

Major General Rob Magowan, the Commandant General of Royal Marines, talks with the participants of Amphibious Leaders Expeditionary Symposium, 22 November 2017, at NATO Maritime Headquarters in Northwood, United Kingdom. Photo by Staff Sergeant Marcin Platek



# COMMITMENT TO ALLIED MARITIME EXCELLENCE



Marines assigned to U.S. Marine Forces Europe and Africa disembark from the Polish minelayer-landing ship "ORP Krakow" during BALTOPS 17, the premier annual maritime-focused exercise in the Baltic Region and one of the largest exercises in Northern Europe. Photo by Jessica Dupree, U.S. Navy



## NATO leaders discussed key points ahead of amphibious leaders' expeditionary symposium at Joint Warfare Centre in June

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**M**ore than 30 maritime and amphibious experts from across Europe and the United States converged on Allied Maritime Command Headquarters in Northwood, United Kingdom, from November 21 to 22, 2017, to develop a way forward and continue the efforts to enhancing amphibious support to NATO. The progress made in Northwood will inform the fourth iteration of Amphibious Leaders Expeditionary Symposium (ALES), which will take place at the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC), Stavanger, Norway, in June 2018. “The consensus of ALES is to continue the dialogue and continue the pressure, because [Supreme Allied Commander Europe] realizes that the nirvana is a NATO fully-formed, fully-functioning, and fully-staffed headquarters, but he realizes that there are other intermediate steps and that there is no plan of action or milestone that is nicely and neatly laid out,” said U.S. Marine Corps Major General Russell Sanborn, Commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Europe and Africa, the leading command behind the ALES initiative. “The consensus [of ALES], the one-liner, that we can all agree on is the shining light at the end of the tunnel.”

During the conference, representatives of eight different Allied Nations and four different NATO commands deliberated on a myriad of topics ranging from interoperability, Collective Defence, readiness and response, and most importantly, the Command and Control (C2) of multi-national amphibious forces during large-scale NATO operations.

“Collective Defence in Europe is about assurance,” said U.S. Marine Corps Major General Niel Nelson, the previous Commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Europe and Africa, who led the first two iterations of ALES. “In NATO, being under Article 5, every-

one comes together, and to come together you need to interoperate. To interoperate you need to know how to do that. This [event] tells us how to do that from the amphibious nature. So, [we have] multiple countries and multiple ships, talking at sea and bringing their forces together and delivering that capability ashore gives us not only the deterrence we are looking for, but also the assurance that we can do it.”

ALES originated two years ago as a forum for senior amphibious leaders to discuss key aspects of combined amphibious operations, with a focus on addressing future threats. The first symposium was held in October 2016, in Stuttgart, Germany, home to U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Europe and Africa headquarters.

During this in-depth self-assessment and examination, senior leaders recognized the need to synchronize and improve the overall C2 structure to better operate as a command under the warfighting organization and improve the employment of organic capabilities. “Amphibious operations are difficult—they take time, they take effort, and they take people to think about the different stress points and work through it,” said Nelson. “Improving the interoperability of Allied maritime forces will

prove of immense benefit in the years to come.”

These conversations spearheaded planning efforts that enabled the execution of a Table Top Exercise (TTX) during the second iteration of ALES, which took place in June 2017, in Naples, Italy, home to Allied Joint Force Command Naples. The TTX validated joint-amphibiousness as a crucial warfighting discipline that must be a fully-interoperable part of a multi-national maritime campaign. Symposium participants were able to provide their inputs from their current national and command roles, but also were able to step outside those roles to help objectively examine the employment of the overall NATO multi-national amphibious force.

“We certainly know we are stronger together and that Collective Defence starts with understanding that United States’ commitment to Article 5 is ironclad and that it is 29 for 29,” said U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Christopher Grady, the Commander of U.S. Navy 6th Fleet and Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO, who participated in the second ALES iteration in Naples. “ALES brings all those folks in the right room to talk about that collective security and that Collective Defence.”



Participants of the symposium discussing NATO maritime security in order to enhance amphibious support to NATO. Photo by SSgt. Marcin Platek



Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, Commander of NATO Allied Maritime Command at Joint Warfare Centre. Photo by JWC PAO





ABOVE: NATO Response Force/Maritime 2018. All photos by MARCOM (WO Artigues and CPO Valverde)

**D**URING THE SYMPOSIUM, participants worked hand-in-hand with each other, as well as with military think tanks and retired, emeritus senior advisors. Ultimately, consensus was reached that a prospective NATO maritime and amphibious task force would be an incredibly powerful and flexible capability for NATO reassurance, deterrence, and enhanced defensive operations. “We are looking at how we are doing active deterrence,” said Royal Navy Vice Admiral Clive Johnstone, the Commander of NATO Allied Maritime Command, where the Northwood seminar was hosted. “That is speed and that is maneuver, this is where ALES will play and how we get the heavy end of our forces moving quickly to

stop the enemy before they start moving.”

The goals of ALES are complementary to other Allied amphibious efforts such as the Allied Maritime Basing Initiative (AMBI) and the European Amphibious Initiative (EAI). AMBI envisions U.S. Marine Corps forces placed on Allied vessels, while EAI creates an environment where NATO-aligned forces work with other Partner Nations, such as Sweden and Finland, to build enhanced amphibious interoperability. Furthermore, ALES exemplifies the NATO commitment to further develop these capabilities, as stated under the 2014 Wales and 2016 Warsaw declarations.

“What we were able to do is achieve recommendations on the business of large-scale operations, so we are talking about amphibious

ous task force-level, and what they imply is that we need change, and that the construct we have right now does not fit the purpose, and hence we are on this journey right now,” said Royal Marines Major General Rob Magowan, the Commandant General of Royal Marines, and co-host of the ALES seminar in Northwood. “We got to keep the dialogue and the momentum going, and the best way to do that is to run a meaningful war game or [rehearsal of concept] drill.”

The success of the symposium in Northwood, together with earlier successes in Stuttgart and Naples, has NATO leadership focused on keeping up the momentum and continuing the push toward sustained improvement in the area of amphibious interoperability. “One of the key aspects in changing the direction of NATO as being a force-projecting stabilization force to re-orient itself back on Collective Defence is that we need to get back together and restudy both the way which we interoperate with each other but also our doctrine and the way our equipment has moved forward,” said Royal Marines Major General Timothy Bevis, NATO Operations and Planning Division. “This kind of event is vital for bringing together the thoughts of leaders to understand how we will integrate and work together in the future.”

Bevis says that after a long concentration of working together overseas, NATO has to look forward on how to defend Allied territory, and if necessary, regain any Allied territory, which a peer might have taken, rather than fighting against insurgency in a less-sophisticated way like in the past 17 years.

The answer to this will be continued to be developed and elaborated upon in the future ALES iterations like the one taking place at the JWC, Stavanger. In Norway, this June, leaders will look to connect outputs from the ALES seminar in Northwood and build toward desired results that reassure all NATO Allies of the uncompromising commitment to Collective Defence, as well as testing agreed-upon outputs during future NATO exercises. “If you look around the room here, all different uniforms, but we all come with naval institute backgrounds,” said Sanborn. “Even though we all speak different languages, we are all subject matter experts in this room. This partnership is a thing of beauty. We might not have all the answers right now, but this ‘center of excellence,’ this group, will figure it out.” ✦