

Undersecretary: 8 LCSs could be based in Gulf

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The Navy could eventually have a force of eight ships operating from Bahrain if plans to base littoral combat ships (LCS) in the Persian Gulf continue as envisioned, the service's No. 2 official said Monday.

The Navy has long been planning to operate LCS ships in the gulf, Undersecretary Bob Work told an audience at the Cato Institute in Washington. The ships, able to perform several different missions when fitted out with specialized equipment packages, already are to replace U.S. minesweepers and patrol boats in the region.

The four-ship minesweeper force operating from Bahrain will be doubled by next month when another four ships arrive from the U.S. West Coast, and a total of 10 large patrol boats are eventually to be stationed there. All will ultimately be replaced by LCS ships.

Work did not lay out a timetable for LCS deployments, but it is likely to be late this decade before enough LCS ships will be available to be forward-based in the gulf at the eight-ship level.

"These plans are preliminary," Work cautioned after his talk, "pending approval from the Pentagon, the Congress and the host nation."

Only two ships — one from each design currently being built — are in service. A third ship will be commissioned this fall, while the fourth won't be delivered until next year.

Freedom (LCS 1) is to make a demonstration deployment in 2013 to Singapore, which has offered to host four of the ships.

The Freedom will return to the U.S. in late 2013 or early 2014 after a 10-month cruise, and the first ship to be regularly operating from the island state is likely to be the Fort Worth (LCS 3), second of the Freedom-class.

The Navy has said it does not wish to mix both classes of LCSs in Singapore for this early effort, and aside from the Freedom, it will be 2016 at the earliest before enough LCS 1-class ships will be available to be based in Singapore.

But LCS 1-class ships are better suited to operations in the Persian Gulf, Work said.

Even if the four LCS 1s at Singapore are shifted to Bahrain and replaced by LCS 2-class units, it will be 2018 at least before enough LCS 1s are available to be operating from the gulf state.