U.S. Navy in Middle East Employs Attack Drone at Sea for First Time



ARABIAN GULF (Dec. 16, 2025) A Low-cost Unmanned Combat Attack System (LUCAS) successfully launches from the flight deck of the Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Santa Barbara (LCS 32) while operating in the Arabian Gulf, Dec. 16. Task Force 59 operated the LUCAS drone, which is part of Task Force Scorpion Strike, a one-way attack drone squadron recently deployed to the Middle East to strengthen regional security and deterrence. (Photo by Spc. Kayla Mc Guire)

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Personnel assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet (NAVCENT/C5F) successfully launched a one-way attack drone from a ship at sea for the first time, Dec. 16.

The Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Santa Barbara (LCS 32) achieved the historic milestone in the Arabian Gulf while launching a Low-cost Unmanned Combat Attack System (LUCAS).

“This first successful launch of LUCAS from a naval vessel marks a significant milestone in rapidly delivering affordable and effective unmanned capabilities to the warfighter,” said Vice Adm. Curt Renshaw, commander of NAVCENT/C5F. “This achievement demonstrates the power of innovation and joint collaboration in this critical region.”

On Dec. 3, U.S. Central Command announced the deployment of the U.S. military’s first one-way-attack drone squadron to the Middle East. The LUCAS drone that took off from USS Santa Barbara’s flight deck is part of the Task Force Scorpion Strike squadron formed to equip U.S. service members with the latest cutting-edge tools.

The LUCAS platforms operated by U.S. forces in the Middle East have an extensive range and can be launched with different mechanisms to include catapults, rocket-assisted takeoff, and mobile ground and vehicle systems.

“This platform will undoubtedly enhance regional maritime security and deterrence,” said Renshaw.

NAVCENT/C5F’s unmanned and autonomous operations task force, Task Force 59, executed the successful LUCAS drone launch from USS Santa Barbara.

NAVCENT/C5F is the maritime component of U.S. Central Command, whose area of responsibility encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean. This expanse, comprised of 21 countries, includes three critical chokepoints at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait at the southern tip of Yemen.