

broadcasting the incredible jumps of snowboarders at Sochi. We went back on the deck, still swept by furious winds. The rough water was shining in the sun like a huge sheet of aluminum. Suddenly while watching a cargo ship on the horizon, we spotted a dinghy drifting just a few meters from the U.S. Navy war ship. A German colleague took dozens of photos with his powerful zoom. The first of the 300 American crew members enlisted on this high-tech ship who arrived admitted that ‘they had not seen anything on their radar or with their googles.’ The boat was too small. And radar waves do not react to such a tiny rubber boat.

Tension mounted and officers got nervous. The USS Donald Cook made a U turn at high speed to position itself in front of the dinghy, about a hundred meters away. Action stations on the top deck of the ship, i.e. the bridge. Captain Scott A. Jones and his deputy Charles E. Hampton, who were in charge, asked for visual identification. ‘Got it,’ a crew member wearing googles said. ‘Ten green tanks and a 16-HP Yamaha engine.’ Perhaps cans of fuels? There wasn’t anyone on board. The dark shape was simply a big plastic bag. ‘Poor people,’ said Hampton, a massive Texan whom, if he were not in the Navy, we would imagine on a rodeo horse. Immigrants? A stolen boat? Traffickers? ‘If the cans contain fuel, that is a lot of fuel,’ said Jones.

The USS Donald Cook was entering the Mediterranean that night, sailing through the strait of Gibraltar. ‘With 25 ships at the same time, it is like a U.S. highway,’ a crew member joked. It was rather dangerous to let such a dinghy drifting. But after one hour and a half of meticulous positioning, the destroyer left without opening fire. These were instructions given by the HQ of the US Navy’s Sixth Fleet based in Naples. Spanish coast guards were to take care of the dinghy. The confrontation between the tiny dinghy and the huge war ship stopped there. The naval battle at dusk did not take place.

‘If it were to us to decide, we would have shot,’ Adam said later. It is a fact that this ship is not lacking ‘arguments.’ The ship, agile and flexible, is full of military technology. And it is first and foremost the vanguard of a flotilla of four similar ships which, by the end of 2015, will for the first time be permanently based in Europe, in Southern Spain. The Cook and the other three ships will form the naval component of the missile shield, which are forces that the United States is dispatching on the Old Continent under a NATO umbrella.

We went on board three days earlier in Funchal – *see previous article on Monday*. From there, the destroyer sailed along the Coast of Africa to the naval base of Rota. It sailed at full speed, taking into account the size of the ship: more than 30 knots, i.e. more than 55 kilometers per hour, in order to avoid the storm

and find a shelter, even the ship then had to sail round in circles in the Mediterranean in order to arrive at the right time on D-Day in Rota. The U.S. Defense Department had organized something that is a rare privilege for civilians: a few European journalists, including Le Soir, were allowed on board of the USS Donald Cook, which had left Norfolk, Virginia, on January 31 after one year of planning and preparation to be anti-missile battle-ready

According to NATO, about thirty countries outside of the Euro-Atlantic area have or try to have ballistic missiles. According to some Western experts, some might be capable of hitting European cities. The United States is very clear about where the threat comes from: Iran and possibly North Korea. Last Monday the Iranian Defense Minister announced that Iran had successfully tested two new ballistic missiles capable of avoiding anti-missiles systems but without specifying their range.

Lieutenant John Ivey, 32, including 10 in the Navy and who is the Combat Systems Officer, guided us from one deck to the other and to the Combat Information Center. 'Here is the ship's brains,' Ivey said, as well as its eye 'to promote peace and security around the globe.' The Situation Room of the ship, plunged into a dim blue light, is full of radar screens, computers, and maps. Up to 40 people can gather in this control room, which is staffed around the clock. It is from this room that the vertical launchers of Raytheon's SM3 anti-missile missiles are activated, but also the Tomahawks, Harpoons, and anti-aircraft cannon, and the anti-submarine defense system.

'If a missile is headed for Europe, we will intercept it,' Ivey assured. The ship has 90 missile silos, which we will see, but we will not see the SM3 missiles. What is their range? Captain Jones replied that 'he is unfortunately not allowed to tell us' if the Cook would for instance be able to stop a missile headed for Brussels. And what is the type of the interceptor supposed to stop the hostile missile by blowing it up in high altitude? John Ivey is not authorized to disclose this either. At NATO, Robert Bell, who is the U.S. Defense Secretary's high representative in Europe, had the same message. 'For security reasons, we do not reveal the specifications of our weapons.' Are these weapons reliable? The Cook has never fired any SM3 because it would be too expensive. But simulations - 'the most realistic possible,' Ivey noted - were made as well as some tests which were not always successful. *Reuters* for instance revealed last week that the Pentagon is going to ask Congress for half a billion dollars to finance further improvements of the interceptors after a few failed tests. Raytheon, which is already rubbing its hands, is developing a new series of missiles for 2015 which are supposed to be more reliable. 'These are unmatched and absolutely capable means,' U.S. Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said in Rota,

adding that ‘it is a credible shield for our European Allies,’ the U.S. Navy acquiring new technologies ‘as they become available.’

In any case, the USS Cook’s action will not be limited to missile defense, far from it. The destroyer will contribute to the regional maritime security, participate in search and rescue operations, in humanitarian missions, in multinational exercise, and in operations of support of NATO in a region shaken by the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

In spite of the budgetary constraints that the U.S. Defense is facing, this show of force at the door of the Mediterranean also represents a reinforcement of the U.S. in Europe, with a possibility to intervene in Africa and the Middle East. ‘After 9/11 and the withdrawal from Afghanistan, NATO will redefine itself again,’ the Captain pointed out. Maintaining security will be essential, ‘especially in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic. It is about reinforcing strategic deterrence faced with threats coming from out of Europe. And missile defense is really an important mission for NATO,’ he added.

