a Block V Virginia SSN displaces 10,000 tons submerged, equating to about half that of the Columbia SSBN, so every Columbia equates to two Virginia SSNs in displacement. Accordingly, with one Columbia and two Block V Virginias under construction, "we're essentially building the equivalent of four Virginias," he said.

"So, the capacity is there," he said. "It's more about the stability and avoiding the peaks and troughs."

"I think our industrial base is somewhat fragile as we've gone from low-rate production in the 90s to now a two-per-year Virginia, a two-plus-one Virginia and Columbia," said Kevin Graney, president of General Dynamics Electric Boat, whose company, teamed with Huntington Ingalls Newport News Shipbuilding, is building the Columbia-class SSBN. "That's requiring us to bring in an awful lot of new suppliers across the industrial base in order to support that."

Graney also said Electric Boat has been investing in

additional facilities including construction halls and laid-out space in Groton, Connecticut, and Quonset Point, Rhode Island; upgrading a floating drydock from which the Columbia will be launched; and purchasing a new transport barge. The company has invested “about $250 million in training programs over the last five years and we’re developing active learning shipyards within the shipyards that have proven effective in improving our proficiency.”

Navy Orders Quickstrike-Extended Range Glide Kits for Sea Mines

A Quick Strike extended range mine hangs from a B-52 on

Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, as part of Valiant Shield 18, Sept. 16, 2018. *U.S. AIR FORCE / Senior Airman Zachary Bumpus*
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has awarded Boeing a contract for the design and production of wing glide kits for Quickstrike-Extended Range (QS-ER) aerial-delivered sea mines.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded the $58.3 million contract to Boeing for the design and production of non-functional wing glide kits, glide kit prototypes articles and glide kit shipping containers, according to a 20 July Defense Department announcement.

The banded-on kits will be designed to convert Quickstrike aerial-delivered sea mines into Quickstrike-Extended Range variants. Upon launch, the wings of kits extend and provide a glide capability to the mines that extend their drop range and provide a protective standoff range from enemy defenses to the launching aircraft. The mines will be able to glide approximately 40 nautical miles from the launching aircraft when dropped from 35,000 feet.

In addition to the wing kits, the QS-ER will be equipped with the precision-guidance kit used by the Joint Direct-Attack Munition. The QS-ER also is equipped with sensors – including acoustic, magnetic and seismic – to detect passing ships and submarines.

Both the Navy and Air Force have aircraft that can deliver mines, including the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter and B-52 Stratofortress heavy bomber. The mine-delivery capability is expected to extend to the Navy's P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, which has replaced the mining-capable P-3 Orion.

U.S. interest in offensive mining has increased in recent years in the era of great power competition and the increasing

naval capabilities of China and Russia.

Navy’s APL 67 Sails Away from Pascagoula, Bound for Japan Base

The Navy’s newest berthing barge, Auxiliary Personnel Lighter (APL) 67 sailed away from VT Halter Marine’s shipyard this week en route to Naval Base San Diego. APL 67 will eventually be delivered to Yokosuka, Japan. *NAVAL SEA SYSTEMS COMMAND*

PASCAGOULA, Miss. – The Navy’s newest berthing barge, Auxiliary Personnel Lighter (APL) 67 sailed away from VT Halter Marine’s shipyard this week en route to Naval Base San

Diego, the Program Executive Office–Ships said in a July 21 release. APL 67 will eventually be delivered to Yokosuka, Japan.

APLs are 82-meter-long barges that can berth up to 611 people, 74 officers and 537 enlisted personnel. Mess seating is available for 224 enlisted personnel and 28 officers in 20-minute intervals, allowing food service for 1,130 personnel to have three meals a day.

APLs are equipped with offices, classrooms, washrooms, laundry facilities, a medical treatment facility, a barber shop and a fitness center.

“The modern APLs make the lives of our Sailors easier while their ships are in port for maintenance or training events.” John Lighthammer, acting program manager, Support Ships, Boats and Craft, Program Executive Office Ships. “We look forward to continuing to get these vessels delivered to the fleet to provide support while our Sailors focus on mission.”

VT Halter Marine is in production on APL 68 and three other APLs.

