

Coast Guard Cutter to Deploy to U.S. 5th Fleet; Escort New FRCs to Bahrain



A U.S. Navy MH-60R Sea Hawk, from Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 37, transfers suspected contraband to U.S. Coast Guard National Security Cutter Bertholf (WMSL-750), July 20, 2020. One of the Bertholf class of cutters will be deployed to the U.S. Fifth Fleet area of responsibility. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Andrew Langholf ARLINGTON, Va. – The Coast Guard plans to deploy one of its Bertholf-class national security cutters (NSCs) to the U.S. Fifth Fleet area of responsibility to escort some new fast response cutters for basing in the Persian Gulf, the Coast Guard Commandant said.

Speaking Dec. 3 in a Navy League Special Topic Breakfast webinar, Adm. Karl Schultz, commandant of the Coast Guard, said the NSC will deploy in 2021 through the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea to the Persian Gulf while escorting two new Sentinel-class fast response cutters (FRCs) for duty in the Gulf.

The FRCs will be the first of six to be forward deployed to the Coast Guard's Patrol Force Southwest Asia, where they will participate in maritime security operations under the auspices of the Navy's U.S. Fifth Fleet. The 154-foot-long FRCs will replace six 110-foot-long Island-class patrol boats in the Gulf.

Schultz praised the capabilities of the service's FRCs, 41 of which have been delivered by Bollinger Shipyards. The FRCs already have been extending the Coast Guard's reach into the South Pacific from Hawaii and now Guam, with two of three FRCs for Guam already in place.

The Coast Guard has made three deployments to the Western Pacific with NSC. Bertholf and Stratton deployed there in 2019 and performed such missions as enforcing sanctions against North Korea and engaging with allied and partner nations. While the Navy destroyers USS John McCain and USS Fitzgerald were going through repairs from collisions, the two NSCs were able to assume missions and free up destroyers and cruisers for the ballistic-missile defense role in the Sea of Japan.

The Waesche deployed to the Western Pacific in 2020 but suffered a fire and is in Japan for repair. In addition, the Kimball deployed to the South Pacific for fisheries patrols near Fiji. The Bertholf was diverted from a counter-drug patrol in 2020 and sent to the Galapagos Archipelago where it used its ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles to observe possible Chinese fishing fleet violations of the Ecuadorian Exclusive Economic Zone.

Schultz also said the service's newest NSC, the Stone, would be deployed on its shakedown cruise in 2021 off the Atlantic coast of South America to, among several missions, counter illegal and unreported fishing violations.