Tuesday at 5 a.m. ‘Buenos dias! Big day today, so please go up’ is what crewmembers in their bed heard from loudspeakers. The ship was decorated and crew members were wearing their ceremonial outfits. The deck had been cleaned and the cannons polished. The ship arrived in Rota in the early afternoon. Time for music, speeches and for kissing family members. John Ivey met his wife and two kids who were waiting for him in Spain.

‘These destroyers are going to contribute to making clear that we stand with our friends and allies not only at the right place and at the right time but all the time,’ Ray Mabus pointed out, then repeating what Secretary Kerry and Secretary Hagel had said a few days ago in Munich, i.e. that ‘we are entering a period of transatlantic renaissance.’

As NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen pointed out, each of these four destroyers ‘is a reminder of 8,000 tons of U.S. commitment for Europe’s security.’ With the end of the Afghan quagmire, NATO has already found its new narrative.

“Moscow Is Furious against NATO’s Shield”

In the most recent Russian military doctrine, NATO remains the threat Number One, the reason being the Alliance’s enlargement to countries of the former

Warsaw Pact as well as NATO's projected missile shield in Europe with - 'at this stage' - mainly American equipment.

Roberto Zadra, head of the missile shield project at NATO's Defense Investments department, said that 'I chaired political and military discussions with Russia on the missile shield. This project is making progress, but not the cooperation with Russia which we continue to offer. Frankly, this does not help, but NATO's train is moving forward.'

The United States is offering to Russia to put some detection equipment in common, but in exchange Moscow demands to partially control the system, which is unacceptable for NATO.

Although NATO points out that the shield is in no way targeted against Russia and that it is in any case insignificant compared with the Russian military power, Russia continues to view this project as a provocation, in spite of the fact that Robert Bell, U.S. Defense Secretary Hagel's representative in Europe, keeps on repeating that 'Russia is not an enemy.'

Tensions mounted again last week when Russia threatened to pull out of the START Treaty. Yet, Barack Obama would like to negotiate a further reduction in both countries' nuclear arsenal. But with the missile shield, it is rather an arms race that will take place, since Moscow is likely to reinforce its nuclear arsenal and its own missile shield. A Nuclear Security Summit will take place in The Hague on March 24 and 25 in the presence of the American President and on the eve of his first visit to Brussels. But the meeting will probably be boycotted by his Russian counterpart.

Retroacts

From Reagan to Obama

Prehistory

Thirty years ago in 1983, Ronald Reagan surprised the entire world with a project that was quickly dubbed 'Star Wars.' His Strategic Defense Initiative consisted in sending a genuinely inviolable shield against Soviet missiles in space. A military competition followed which contributed to exhausting the USSR. The project was buried in 1983 by the Administration of Bill Clinton, who did not totally give up the development of a missile shield.

Re-launch

Soon after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush revived the project of having an anti-missile system on U.S. soil. The neo-conservative U.S. President then deeply divided his European Allies by unilaterally negotiating the installation of radars and interceptors in Poland and in the Czech Republic. In the end in 2008, NATO agreed that this project might perhaps contribute to the continent's security.

Adjustment

President Barack Obama then adjusted the system, which was clearly put under the auspices of NATO, where political and military discussions would take place. Ships off Spain, a powerful radar system in Turkey, and plans to have interceptors in Romania in 2015 and in Poland in 2018: the United States considers that, in spite of the hope of a détente with Tehran on the nuclear program, the threat coming from ballistic missiles is increasing. The missile shield is therefore far from being buried.

Life on a Destroyer

On the USS Donald Cook

‘Rev-uh-lee! Rev-uh-lee!’ Crew members woke up without protesting, stacked in blocks of 3 iron bunk beds very close to one another. And then centimeters above their face, like a guillotine, is a metal bar with a little neon light.

Most of the some 260 enlisted men and 40 enlisted women have signed for two years,’ Wayne D. Welch, Command Master Chief, explains. He has been in the Navy for 22 years, including 14 at sea. ‘Most of them have chosen this mission and are thrilled to get to Spain,’ he added. With so many young crew members, Welch sees himself as a kind of schoolmaster. If there were not these incredibly powerful weapons, one might think that it is a boy-scout camp: indeed, 125 sailors are younger than 22. Many joined the Army to be able to pay higher education tuitions.

Once in Rota, some will go back to the U.S. while others will stay for a little while. Either on the ‘Little America’ of the Spanish military base or in the city and the vicinity. The presence of the four destroyers should add 2,000 Americans to the 3,000 already present. Considerable for a run-down local economy.

Lieutenant Jeffrey Chewning, 31 and 9 years in the Navy and who has a wife and two kids waiting for him in Rota, has already been in Japan and Bahrain. 'We are all travelers,' he pointed out. He thinks that he will stay a year in Spain with his family. Mansfield Murch, a 24-year old unmarried African-American woman, thinks she will extend her presence in Rota until October 2015. What does she expect? 'A different culture,' she said.

Enlisted men and women on the Cook are well trained and briefed. Two Navy Veterans, Dough Hasselbring and John E. Hughes, were on their side throughout the journey from Norfolk. 'We explained to them that our XXL-size cars will be too broad for the tiny streets of Rota. Or how to register one's weapons, rent a house, or that Spanish people eat quite later than on the ship,' they explained in the Laurette's café, which is the crew members' canteen. Laurette? It is the late wife of Donald Cook, to whom a real cult is devoted under the mantra 'Faith without Fear.' Cook is a hero who was prisoner of the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War and died while being captive. Just like in the Communist jungle, life remains austere on board: there is no alcohol but only blue-colored soda. And movies on war, police, or Batman.