
BRILLIANT MARINER EXERCISE

Den Helder hosts Nato Response Force (NRF)

Between 24th and 27th of march the harbour of Den Helder hosted nearly all the maritime participants of NRF-7 which stands for Nato Response Force 7. NRF-7 indicates the 7th rotation connected with a specific task and exercise to demonstrate the capabilities where it stands for and to test its own readiness. The idea of a rotational instrument for a quick reaction force was born on the Nato summit in 2000 in Prague. To act in major crises in a sufficient way Nato faced at that time the need to restructure to provide forces operating adequate capable of both fully military actions and interaction in complex humanitarian disasters and to be joined by the new members. Today the NRF livex exercises can also be joined by Partnership for Peace countries.

Brilliant Mariner

Totally 29 ships from Den Helder and 2 ships from Amsterdam left the main land of the Netherlands at march 27, 0400 hrs to the North Sea where they joined the exercise Brilliant Mariner 2006. However the exercise was conducted in the northern region of Europe some major elements were from countries of southern Europe in a fleet comprising also smaller elements of Scandinavian countries. The appearance of the Spanish aircraft carrier 'Principe d'Asturias' and the LPD's (Amphibious assault ships) 'Calicia' and 'Castilla' together with the Italian LPD 'San Giorgio' is a very unusual sight in the northern waters.

The exercise provides those members of Nato which are not used to operate in the northern area a great opportunity to train in this environment. When NRF rotations started three years ago Spain took a major role in NRF 1 & 2 and today Spain has in NRF 7 a major role again. With Command & Control Headquarters and Maritime Component Command (MCC) at land in Northwood, UK the NRF was actually lead from here. The staff elements at sea were mainly operating from the Spanish Principe d'Asturias and the Castillia, having very good facilities for that. Staff from SNMG-1 (Standing NRF Maritime Group 1), previously called STANAVFORLANT (Standard Nato Force Atlantic) was operating from the Canadian HCMS 'Athabaskan' and staff from SNMCMG-1 (Standing NRF Mine Countermeasures Group 1) from the German FGS Rhein.

Joint exercise

A NRF rotation period is spread over 6 months. Between 24-03-2006 and 06-04 2006 the first part in NRF-7 started with Brilliant mariner 2006 in a preparation phase. Brilliant mariner 2006 was set up as a main livex exercise to train and certificate for combat readiness in joint task force. After this period a final demonstration around Cape Verde Islands off west coast of Africa is scheduled in spring 2006 called exercise Steadfast Jaguar. The joint character consists of sea, land and air components. Some flying assets from NAEWF like AWACS aircraft and fighters from Germany and Denmark were involved however the main issue here was conducting amphibious assault exercises. In the initial phase the scenario was set to train the maritime component combined with marines and other land forces.

Movements in the surrounding seas of Denmark

Altogether military personnel from 17 nations, including Sweden, Finland and Ukraine as PfP nations next to the Nato members participated in Brilliant Mariner in a combined force of ships, submarines and embarked aircraft. Like mentioned before aircraft from the mainland took part in limited numbers and sorties. Equally training of air force units were planned and scheduled in another exercise of the Brilliant series called Brilliant Arrow 2006. One of the first basic elements of the maritime exercise is power projection for a potential crisis area. Like the MCC admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent mentioned; maritime forces have the advantage that they can respond quickly. To give insight in where the force can react one must understand the statistical fact that 90 % of the world population is living within 300 nautical miles and 80 % of world cities are situated within 100 nautical miles from seashores.

Amphibious taskforces can show up quite unpredictable. While the mobility offers them many possibilities to choose a specific spot at the latest moment. Sometimes power projection also called 'show flag' can be enough to influence the political situation, but sometimes it can be necessary to evacuate people with an extraction force. Missions took place in the North Sea , north of the Netherlands and Germany and west of Denmark, in the Skagerrak and Kattegat to the South of Norway. Denmark offered land facilities to train marines and press conference facilities in Esbjerg.

