



STRATEGY

## Peraton sails forward with unmanned Navy work

By Ross Wilkers      Feb 14, 2020

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The list of companies on this recently-awarded \$982.1 million unmanned surface vessel contract indicate the Navy's push for more ships without sailors is viewed as a growth opportunity by government contractors of all types.

Whether they manufacture the vehicles or not, companies are looking for at least a piece of that expanding pie and those that do not make the platforms are increasingly picking their spots in software and other service areas.

From the perspective of Peraton, building the platforms themselves is certainly a big part of the broader unmanned story that is tilting more toward autonomous. But officials helping run that part of Peraton portfolio recently told me that does not tell all of it.

“It’s one thing to build them, and then it’s the operating and testing, knowing the environment and knowing the operational capabilities of the systems,” said Christopher Murray, a program manager. “That’s where we come in: there’s integration with the systems, there’s the cybersecurity that we are trying to get more involved in.”

A look at a set of four Navy task orders Peraton announced in January shows part of where the Herndon, Virginia-based company is placing its bets when it comes to the unmanned maritime arena.

Those orders focus on unmanned underwater vehicles and services will include testing and operations, providing fleet support representatives, software engineering and development, and IT services to support iterations and upgrades.

For Peraton, that means focusing on domain expertise of employees, advances in digital technologies that augment the platforms and other services wrapped around them.

Operations Manager Joseph Huhman said the company has hired a cadre of former military mechanics, divers and other operators that focus on developing tactics and procedures for unmanned vessels to operate in the field.

Then there is the shift in conversation from the word “unmanned” to that of “autonomous,” which is where the technology piece comes in.

“Right now, we’re manning these systems a little bit more heavier than we were planning on originally when everything was drawn up,” Huhman said. “But as things get more autonomous, they can read their environment, different sensors come out, the tactics and the techniques improve, the maintenance and logistics get better.

“All those things are going to come together and make these systems way more robust.”

How far along the Navy is on bringing all of that together and making unmanned maritime systems more robust -- and also autonomous -- depends on who is asked that question on a particular day.

But already-awarded procurements such as the one mentioned in the first paragraph of this story and another \$794.5 million contract the Navy awarded in mid-2018 for work on underwater vessels are signs. The Navy also has a solicitation out on the street now to acquire a medium-sized unmanned surface vessel with autonomy a key component of that buy.

The self-driven aspect of future vessels is certainly a key area of focus for Peraton through its test-and-evaluation work, according to Matthew Clements, one of the company’s UUV program managers.

Clements said one aspect involves the vehicle figuring out by itself which areas to search in and what would be advantageous to it, while a second thread

concentrates on quicker mission timelines and working through post-processing situations.

His answer on what Peraton is working on might serve as a preview of how unmanned systems and technologies can come together.

“We are also experimenting with some algorithms that would be an on-board solution, so data would be reviewed on their way into the vehicle,” Clements said. “That stuff’s all pretty developmental still and is not out in the fleet... but those efforts are underway.”

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#### About the Author

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