



European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz Operation AGENOR

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BELGIUM TAKES THE COMMAND OF TASK FORCE AGENOR

Abu Dhabi, UAE – December 7th, 2023 – In a pivotal moment for the European Maritime Awareness Mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH), Belgium, under Admiral Benelux (ABNL) flag, has officially taken tactical command of the Task Force AGENOR. The Change of Command Ceremony, held under the authority of Operation Commander French Vice Admiral Emmanuel Slaars, saw Belgian Rear Admiral Hans Huygens assume the Force Command from the Italian Rear Admiral Mauro Panebianco, who led Operation AGENOR since June 2023. Present at the ceremony were Rear Admiral Agostini and Lieutenant General Descheemaeker, representing the Italian and Belgian Joint Operation Centres, respectively.

EMASoH, with its diplomatic and military tracks, 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.

Following a successful 11th rotation of Operation AGENOR spanning six months, the Force Headquarters, in collaboration with dedicated assets, has significantly bolstered maritime security and ensured freedom of navigation in the Gulf region. The operational lineup, 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 safe navigation.

In his speech, Rear Admiral Mauro Panebianco emphasized the operations de-escalatory posture and dedication to achieving stable regional security. Rear Admiral Panebianco: "I'm very proud of what has been done in the past six months by this European team of naval specialists. I have done my best with assets, staff, ships, aircraft, in order to continue the mission and to reach its aim."

During the Change of Command Ceremony, Rear Admiral Panebianco and his staff were honoured with the French Médaille Commémorative Française for their exemplary service. Rear Admiral Hans Huygens expressed his privilege and honour in assuming tactical command, emphasising presence, reassuring visibility and predictable profile will be key points in his future command.

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The Change of Command signifies a seamless transition in leadership, reinforcing EMASoH's commitment to maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz and its surrounding areas. The collaborative efforts of the participating nations underscore the mission's effectiveness in maintaining stability and security in this strategically vital region.

Find the pictures of the Change of Command Ceremony below (source: FFEAU – Forces françaises aux Émirats arabes unis).

For more information:

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Figure 1 – The French Ambassador, the Operation Commander, the outgoing Force Commander and his authority and the incoming Force Commander and his authority present at the Change of Command Ceremony.



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Figure 2 – Rear Admiral Hans Huygens addressing the guests and the staff of the Force Headquarters.



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Figure 3 - The staff of the Force Headquarters receiving the French Médaille Commémorative Française.



Figure 4 - The new Force Commander Rear Admiral Hans Huygens receiving the tactical command of Task Force AGENOR from the Operation Commander Vice Admiral Emmanuel Slaars.