U.S. Navy Showcases Operational Readiness, Flexibility in Exercise with Israel



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MEDITERRANEAN SEA –

U.S. naval forces participated in the largest-ever bilateral exercise between the United States and Israel last week, which culminated in a visit to aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) on Jan. 26 by senior military leaders from both

nations.

During exercise Juniper Oak 23-2, the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group operated in the Mediterranean Sea in support of U.S. 5th Fleet while still under the operational control of U.S. 6th Fleet. The command-and-control setup demonstrated the inherent flexibility of U.S. naval forces to simultaneously support operations in two regions – Europe and the Middle East.

“I’m proud of the effort from our team to support Juniper Oak, which showcased a high level of dedication, professionalism and readiness from our Sailors alongside our Israeli partners,” said Rear Adm. Dennis Velez, the strike group commander. “The command-and-control arrangement in Juniper Oak also highlighted the flexibility U.S. Navy carrier strike groups have to operate across multiple theaters of operation, and reflects the value the Navy provides to national security and regional stability anywhere in the world.”

The strike group coordinated complex, combined military operations with Israel on land, in the air and at sea, involving all elements of the team. Guided-missile destroyer USS Truxtun (DDG 103) participated in a live-fire drill in addition to a large-scale strike with air assets from Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 7.

Aircraft from CVW-7 involved in the strike exercise included 16 F/A-18 Super Hornets, four E/A-18G Growlers and two E-2D Hawkeyes. Four GBU-16 laser-guided bombs were expended on training targets.

Additionally, strike group ships also sailed in formation with Israeli vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean. Participating ships included George H.W. Bush, Truxtun, guided-missile cruiser USS Leyte Gulf (CG 55), guided-missile destroyer USS Nitze (DDG 94), and Israeli Navy Sa’ar corvettes INS Hanit, INS Eliat, INS Oz, and INS Tarshis. The Israeli Navy submarine

INS Dolphin also joined.

During Juniper Oak’s final day, top U.S. and Israeli military leaders flew out to George H.W. Bush to meet and discuss the results of the exercise as well as observe carrier flight operations.

“Juniper Oak has raised our level of planning and our level of implementation of combined operations,” said Israeli Lt. Gen. Hertzi Halevi, chief of the general staff for Israel Defense Forces. “It is always good to have our best partner here with us to learn from each other. This interoperability strengthens our ability to cope with a range of security challenges over the area.”

The U.S. 5th Fleet operating area includes 21 countries, the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb and Suez Canal.