

'OpTech' Workshop Will Focus on Littoral Environment in Baltic Sea

HELSINKI – The Littoral OpTech Baltic Sea workshop coming up at the end of August in Helsinki may look like a logical dialogue to have with navies in the region in the shadow of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but it's not.

It comes as the two nations who are leading the event are preparing to joining the NATO alliance, but that is coincidental. In fact, this Littoral OpTech workshop was originally planned for two years ago and postponed twice because of the pandemic.

However, world events and the importance of littoral environments in areas such as the Black Sea and Baltic Sea, underscore the urgency of having this event now.

The Helsinki workshop will be held Aug. 30-31 at the Finnish Naval Academy and is one of a series of OpTechs held in different parts of the world in key littoral environments. The first was conducted in 2014 in Stockholm, with subsequent workshops conducted in important littoral areas of maritime operations including Japan, Columbia, Canada and Greece.

Other conferences and workshops have been held at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The workshops are usually two-day events, with the first day focused on the environment and operations and the second day examining new technologies. Participants also take part in a "war game" focused on a plausible maritime scenario in that part of the world.

Capt. Bo Wallander, a retired captain in the Royal Swedish Navy, has led the previous OpTechs, along with retired U.S.

Navy Cmdr. Steve Benson.

Wallander, who is producing the Helsinki event, said the purpose is “to gather international defense leaders, scientists, researchers, analysts, and think-tank experts to explore the unique operational and technological challenges to security and defense in typical cul-de-sac littorals, like the Baltic Sea.”

The nations on the Baltic Sea are close to each other. The air distance between Kaliningrad and Helsinki is 357 nautical miles, and to Stockholm it's just 288 nautical miles. It's 161 nautical miles from St. Petersburg to Helsinki, and 372 nautical miles to Stockholm. So, reaction times are short.

“The goals of the workshop are to share experiences how to develop systems and operate and in a littoral environment,” Wallander said.

“Focusing on the Littorals fosters collaboration on common security and defense concerns with an all-domain approach to solutions,” Benson said.