# Strike Groups with Fifth-Generation Fighters Demonstrate Interoperability, Interchangeability

Ships from four nations take part in large scale formation sailing. On Aug. 24, the ships of the United Kingdom Carrier Strike Group, led by the Royal Navy flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth, met with the USS America, USS New Orleans, JS Ise and JS Asahi. Working with ships from the US Navy and the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force, a close formation was formed and on completion the Japanese ships broke away to conduct a ceremonial sail past. *ROYAL NAVY / Dan Rosenbaum*
A multinational task force is operating together as part of Large Scale Global Exercise 2021 (LSGE 21) in the Pacific.

The U.K. Carrier Strike Group 21 (CSG 21) and U.S. Expeditionary Strike Group 7 (ESG 7) are conducting multinational advanced aviation operations as part of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's LSGE 21.

According to Lt. Cmdr. Sherrie Flippin, spokesperson for ESG 7, "LSGE is a Joint Staff-sponsored exercise intended to rehearse the integration of defense activities in the Indo-Pacific Region. LSGE 21 is the first iteration of this event, involving the coordination of operations, activities, and investments in support of large-scale operational maneuvers.

"Currently, both HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier Strike Group and USS America Expeditionary Strike Group are conducting multinational advanced aviation operations to further enhance proficiency and capability to respond to shared challenges in the region."

LSGE 21 commenced Aug. 2 and is taking place throughout the

Indo-Pacific region. It will run until the end of this week.

Royal Navy Commodore Steve Moorhouse commands Carrier Strike Group 21 and is embarked aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth (R08). Rear Adm. Chris Engdahl is in command of ESG 7 and is aboard his flagship, USS America (LHA 6). They spoke to a small group of reporters by phone while they were underway on Tuesday.

HMS Queen Elizabeth leads the U.K.'s Carrier Strike Group and is operating a mixed air group of F-35Bs, with a squadron of U.K. jets and a squadron from the U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211 (VMFA 211), and is escorted by surface combatant escorts from the U.S. Navy, Dutch Navy and Royal Navy – HMS Defender (D36), USS The Sullivans (DDG 68), HMS Kent (F 78) and HNLMS Evertsen (F805).

"HMS Queen Elizabeth is the largest warship has ever built for the Royal Navy, and she was designed from the keel up to operate the F-35B aircraft," said Moorhouse. "We have our own 617 Squadron of Royal Air Force and Royal Navy personnel, as well as a U.S. Marine Corps Squadron. When we talk about a fifth-generation aircraft, we now have ourselves a fifth-generation aircraft carrier. This is the largest force of fifth-generation aircraft to put to sea anywhere in the world."

For LSGE 21, both strike groups have been contending with a multi-domain tactical scenario, from undersea to surface and air, as well as cyber and space, and to include the Marines going ashore and operation on land.

The USS America Expeditionary Strike Group (AMA ESG) is carrying Sailors and Marines from 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit with aviation support from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 262 (Reinforced), and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 12 (VMFA 12), along with staff members from Expeditionary Strike Group 7, Amphibious Squadron 11, and Destroyer Squadron

7, Tactical Air Control Squadron 12, Fleet Surgical Team 7 and an embarked helicopter detachment from Helicopter Sea-Combat Control Squadron 25. Also part of the ESG is USS New Orleans with personnel from Naval Beach Unit 7, Fleet Surgical Team 7, and additional personnel from the 31st MEU.

“For years we have operated with partners, and we’ve been able to talk and communicate. But what we’re really trying to do here is take it to the next level of integrating. Our Dutch and American warship are absolutely integral to our strike group operations,” Moorehouse said. “But as we operate with the America strike group, our aircraft – both fixed and rotary – have been flying and operating from each other’s deck seamlessly.”

“We extended the range of our fifth-generation fighters by moving them from one aircraft carrier to another. We recovered, rearmed, refueled and relaunched those planes to continue the mission,” Engdahl added.

Helping to sustain the task force at sea are the Royal Fleet Auxiliaries RFA Fort Victoria and RFA Tidespring. Furthermore, USS America is optimized for aviation operations and does not have a well deck for LCACs (landing craft air cushion) or LCUs (landing craft-utility) with amphibious vehicles inside.

“One of her attributes is the capacity for significantly more fuel than other amphibious ships – literally millions of gallons of fuel – which means she can supply fuel to the other ships in company,” Engdahl said.

Engdahl said LSGE 21 provided great practice to enhance the tactical abilities of the crews of the ships and the aviation units embark.

“It reflects the strength of our alliance, our partnerships, the ongoing military relationship. And the relationship that

we have is really bolstered by the interchangeability of the platforms that we employ.”