NAVCENT Establishes Task Force for Unmanned System Operations



An MQ-9 Sea Guardian unmanned maritime surveillance aircraft system flies over Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Coronado (LCS 4) during U.S. Pacific Fleet's Unmanned Systems Integrated Battle Problem (UxS IBP) 21, April 21. *U.S. NAVY / Chief Mass Communication Specialist Shannon Renfroe*

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

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.

The first commodore of TF59 will be Capt. Michael Brasseur, who also spoke in the conference.

Cooper said TF59 "is designed to integrate unmanned systems and AI. Task Force 59 is the first U.S. Navy task force of its kind … taking efforts from across the Navy, concentrating them here in a forward operating environment — a forward fleet — to gradually move toward development and integration."

Cooper pointed out the testimony last spring before Congress of Vice Adm. Jim Kilby, then-deputy chief of naval operations for Warfighting Requirements and Capabilities, who said the Navy needed to get unmanned systems out to the fleet and into the hands of operators. Cooper said TF59 is standing up to work out the systems and assess tactics, techniques and procedures in an operational environment.

“The bottom line on why we’re doing this is so that we can develop and integrate unmanned systems and AI as a means to do two things: enhance our maritime domain awareness and increase our deterrence,” he said.

“On the unmanned side, we anticipate putting more systems in the maritime domain above, on and below the sea,” he said. “We want more eyes on what’s happening out there in addition to where we see and generate through our manned platforms that continue to patrol the region today. It’s not enough to simply increase the amount of information, the raw data coming in. We’ve got to process and sort in real time to determine what’s relevant to the mission.”

The admiral said the allied and partner navies in his region have great interest in using unmanned systems, noting the launch of TF59 “really invigorates our partnerships around this particular region as we expand our common operating picture. The waterways here are ripe for real-world evaluation. It’s a very maritime region [with] 5,000 miles of coastline [and] three critical chokepoints,” the Straits of Hormuz, the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal.

“Our belief is if the new systems can work here, they can probably work anywhere else and we can field them across other fleets,” he said.

“We’ve assembled quite an impressive team to get after this opportunity,” said Brasseur, speaking of his task force. Brasseur is the former skipper of a coastal patrol ship and a littoral combat ship. “I’m really looking forward to launching the task force tomorrow and getting these systems in the water and in the hands of the operator.”

Cooper said some systems used earlier this year in Integrated Battle Problem 21 “will be used in an operational context” by TF59 during IMX-22 exercise in January 2022, which will be focused on unmanned systems.

Cooper affirmed in the future the 5th Fleet could be augmented by unmanned underwater vehicles from UUV Squadron One.