

USS Sioux City was 'Built for 5th Fleet'



Littoral combat ship USS Sioux City (LCS 11) moored pierside in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 31. Sioux City is deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations to help ensure maritime security and stability in the Middle East region. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Nicholas A. Russell*
USS Sioux City (LCS 11) has become the first littoral combat ship to deploy to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility.

According to Capt. Rob Francis, the commander of Destroyer Squadron 50 and Task Force 55, the Freedom-class variant is perfect for this AOR.

The Mayport-based Sioux City was commissioned in 2018. It has more varied deployment experience than any other LCS. It deployed to the U.S. 4th Fleet last year, supporting interdiction operations in the Caribbean with a U.S. Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement embarked, and was served with the U.S. 6th Fleet during most of the month of May on its way to the Middle East.

The ship is equipped with the surface warfare mission package. An embarked detachment of a pair of MH-60S Seahawk helicopters from the Sea Knights of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22 is assigned to the Sioux City for its deployment.

The ship hasn't arrived in the Arabian Gulf yet, but is operating in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden as part of Combined Task Force 153.

"LCS isn't like anything that has come out to 5th Fleet," Francis said. "We recognize that that LCS was built for this AOR. We have a CO and a crew that's 100% locked on to helping

us understand how to integrate the Freedom class into our operations, because this is our future.”

Francis said the plan is to conduct patrols and maritime security operations.

“Right now, she’s conducting boardings, and doing the real-world mission we need her to do. She’s also providing air domain awareness for the CAOC, which is something the ship wasn’t designed for. We’ll exercise all of the ship’s capabilities. We want to find out what she can do.”

Francis also said the deployment is a test of the Navy’s support infrastructure in the region.

“We’ll do a planned maintenance availability when they get to here to Bahrain, and we’ll exercise every one of our support capabilities and facilities.”

Francis acknowledged the concerns about LCS fuel consumption and readiness.

“We’ve heard the criticism that LCS has short legs. Okay, if you run it around at 40 knots all the time, that may be true. When she’s station keeping, however, it’s at an economical speed that offers good fuel consumption,” he said. “I don’t have an oiler following her around.”

Francis said Sioux City has met expectations for readiness.

“I look at all of my ships every single day, and Sioux City is green across the board. If you ask me, I’d like three or four more out here tomorrow.”