

Operation Southern Spear: Latest Development in Operationalizing Robotic and Autonomous Systems



Operation Southern Spear will deploy unmanned air and surface vessels to help determine combinations of unmanned vehicles and manned forces to provide coordinated maritime domain awareness and conduct counternarcotics operations.

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MAYPORT, Fla. – U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet is advancing the Navy’s Hybrid Fleet Campaign through Operation Southern Spear, which will start later this month in U.S. Southern Command Area of Responsibility (USSOUTHCOM AOR) and at U.S. 4th Fleet Headquarters at Naval Station Mayport.

“Southern Spear will operationalize a heterogeneous mix of Robotic and Autonomous Systems (RAS) to support the detection and monitoring of illicit trafficking while learning lessons for other theaters,” said Cmdr. Foster Edwards, 4th Fleet’s Hybrid Fleet Director. “Southern Spear will continue our (4th Fleet’s) move away from short-duration experimentation into long-duration operations that will help develop critical techniques and procedures in integrating RAS into the maritime environment.”

Specifically, Operation Southern Spear will deploy long-dwell robotic surface vessels, small robotic interceptor boats, and vertical take-off and landing robotic air vessels to the USSOUTHCOM AOR. 4th Fleet will operationalize these unmanned systems through integration with U.S. Coast Guard cutters at

sea and operations centers at 4th Fleet and Joint Interagency Task Force South. Southern Spear's results will help determine combinations of unmanned vehicles and manned forces needed to provide coordinated maritime domain awareness and conduct counternarcotics operations.

U.S. 4th Fleet is conducting Operation Southern Spear in support of our Navy's Project 33 targets to operationalize RAS. Using RAS to increase presence in, and awareness of, strategically and economically important maritime regions will help decision-making, strengthen sovereignty, and facilitate regional cooperation.

"Operation Southern Spear is the next step in our Hybrid Fleet Campaign," said Rear Adm. Carlos Sardiello, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. Fourth Fleet. "We look forward to the results of Southern Spear. Hybrid Fleet operations increase our collaboration with partners in the region while furthering the Navy's tactics, techniques, procedures, and processes."

U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet is the trusted maritime partner for Caribbean, Central and South America maritime forces leading to improved unity, security and stability.