

CNO Creating Unmanned Systems Task Force to Ensure Reliability, Command and Control



System technicians perform a safety test on a MANTAS T38 Devil Ray unmanned surface vehicle in San Diego Bay for an operational test run during U.S. Pacific Fleet's Unmanned Systems Integrated Battle Problem (UxS IBP) 21. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alex Perlman*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Getting the right mix of unmanned air, surface and undersea vehicles in the U.S. Navy's future fleet is so critical, the Chief of Naval Operations is creating an unmanned systems task force to sort out nagging issues like scalability, reliability, command, and control.

In a virtual appearance Sept. 8 at the Defense News online conference, Adm. Michael Gilday said he was unsatisfied with the Navy's pace of unmanned development, citing reservations about the reliability of unmanned vessels for long range, long duration missions, as well as command and control issues.

"Over the next few months, we'll be standing up an unmanned task force," similar in terms of scope and purpose to Project Overmatch, Gilday said. A group of technical experts, along with operators, will focus on problems "to move forward in all three domains, at speed, to make unmanned a reality by the end of this decade."

Gilday likened the new unmanned task force to Project Overmatch, the Navy's plan to develop a new fleet architecture using artificial intelligence (AI) and manned/unmanned teaming to enable distributed maritime operations. Highly mobile and widely distributed Navy and Marine Corps element are a basic

game plan for dealing with near-peer adversaries like China in contested areas of the vast Indo-Pacific region.

As the Navy plans future fleet battle problems, "One of the things I'll be looking for is how we utilize unmanned [systems] at scale into the fleet, because we know that in the future. They're going to be a significant part of distributed maritime operations," Gilday said.

Gilday said the task force will include both Sailors and Navy civilians. "We have a lot of technical expertise in the Navy today that we can leverage," including warfighting labs and systems commands, he said. Still in the early stages of planning, Gilday said he would be able to share more details about the task force "by early 2022."

Gilday, and some key lawmakers, have expressed concern about the reliability of unmanned surface and undersea vessels deployed at sea for extended periods of time with little or no maintenance. The CNO said he's seen progress in that area this year, noting three successful missions by unmanned surface vessels transiting more than 4,000 miles from the Gulf Coast, through the Panama Canal to California, while operating autonomously 98% of the time. However, "we're not yet satisfied where we need to be with respect to reliability but we are quickly moving in that direction" although it's still a few years before the Navy can go to the Pentagon and Congress with a plan to produce unmanned vessels at scale.

Concerns about command and control over unmanned systems was the genesis for Project Overmatch, Gilday said. With an initial plan to have a third of the fleet unmanned or minimally unmanned "we knew we couldn't command and control, let's say well over 100 vessels, without changing the way we were networked," the CNO said.

"I do think as we look at AI applications for unmanned, it's going to be a journey for us before we talk about an

autonomous, unmanned fleet,” Gilday said. Initially, such platforms will be minimally manned or teamed with manned vessels. “The man in the loop is going to be an important piece for a while,” he said.

The U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) also will establish a new task force to accelerate integration of unmanned systems of all domains and artificial intelligence, the NAVCENT commander [said recently](#).

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander, U.S. Fifth Fleet and commander, U.S. Naval Forces U.S. Central Command, speaking Sept. 8 to reporters by phone conference, said Task Force 59 (TF59) would be established on Sept. 9 in Manama, Bahrain.