Foggo: Fourth ‘Battle of the Atlantic’ Underway

Adm. James G. Foggo III, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, speaks at a Council on Competitiveness dinner in December. During a June 25 webinar, Foggo said the U.S. Navy and other NATO sea services need to extend operations in the North Atlantic to counter Russian and Chinese expansion. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kyle Moore

ARLINGTON, Va. — The admiral in command of U.S. Naval Force in Europe and Africa said the U.S. Navy and other NATO naval forces need to extend operations in the North Atlantic to ensure the security of Europe and North America.

“We’ve entered what I call the Fourth Battle of the Atlantic,” said Adm. James Foggo III, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa, speaking June 25 in a webinar sponsored by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, a U.K.-based think tank.

Foggo, soon to complete his assignment in Europe, pointed to the increased Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea and the increasing Russian and Chinese activity in the Arctic regions as a rising threat in an era of Great Power Competition.

He noted the deployment of 10 Russian submarines simultaneously in the North Atlantic in October 2019 — detected by Norwegian forces — and the Russian construction of an icebreaker armed with the Kalibr cruise missile.

Foggo said that NATO still has a competitive advantage over Russia but that advantage is under increasing challenge. He noted Russia is fielding an array of new submarine classes.

The admiral said that Russian forces have reopened some old Cold War Soviet bases in the Arctic and have deployed the

S-400 surface-to-air missile system in the region.

“NATO needs to be able to operate in the far north,” Foggo said, noting the recent NATO surface action group that operated in the Barents Sea and the October 2018 operation of the USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group, the first carrier strike group to operate above the Arctic Circle in two decades.

“As for the seas in the high north, you can expect to see us operating there and ensuring freedom of the seas and adherence to international norms and customs again and again,” he said.

“We need to look at new and innovative approaches to the Arctic,” he said, noting that Russia is not a member of the Newport Arctic Scholars Initiative – representing seven of the eight Arctic nations – at the Naval War College but should be. “We all benefit when we engage in dialogue – deter, defend, and dialogue.”

Foggo said the Newport group is trying to restart the Arctic Chiefs of Defense meetings, “establishing an Arctic maritime symposium to bring together key stakeholders in the region’s navies and coast guards to better understand the challenges of the regions.”

He said a Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), similar to the Incidents at Sea agreement and the 2014 CUES in the Far East, should be implemented in the Arctic to reduce escalatory mistakes.

“Russia has the right to defend itself and protect its interests, but it needs to exercise that right in accordance with international norms, customs and traditions,” Foggo said. “What I’ve seen from them so far give me pause. Russia already is attempting to use the rules of the Northern Sea Route to violate international maritime laws and protocols.”

He also said that “lest we forget, China also is seeking to

exploit the Arctic. They are eying investment opportunities that range from natural resource exploitation to future commercial maritime traffic potential of the ‘Polar Silk Road.’ With China having its own precedent for making bogus claims over international waterways in the South China Sea, it’s possible that China will also seek to bend the rules in their favor in the Arctic.”

Russia also has increased naval activity in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean in recent years, particularly in support of Syria in the latter case. Syrian-based Russian jet fighters have harassed U.S. Navy P-8A maritime patrol aircraft. The Kalibr cruise missiles that arm the Russian Kilo-class submarines are capable of striking any capital city in Europe. Russia also has deployed fighter aircraft in Libya, which is in the throes of civil war.