



EMASoH in December: Latest News

- In December a total of 47 reassurance calls have been conducted by the Atlantique 2 to merchant ships in the Gulf region.
- The Belgian Rear Admiral Hans Huygens has become the new force commander of Operation AGENOR.
- Introducing the new Force Commander of Operation AGENOR.
- Naval Coordination and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) monitors the Tunb Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS).
- The Force Commander and his staff visited cruise ship MSC Virtuosa.
- Information about the EMASoH Voluntary Reporting Scheme (VRS).
- The VRS tool on the EMASoH website.

Change of Command Military Operation AGENOR

On the 7th of December, 2023, under the authority of the French Operation Commander Vice Admiral Emmanuel Slaars, Belgian Rear Admiral Hans Huygens received the Force Command from the Italian Rear Admiral Mauro Panebianco, who served as the Force Commander of Operation AGENOR since the beginning of June 2023. Present at the ceremony were Rear Admiral Agostini and Lieutenant General Descheemaeker, representing the Italian and Belgian Joint Operation Centres, respectively.



Figure 1 - Change of Command Ceremony (FFEAU, 2023)

EMASoH consists of a diplomatic and a military pillar named AGENOR, which was launched on January 20th, 2020 by a joint European declaration of support. EMASoH

aims to ensure freedom of navigation and maritime security, de-escalate tensions and foster inclusive regional dialogue in the Strait of Hormuz. Currently, nine nations, including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal, participate in this crucial mission.

During the ceremony, the departing Force Commander, Rear Admiral Panebianco, addressed the assembled staff and guests, underscoring the operation's de-escalatory posture and unwavering commitment to achieving stable regional security. Rear Admiral Panebianco expressed gratitude for the privilege of serving as the 11th Force Commander of Operation AGENOR, acknowledging the professional and balanced execution of air and maritime surveillance missions. He credited the successful operations to the support received from Surface Assets and Air Assets: "I have done my best with the staff, ships and aircraft in order to continue the mission and to reach its aim." In addition, Rear Admiral Panebianco extended his best wishes to Rear Admiral Hans Huygens and his team for their new adventure, expressing confidence that they would continue to uphold the high standards that have characterised EMASoH until this moment.

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Looking back: 11th Rotation

Following a successful 11th rotation of Operation AGENOR spanning six months, the Force Headquarters, in collaboration with dedicated assets, has significantly contributed to maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Gulf region. The operational line up, featuring contributions from France and Italy, included frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, UAVs and satellite imagery.

Over 900 personnel from seven nations showcased exceptional professionalism and expertise, contributing to the mission's success. Notably, numerous radio communication calls were initiated, facilitating crucial information exchange and coordination with commercial shipping. Operation AGENOR conducted over 130 accompaniments of merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf region, underscoring its commitment to maritime security and freedom of navigation.



Figure 2 – Accompaniment merchant ship

Introducing the new Force Commander



Figure 3 – Introducing the new Force Commander
Rear Admiral Hans Huygens

Following the Change of Command Ceremony, the transition in leadership is marked by the introduction of Rear Admiral Hans Huygens as the new Force Commander of Operation AGENOR.

Born in 1964 in Leuven, Belgium, Rear Admiral Huygens brings a record of service to his role. As a 'ship driver' and navigation & operations specialist, he spent over a decade on ships of the Belgian Navy, contributing to various UN, NATO and EU naval operations.

In 2011, he commanded the Belgian Navy's frigate F931 Louise-Marie during the EU counter-piracy Operation ATALANTA. With an extensive record, Rear Admiral Huygens has held key Politico-Military roles, including Strategic Operations Planner at the EU Military Staff and Head of the EU Section & Defence Policy Division in the Belgian Defence Staff.

His expertise extends to Crisis Management, Operations Planning and Maritime Warfare. Since 2019, he has been integral to the EU Military Staff, leading strategic military teams and planning EU Operations. In 2023, he assumed the role of senior advisor on operations.

During the Change of Command Ceremony, Rear Admiral Hans Huygens expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to assume tactical command of Operation AGENOR. He highlighted the importance of maintaining a predictable profile, reassuring visibility and a strong presence in his future command. We are pleased to welcome Rear Admiral Hans Huygens as the Force Commander.

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Reassurance Calls

In the ongoing commitment to maritime security, EMASoH – Operation AGENOR continues its reassurance calls to merchant vessels navigating the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf region.

In the month of December, the efforts of our maritime patrol aircraft Atlantique 2 operating under command of Operation AGENOR have yielded significant results. A total of 47 reassurance calls have been conducted. These reassurance calls are not merely routine procedures; they embody the proactive approach to maritime security involving direct communication with crews of merchant vessels.



Figure 4 – Maritime Patrol Aircraft Atlantique 2 crew with EMASoH flag



As we reflect on the achievements of December, we recognise the critical role played by our maritime patrol aircraft. We underscore that our mission is still work in progress, with a significant effort yet to be invested in ensuring continuous maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf region.

Scan the QR code to discover a video of the mission of the MPA Atlantique 2 on our social networks.

Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping

The analyses of “patterns of life” we hold on a permanent basis show unmistakably that the traffic through the Tunb Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) located west of the Strait of Hormuz along the Tunb islands has fallen dramatically.

In our assessment at EMASoH, we have historically regarded the frequency of TSS utilisation as a rough indicator of the perceived threat level.

Interestingly, among vessels flying EMASoH flags or having beneficial ownership ties, approximately one-third of the traffic intended to use the TSS would actually use it. This marks a notable decrease

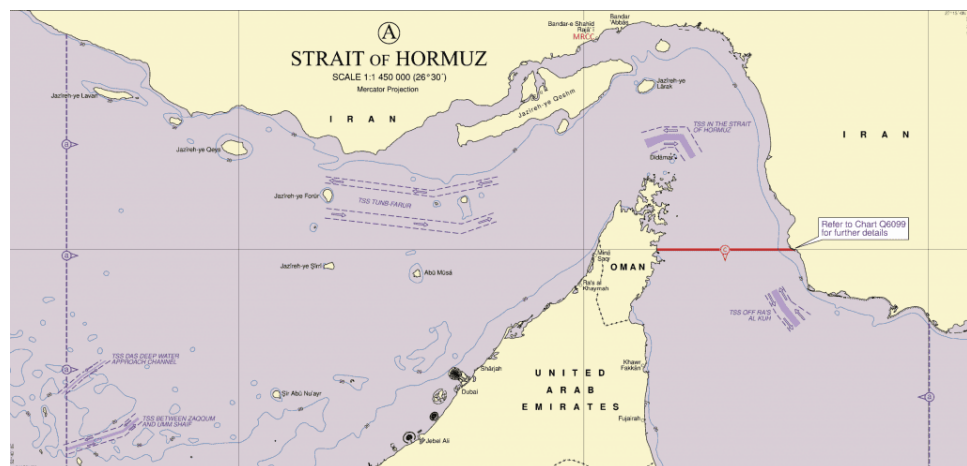


Figure 5 – Map Strait of Hormuz

from the recent past when two-thirds would choose this route. Certain flag states recommend avoiding this TSS as being in territorial waters. In early November 2023, the Industry proposed an alternative transit route south of the Tunb islands. We will continue to monitor the TSS.

Visit to MSC Virtuosa

EMASoH Operation AGENOR had the privilege of visiting the MSC Virtuosa, a cruise ship measuring 331 meters in length and accommodating over 5.000 passengers. The cruise ship is one of the two largest in the MSC Cruises fleet, alongside MSC Grandiosa. During the visit, EMASoH staff members enjoyed an insightful tour of the ship.

Recognising the critical importance of maritime security for the safety of passengers and crew, and aligning with EMASoH's commitment to promoting security in the maritime domain, we took the opportunity to present our mission's objectives and share relevant figures on Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS). MSC Virtuosa, a sincere thank you for your invitation and hospitality.



Figure 6 - Visit to MSC Virtuosa

EMASoH Voluntary Reporting Scheme (VRS)

Merchant vessels are invited to take part in our Voluntary Reporting Scheme. Voluntary reporting improves the cooperation and guidance that EMASoH can provide to those ships. They will also be prioritised in the event of accompaniments and reassuring calls performed by both navy ships and aircrafts.

48 hours prior to entering the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA), or as soon as possible:

- ✓ **inform** EMASoH about your estimate time of entry into and exit from the VRA;
- ✓ **confirm** your time 6 hours before entering and please keep us informed of any changes in your intentions;
- ✓ **report** any suspicious behaviour;

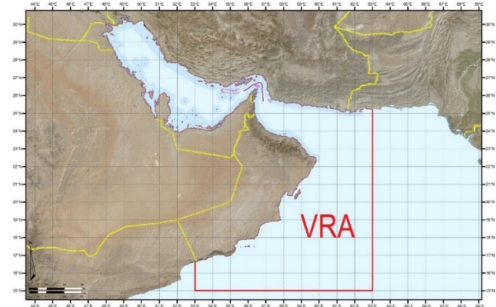


Figure 7 - EMASoH VRA

VRS reporting on EMASoH website

Voluntary Reporting Scheme - VRS

All ships entering the EMASoH Voluntary Reporting Area are invited to provide the following information 48 hours prior to entering the area or as soon as possible and report suspicious behaviour or unusual events.

The data sent through this form will only be used by EMASoH's Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping.

Ship name *

IMO number *

Flag state *

Bridge / ship master phone number *
telephone number

Ship master email *
email address

Estimated Time of Arrival entering the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA)

Figure 8 - Voluntary Reporting Scheme Tool

To simplify the reporting process and make it more efficient we developed a web-based reporting form.

This tool should guarantee the integrity of the data.

Ideally you would fill in our form online although you still can report by email.

More information about the VRS: <https://www.emasoh-agenor.org/voluntary-reporting-scheme>

Voluntary reporting to EMASoH via ctf474-emasoh.vra.fct@def.gouv.fr

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