Joint Force Command Norfolk Kicks off Part 1 of NATO's Steadfast Defender 2021



Gen. David H. Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, visited Her Majesty's Ship Queen Elizabeth at sea off the coast of Flamborough, United Kingdom, in October, 2020. The HMS Queen Elizabeth strike group is one of 20 ships participating in the NATO maritime live exercise Steadfast Defender. *U.S. MARINE CORPS*

ATLANTIC OCEAN – A dynamic NATO maritime live exercise (LIVEX) has begun off the coast of Portugal with participation from 11 allied nations from North America and Europe as a part of Steadfast Defender 2021, May 20, Joint Force Command Norfolk said in a May 20 release.

The maritime LIVEX, led by Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFCNF), focuses on the rapid reinforcement of NATO's European allies by North American forces. Over 5,000 service members and 20 ships will be participating, including the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group HMS Queen Elizabeth; and 40 aircraft, including F-35B Joint Strike Fighters embarked.

"This challenging mission serves to demonstrate the unity of NATO allies and our readiness to deter conflict and aggression," said Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, Commander, JFCNF and U.S. 2nd Fleet. "It showcases our abilities, as an alliance, to maintain freedom of navigation, rule of law, and to effectively deter adversaries around the globe."

The size and scope of Steadfast Defender 2021 will test NATO's capability to secure the strategic and sea lines of communication and move large numbers of troops, equipment and supplies across the Atlantic and Europe in response to the exercise scenario. The prompt deployment of forces from North

America, their movement across the European Continent, and the integration of multinational troops will strengthen the readiness and deterrence posture of Allied Command Operations.

“The 21st Century transatlantic link is complex and technologically advanced,” said Royal Navy Rear Adm. Andrew Betton, deputy commander, JFCNF. “We will deter and defeat challenges to protect our economic prosperity and strategic lines of communication by keeping the arteries of commerce open on the world’s interconnected oceans. This exercise will demonstrate alliance unity and the importance of the transatlantic bond to allied security.”

There will be a serialized program over the course of two weeks that allows allied submarines, surface ships, and aircraft, to work together in a dynamic environment to prepare for challenging, high-end operations against near-peer competitors.

U.S. 2nd Fleet is acting as the Maritime Component Commander (MCC) for part one of Steadfast Defender 2021. Staff in support of the Maritime LIVEX embarked aboard the U.S. 6th Fleet command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20).

“The USS Mount Whitney plays a pivotal role with its communications capability,” said Rear Adm. Steve Waddell, Royal Canadian Navy and vice commander of U.S. 2nd Fleet, embarked aboard Mount Whitney as the leader of the MCC. “Second Fleet’s role as the MCC for the exercise demonstrates the United States’ ironclad commitment to NATO, and the U.S.’s dedication to further revitalize its relationship with the alliance.”

For added high-end complexity, the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group will integrate into the exercise as a testament to the seamlessness of our integration. USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and its ready group are providing reach to the MCC for the sea lines

of communication protection mission.

This exercise is also part of the maiden deployment of the United Kingdom's newest aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth. U.K. and U.S. F-35B Strike Fighters embarked, making it the world's largest air group of fifth generation jets. It will also be the largest deployment of Fleet Air Arm helicopters in a decade.

Steadfast Defender 2021, NATO's flagship exercise for 2021, is the first in a new series of long-planned NATO exercises to ensure that forces are trained, able to operate together and ready to respond to threats from any direction. This exercise will display the value of North America and Europe's interoperability and national security during challenging environments working together to keep nations safe in a more challenging security environment.

Steadfast Defender is comprised of three parts, made up of a series of linked exercises, taking place across the Atlantic and Europe. Part one is the maritime LIVEX focused on Transatlantic Reinforcement. Part two focuses on the enablement of Supreme Allied Commander Europe Area of Responsibility, Military Mobility and the Deployment of the NATO Response Force; and part three is when allies and partner nations will participate in various national exercises, including redeployment operations back to their home stations.

JFCNF is the only operational-level NATO command in North America and its establishment and location in Norfolk, Virginia, embodies the enduring trans-Atlantic commitment to collective security and defense of our allies and partners.

Participating units in the Maritime Live Exercise include: USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) as the command and control platform, with the embarked U.S. 2nd Fleet Staff; the Royal Navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group with embarked U.S. Marine

Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, and cooperative deployers, the Dutch HNLMS Evertsen (F805), USS The Sullivans (DDG 68); the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group; Standing NATO Marine Groups 1 and 2; as well as surface ships and aircraft from Portugal, Spain, France, Canada, Turkey, Germany and Italy.