



**NAVAL STRIKING AND SUPPORT FORCES NATO
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PRESS RELEASE

Exercise BALTOPS 50 kicks off today

June 6, 2021

BALTIC SEA – The 50th Baltic Operations (BALTOPS 50) exercise, the premier maritime-focused exercise in the Baltic Region, kicks off today, June 6.

Between June 6-18, air and maritime assets from 18 NATO Allies and partner nations will participate in live training events that include air defence, anti-submarine warfare, amphibious operations, maritime interdiction, mine countermeasure operations.

“This year, we celebrate the 50th BALTOPS, an exercise that sets the foundation of interoperability across the Alliance,” said U.S. Vice Adm. Gene Black, commander, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO and commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet. “BALTOPS stands as the keystone of our exercise season, demonstrating half a century of the unwavering commitment of our partners and Allies. Lessons learned in BALTOPS enable international strike group operations, advanced missile defense capabilities and seamless surface action group missions.”

BALTOPS 50 consists of two at-sea training phases: the combat enhancement training (CET) and force integration training (FIT) portion and the final tactical phase of the exercise (TACEX).

During the first six days (the CET/FIT phase), ships and aircraft will transit through the Danish Straits, focusing on maritime operations in critical chokepoints, ensuring access and freedom of navigation in the Baltic Sea.

The exercise will continue to move East during its two phases, operating in accordance with international law and supported by participating Allies and partners. The exercise will culminate with the TACEX phase, where the exercise paradigm will shift into a “free-play” portion, and commanders are given more freedom to run their own tactical programs. The TACEX phase is designed to better represent operating in real-world situations.

For the first time, exercise design incorporates defensive cyber warfare tactics, techniques and procedures as BALTOPS continues to adapt and train to ensure an asymmetric advantage in the era of modern warfare.

Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO) will again command and control BALTOPS from its headquarters in Oeiras, Portugal.

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II Marine Expeditionary Brigade and Expeditionary Strike Group 2 will command and control exercise Marine forces throughout the exercise from aboard USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20), demonstrating international naval integration and power projection ashore for an amphibious demonstration in Lithuania.

BALTOPS 50 involves participation from 18 nations. The 16 NATO and 2 partner nations will provide approximately 40 maritime units, 60 aircraft, and 4,000 personnel.

The participating nations are: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the U.K., and the U.S.

BALTOPS, held in the Baltic region since in 1972, is a joint, maritime-focused exercise that brings together NATO Allies and partners in order to increase interoperability and enhance flexibility among the participants.