Surface Boss: Navy Considering Light Amphibious Warships for Junior Officer Command

The Cyclone-class coastal patrol ship USS Tornado (PC 14) conducts a man overboard drill Sept. 16, 2020. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Dan Serianni*

ARLINGTON, Va. — With the Navy planning on decommissioning its remaining Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships over the next two years, the opportunities for junior officers to command ships early in their careers are drying up. A new ship now being planned for the fleet may provide a solution to the problem.

Most Navy warships — destroyers, littoral combat ships (LCSs), amphibious transport dock ships and dock landing ships — are commanded by surface warfare officers with the rank of commander. The forthcoming Constellation-class frigate likely will be the same. Cruisers are commanded by captains who previously have commanded a smaller ship.

In an earlier era, such as World War II, many small warships, such as destroyer escorts, were skippered by lieutenant commanders. Antelope-class patrol gunboats during the Vietnam War were commanded by lieutenants. Today the Coast Guard has many ocean-going cutters, such as Sentinel-class fast response

cutters, that give lieutenants early command experience. Command at sea for a junior officer has been shown to produce a more mature, experienced mariner accustomed to facing hard decisions that require sound judgement.

Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, commander, Naval Surface Forces, was speaking July 22 to reporters at a media roundtable when asked about the diminishing opportunities for lieutenants and lieutenant commanders to gain experience in command of a ship.

“I think about that a lot,” Kitchener said. “I’m a big believer in early command opportunity if you’re truly trying to develop good COs [commanding officers] at the O-5, O-6 [commander, captain] level. It really gives them a broader understanding of the force.

“One of the things we’re looking at right now, tracking pretty closely, is the Marine Corps’ initiative for the LAW, the Light Amphibious Warship,” he said. “I see that as perfect opportunity for early command for our future officers. I think that’s a great mission for them. Right now, I think on that we’re on track.”

Kitchener said he has “looked a little bit at about LCS, but not where I want to talk about my thoughts on it, but I do think the LAW is something perfectly suited for [early command].”

Sea-Air-Space 2021 Prequel:

Next-Gen Attack Sub Will Be Ultimate Apex Predator, Admiral Says

USS Seawolf, shown here in Japan in 2009. The Navy aims to combine the Seawolf-class's speed and payload, Virginia-class acoustics and sensors and Columbia-class longevity into the next-generation nuclear-powered attack submarine, the SSNX. *U.S. NAVY / Lt. Cmdr. Greg Kuntz*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy's next-generation nuclear-powered attack submarine, SSNX, will combine the best technologies and capabilities from earlier submarines to produce the finest hunter the world's oceans have ever seen, according to the service.

"We're looking at the ultimate apex predator for the maritime domain," said Rear Adm. Bill Houston, director, Undersea Warfare, Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, who has been selected to be the Navy's next commander,

Submarine Forces, speaking in a pre-recorded webinar of the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space Prequel.

Houston said the SSNX has "got to be faster, carry a significant punch, a bigger payload, a larger salvo rate. It's got to have acoustic superiority and simultaneously we're going to work on operational availability with respect to maintenance and life of the ship.

"We're taking what we already know how to do and combining it together," he said.

The Seawolf-class SSN, which entered service in the late 1990s, "has incredible speed and payload," he said. "We're going to take that Seawolf trait of payload and speed; we're going to take Virginia class acoustics and sensors; and then we're going to take Columbia's [nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine, or SSBN] operational availability and life of ship.

"We're going to put that all together [for SSNX] – the apex predator – because it really needs to be ready for major combat operations," he said. "It's going to need to be able to go behind enemy lines and deliver that punch that is going to really establish our primacy. It needs to be able to deny an adversary's ability to operate in their bastion regions."

Houston said that the Navy is "confident we're going to be able to do that because we've already built that on those platforms. We know how to do that. We just have to mesh it together with one platform. The systems we have, with electronic design, the tools, the stuff that we've already developed, we're going to capitalize on that."

The admiral explained that the SSNX is timed to capitalize on the 'very robust" design team for the Columbia-class SSBN when that program is ramping down amid production of the SSBNs.

"We'll be ramping up in SSNX because we'll have the design and

the RDT&E [research, development, test and evaluation] done," Houston said. "It takes a significant amount of time and effort for that RDT&E to develop this apex predator. That's what we're going to do over the next decade working on the systems for SSNX. We're very confident we can get there. It's a daunting task, but the team is more than capable of doing it."