

U.S. Naval Aviation No Stranger to Southeast Europe Operations



A German air force A400M tanker, left, and an F/A-18E Super Hornet, attached to the “Sunliners” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 81, fly over the north Aegean Sea March 4. *ELECTRONIC ATTACK SQUADRON 137*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The skies over southeast Europe are not normally associated with the history of U.S. naval aviation, but the current patrols being flown over the region by Navy aircraft from the aircraft carrier U.S. Harry S. Truman are just the latest of at least three operations conducted by U.S. naval aviation in the region since the end of the Cold War. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the latest operations.

The USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group, with Carrier Air

Wing One (CVW-1) embarked in the carrier, is deployed to the Mediterranean, operating in support of NATO operations. The CSG has operated in the restrictive waters of the Adriatic Sea and the Aegean Sea on this deployment as well. The routine deployment also is showing the value of forward-deployed naval forces, available on short notice to respond to international crises.

“Conducting enhanced Air Policing from North Aegean waters further illustrates NATO’s continued ability to share and pool existing capabilities,” said Rear Adm. Curt Renshaw, commander, Carrier Strike Group Eight, in a March 7 release from the U.S. 6th Fleet. “We set out to prove that this dynamic employment of an aircraft carrier – in pretty restrictive waters – could be done, and in doing so, we have demonstrated the enduring U.S. commitment to Allies.”

U.S. carriers in the region provided air cover and close air support in the early-to-mid-1990s during Operations Deliberate Force and Deny Flight during the civil wars that broke out as Yugoslavia splintered eventually into seven separate nations.

In 1999, during Operation Allied Force, U.S. carriers in the Adriatic Sea launched strikes into Serbia and Kosovo to protect the Kosovars from Serbian action. Navy P-3C Orion patrol aircraft also launched Standoff Land-Attack Missiles against Serbian targets. Navy and Marine Corps EA-6B and F/A-18 aircraft operated from bases in Italy as well.

In recent years, Navy P-3, P-8, and EP-3 maritime patrol reconnaissance aircraft expanded patrols over the Black Sea region.

This week, CVW-1 aircraft, including F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters and EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft, have flown patrols in the region to defend NATO nations’ airspace as part of the NATO Response Force. The squadrons conducting the patrols include strike fighter squadrons

VFA-11, VFA-34, VFA-81 and VFA-211 as well as electronic attack squadron VAQ-137.

In recent weeks, CVW-1's squadrons also have flown in training exercises with the Romanian and Italian air forces.