



Norwegian Coastal Forces Evaluate New Drones to Detect Threats at Sea

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HARSTAD, Norway — A few hundred kilometers from a Russian naval base in the Murmansk Oblast, a formation of military vessels plows through the icy waters of the Norwegian Sea.

A group of officers, with the Norwegian flag on their uniforms, moves from a moving vessel to a larger one, an offshore patrol ship of the Norwegian Coast Guard, using a pole with a hook and a precarious ladder to climb aboard.

They are part of the Norwegian Coastal Rangers, a marine command unit trained to operate in coastal combat environments. In the context of the NATO Joint Viking 2025 exercise, organized earlier this month, they trained for the operation of boarding a suspicious ship.

The ship boarding scenario has become central in the recent defense planning of the alliance. Western officials fear that NATO adversaries might use ships under the guise of research missions or civilian transports to damage submarine cables and energy infrastructure in European waters.

The small Norwegian unit, consisting of about 150 individuals, is extremely versatile and tasked with missions ranging from coastal raids and maritime patrols to intelligence gathering. With the risks of sabotage in mind for NATO, formations like this are gaining new importance in national force structures.

In its annual national threat assessment report, the Norwegian Police Security Service noted that in the past year, Russia has demonstrated "its determination and capability to conduct sabotage operations on European soil" and that it is "likely" to affect Norway in 2025.

The NATO member shares a 198-kilometer (123-mile) land border with Russia in the Arctic and a maritime border in the Barents Sea.

Although the Coastal Rangers have not noticed an increase in the number of illegal or sanctioned vessels sailing along the Norwegian coast, officers have noted that there has been an increase in the level of electromagnetic disturbance in recent years.

The Norwegian defense authorities have recently approved a series of upgrades to modernize and expand the capabilities of the ranger unit. Among these is the acquisition of new unmanned technologies, including drones for long-range maritime surveillance, according to Frode Nakken, commander of the Coastal Rangers.

"We have operated with drones for several years, mainly fixed-wing models, but they have proven vulnerable to the Arctic climate - the larger and long-range drones we will acquire will have greater endurance and power to withstand these conditions," he stated to Defense News during the Joint Viking exercise.

Winter temperatures in northern Norway can easily drop to -10 degrees Celsius, where the cold quickly drains drone battery life and the abundant precipitation makes it difficult for operators to pilot them.

The Norwegian Defense Pledge 2025-2036 stated that the ambition is to have unmanned aerial systems stationed at Andøya Air Station, about 300 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle.

The Norwegian Ministry of Defense has contacted U.S. manufacturers, including Northrop Grumman and General Atomics regarding this request for information, as reported by Janes.

A spokesperson for General Atomics told Defense News that the company has already responded to the solicitation, proposing its MQ-9B SeaGuardian.

“It will provide Norway with 360-degree maritime radar coverage and full SIGINT capabilities - the MQ-9B is the only remotely piloted aircraft capable of conducting anti-submarine warfare missions, allowing the enhancement of the country's existing P-8 patrol aircraft fleet,” said spokesperson C. Mark Brinkley.

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