

PERUVIAN NAVY TESTS ANTI-SUB SKILLS DURING LATEST SILENT FORCE EXERCISE

Report by Guy Toremans

The Marina de Guerra del Peru hosted the thirteenth edition of the bi-annual Anti-submarine Warfare (ASW) Silent Force Exercise (SIFOREX XIII). The SIFOREX series, which started back in July 2001, is unique because it is solely funded by the Peruvian Navy, with the aim of creating an exercise based on one of its submarines versus US Navy surface vessels. However, during the initial exercise's planning process it was decided to include Peruvian Navy's surface assets. The first one therefore included three Peruvian submarines and two Lupo Class frigates while the US Navy took part with the AEGIS cruiser USS Ticonderoga. Although a binational exercise, different guest countries have joined in across the years.

For example, previous editions saw units from the Spanish and the Dutch navies taking part. In 2004 even the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group (CSG) was involved. Until 2010 the exercises were organised by the Commander Peruvian Submarine Force, but from the 2012 edition onwards SIFOREX has been conducted by the Peruvian Navy's Surface Warfare Command. In 2023 Rear Admiral Mario Hector Cache Pella (Commander, Peruvian Navy's Surface Warfare Command) was the Officer Organising the Exercise (OOE) and Rear Admiral Fernando Thomas Cactillo Heredia (Commander of the Peruvian Submarine Force) the Officer Conducting the Exercise (OCE). It saw participation by three submarines, eight surface units, eight aircraft and more

than 1,680 personnel from Peru, Argentina, Canada, Spain, and the USA. The Peruvian submarines BAP Angamos and BAP Pisagua took part in 2023, along with the frigates BAP Mariategui and BAP Bolognesi, corvettes BAP Ferre and BAP Guise. Also involved was the combat support ship BAP Tacna, torpedo recovery vessel BAP San Lorenzo and oceanographic research vessel BAP Carrasco. Naval aviation assets contributed by Peru included a Bell AB-412ASW and two Sikorsky Sea King UH-3H helicopters, along with a Beech King Air B-200 and a Fokker F-50 aircraft. The Peruvian Air Force participated via two KAI KT-1P aircraft. The US Navy deployed the Los Angeles Class submarine USS Hampton, the Arleigh Burke Class (Flight IIA) destroyer USS

Momsen, the latter with two MH-60R helicopters from Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 49 'Scorpions.' The USN also sent a P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) from Patrol Squadron (VP) 9 'Golden Eagles', as well as staff from the US 4th Fleet, Commander Submarine Force Atlantic (COMSUBLANT) and the Destroyer Squadron 40 (DESRON 40). Personnel from the Argentinean, Canadian and Spanish navies attended as observers.

IN an area located some 50 miles off the port of the Callao, known as the Mar de Grau, the participants were subjected to numerous challenging scenarios of advanced ASW. They gradually increased in complexity and culminated with a free play

In the Mar de Grau a boatswain's mate signals on the flight-deck of USS Momsen during the latest SIFOREX. In the background is the Peruvian frigate BAP Bolognesi. Photo: DC2 Stone Goral/US Navy.



phase. The surface units conducted sub-surface as well as surface and air serials.

These included search, detect and track sub-surface contacts, while the MPAs, surface vessels and helicopters scanned the area to sniff out their prey (submarines). Coordination between surface ships the MPAs and the shore-based helicopter operations was practiced.

The submarines took it in turn to deploy both defensive and offensive tactics, to hunt and be hunted. They had to carry out evasion procedures against surface and air units.

They tracked, stalked, classified and 'attacked' surface targets as well as conducting intelligence collection, surveillance and reconnaissance missions facing different threat levels.

Throughout the exercise the naval staff personnel evaluated the serials and produced detailed analyses of the units' actions in order to provide them with feedback on their performance, in order to enable the operators to make changes to, or fine tune, their tactics.

BUT SIFOREX did not only focus on underwater operations. One of the serials involved submarine Search-and-rescue (SMEREX) during which the surface units had to search and locate a submarine, which was depicted as losing contact with home. This allowed the Peruvian Navy to test the capabilities and technology on board its oceanographic research ship BAP Carrasco, as had also been the case during the SIFOREX XII edition.

That vessel has highly specialized equipment for the exploration of the seabed and the detection of a submarine in distress.

The Peruvian Navy intends to participate via BAP Carrasco in the same type of exercise with the USN's Under Sea Rescue Command in San Diego.

Another serial during the latest SIFOREX included Replenishment-at-sea (RAS) evolutions between the Peruvian Navy's combat support ship BAP Tacna and the destroyer USS Momsen.

SIFOREX XIII tested the Peruvian Navy's high operational readiness while for the US Navy's sonar technicians it provided an opportunity to exercise with diesel submarines in a littoral environment.

Consequently the exercise series is highly valued by the USN because it provides high quality ASW training and allows practice of doctrines and tactics, in order to address the threats posed by a diesel-electric submarine.

It is a type of vessel that has been absent from the USN order of battle for decades, but is in service with more than one potential foe.



Above: the Peruvian submarine BAP Pisagua returning to Callao on completion of SIFOREX 2023.
Below: Peruvian frigate BAP Mariátegui, which took part in the exercise.
Bottom: American submarine USS Hampton sailing from Callao Naval Base to commence SIFOREX 2023.
Photos: Peruvian Navy.