Extraction Force

The scenario in the south of Norway was comparable with the scenery in for example former Yugoslavia. A nowadays political crisis was simulated to give the forces a very realistic possibility to respond and react on those problems. In central Norway is the country Oakland situated being an established military power in the region. The southern part of Oakland is named Roseland and Denmark is named Ashland. Roseland wants to separate from Oakland living in conflict under Oaklands regime. There are problems like terrorist actions and ethnic cleansing. Roseland asked the international community for help. The maritime task group has to stabilize the situation first, proceeding maritime interdiction and prevent unauthorized traffic. Oakland wants to inhibit the stabilized area and so the task group must beware of counter operations. Developments of political and military aspects makes it necessary to start amphibious operations but not of the classical beach type. At Kristiansand the harbour must be cleaned and people from there brought out. Oakland must be closely watched to avoid any involvement in this process and if necessary the maritime force must respond on that. Some mine cleaning measures (MCM) has to be carried out first together with achieving air supremacy before an amphibious landing can be executed.

Flying naval elements

Some of the ships while in the Netherlands allowed us to have a look at the embarked aircraft. The Principe d'Asturias invited journalists for a small press conference about the ship. The aircraft carrier is when attached to an amphibious task group an important element supporting the group with air defence by its fighters, providing zone control, and is even capable to launch close air support missions when forces have landed on the shore. Being the largest ship and having the most

sophisticated communication facilities the choice to host the Maritime Component Commander (MCC) at sea could be obvious. As one of the major assets in SPMARFOR/Spanish navy Principe d'Asturias is committed to NRF and ship and crew are used to flexible, interoperable and sustainable tasks in the philosophy of ready to move to wherever needed. This of course will be not different for the joining LPD's/Amphibious assault ships Galicia and Castilla both capable to host 550 marines and Seaking helicopter transports.

The Asturias was seen with six AV-8B+ Harriers for defensive/offensive missions, One AB-212 for multimissions, two SH-3D Seakings for transport/SAR and one Seaking SHW for AEW missions. Altogether an impressive configuration in the hands of Commandante De Querol Pagan. Equally we were guests at the Italian San Giorgio which was the only Italian LPD represented in NRF-7 leaving its sisterships San Marco and San Giusto in Italy. The San Giorgio together with the two Spanish LPD's and a British ship were tasked to deploy beach naval groups in the littoral waters. Commandant Attilio explained the importance of starting the exercise with integration training and next to this simple exercises like topographic navigation and training landingcraft followed by specific training and finally all elements will train together.

An amphibious ship serves the landing forces while on the land and gives support. In this way the ship is called the 'cordone ombelicale' meaning umbilical cord. With 4 spots deck San Giorgio can equip either two Seaking/two AB-212 or four AB-212 or three Seaking. San Giorgio was seen in the last setting with 3 Seakings for multimissions. Those helicopters were fitted with special racks outside to fastrope two lines with marines simultaneously. Some 200 marines can be put on land by this ship. Also some other ships like destroyers or frigates in the fleet embarked helicopters for ASW or SAR duties like a Polish SH-2G, a French and Portuguese Lynx, a Spanish and Turkish AB-212 and a US NAVY SH-60B Seahawk. The UK deployed a Merlin and three Lynx helicopters. HMCS Athabaskan embarked a new Canadian CH-124A Seaking while an earlier example ditched in the ocean without casualties.

Steadfast Jaguar

While expanded from 16 to 26 Nations Nato has with the NRF exercise a good instrument to give training capabilities for as many members as possible. The maritime forces in NRF have 5 days reaction time and can sustain 30 days anywhere in the world. Normally a NRF can deploy 17000 troops but Steadfast Jaguar will see a deployment of 25000 troops, maritime component included and up to 200 air sorties a day. In the initial phase 7 types of missions were completed with a marine staff of 21 while Brilliant series are certifications for CTG staff (Commander Task Group), approximately 6000 men/women, some 60 warships, 5 submarines and more than 15 Aircraft. Twenty nations took part in the initial phase.

The NRF tasking is a one year commitment and comprise a preparation phase of six months and a stand-by phase of six months. The preparation phase results in a major exercise which demonstrates the capabilities of the force followed by a six month stand-by period with very high readiness to Nato commanders.

In June 2006 NRF 7 will proof itself in exercise Steadfast Jaguar involving army elements. NRF 7 will contribute a brigade-sized land component with 'forced entry', a naval task force by an aircraft carrier battle group an amphibious task group, a surface action group and an air component. In this exercise to be held at the Cape Verde Islands off west Africa indeed a large force will be brought on land in vulcanoues area. NRF-7 will then have completed her task in exercises and will guard in stand-bye phase while new NRF rotations will be formed with new tasks and new scenario's.

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