

War Game With Cold War Roots Ends Off U.S. Coast

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NORFOLK, Virginia — An annual international naval exercise that began as a way to reduce Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and U.S. allies wrapped up off the coast of Virginia on Friday, with the nations saying it would enable them to better combat piracy together.

Russian, British, French and U.S. sailors trained for the past two weeks to ensure that they could work together to overcome language and logistical barriers, among other things.

"We've shown that we can operate together both as a headquarters and at sea as a small flotilla of ships," said Rear Admiral Herman Shelanski, commander of the U.S. Navy's Carrier Strike Group 10.

He said it should improve maritime security around the world.

While the two-week exercise focused on a variety of scenarios, Navy officials said combating piracy is one of the best real-world examples of how the training pays off. An international

flotilla of warships regularly patrols off the coast of Somalia to protect commercial ships and private yachts from pirates, who seek to hijack them for millions of dollars in ransom money.

The exercises began in 1988. The Russian anti-submarine warfare ship RFS Admiral Chabanenko has participated in the exercise, known as FRUKUS for the initials of each country, in the past. One of the Russian navy's premier ships, it spent four months patrolling off the Somali coast in 2010.

Based on lessons learned from this year's exercise, sailors from the allied nations "were able to do more interoperability and coordination with that very vessel, and so it has proven itself," Shelanski said.

The training included identifying pirate vessels, boarding them and protecting the allies' ships.

"I've got a good experience of dealing with pirates in the Horn of Africa. This exercise, we used different approaches I had used before in that region," Captain Stanislav Varick, commanding officer of the Admiral Chabanenko, said through an interpreter.

The other ships that participated in the exercise included the destroyer USS James Williams, the French frigate FS Ventose and HMS Dauntless, a destroyer that is Britain's newest warship.

The four partner nations take turns hosting the training each year while providing cultural activities and games designed to help the crew members get to know one another better and build trust. This year's activities included a trip to Colonial Williamsburg and the amusement park Busch Gardens.

Russia will host next year's exercise.

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