

U.S., Israel Complete Unmanned Exercise in Gulf of Aqaba



Vessels from the Israeli Navy and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command operate in the Gulf of Aqaba with two unmanned surface vessels, a Devil Ray T-38, top, and Saildrone Explorer, bottom, during exercise Digital Shield, Sept. 21. *U.S. NAVY MANAMA, Bahrain* – Forces from Israel and the U.S. completed a four-day exercise in the Gulf of Aqaba on Sept. 22, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs said.

The exercise, called Digital Shield, was a bilateral training event between U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and Israeli naval forces that focused on enhancing maritime awareness using unmanned systems and artificial intelligence in support of vessel boarding operations.

U.S. participants included members of NAVCENT's unmanned systems and artificial intelligence task force, Task Force 59, and the U.S. Coast Guard. A Devil Ray T-38 and Saildrone Explorer unmanned surface vessel also participated.

“Integrating unmanned systems with our partners advances our integration efforts,” said Lt. Cmdr. William Ricketts from Task Force 59. “Ultimately, we are strengthening ties and innovating new capabilities with regional partners to enhance maritime security.”

NAVCENT established Task Force 59 in September 2021 to integrate new unmanned systems and artificial intelligence into U.S. naval operations across the Middle East. Since its launch, the task force has operated a suite of new unmanned systems based at operational hubs in Bahrain and Aqaba, Jordan.

The task force partners with industry and international forces for operational evaluation and employment. The Middle East region's unique geography, climate and strategic importance offer an ideal environment for unmanned innovation.

NAVCENT is headquartered in Manama, Bahrain, and includes maritime forces operating in the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandeb.