The U.S. Naval War College offers the International Maritime Staff Operator Course
Multinational maritime missions have thrusted together navies that don’t always share the same rules of engagement, interpretations of international law or capabilities at sea. Those differences can complicate missions in which interoperability is required to eradicate piracy, protect shipping lanes and arrest smugglers.

A successful mission starts with a clear understanding of the agreed objectives. All partners must be included in the planning process to generate clear and unambiguous direction and guidance for an integrated multinational force.

The International Maritime Staff Operator Course, which the U.S. Naval War College will begin offering to multinational naval officers in January 2018, aims to address this problem by promoting successful partnerships at sea and smoothly integrating coalition forces in the Middle East.

Using a mix of lectures, discussions and practical training, the course builds competency by drawing on the skills and knowledge acquired by the U.S. Navy through its long experience patrolling the waters of the world. Twenty-five participants at a time can take the 12-week course, offered twice in 2018 and three times in 2019.

“Demand for this course came from the international navies, partners who said they would like to participate,” said U.S. Navy Cmdr. Michael Hallett, a staff member at the Naval War College. “We are not saying every country will do it the way we teach it, but we’ll present a model that can inform their operations.”

Governments in the Middle East and South Asia support many robust and successful multinational organizations, partnerships, and bilateral agreements promoting cooperation and interoperability to maintain freedom of navigation, the free flow of maritime commerce and stability of the maritime domain.

These include the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as the Bahrain-based Combined Maritime Force (CMF). The CMF is a 31-member multinational naval partnership composed of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, focused on maritime security and counterterrorism; CTF 151, a multinational anti-piracy operation; and CTF 152, focused on Arabian Gulf security and cooperation.

Exercises and conferences such as the International Mine Countermeasures Exercise and the Maritime Infrastructure Protection symposium, last held in Bahrain in April 2016, highlight the need to enhance interoperability not only at the tactical level, but at the operational level as well. According to retired British Royal Navy Capt. Andrew Elvin, program manager for the course, naval officers from multiple countries were forced to spend valuable time during the 2016 exercises gelling as a staff before they could effectively execute their training mission in and around the Arabian Gulf.

“In recognition of this shortfall, the U.S. Naval War College supported a command post exercise in which naval officers from multiple countries were taught how to cooperate in the development of a mission and then how to execute that mission,” Capt. Elvin said.

A similar need for staff integration exists within the GCC, whose six members are trying to set up their own independent maritime operations center in Bahrain. Not only is this area impacted by issues of national sovereignty, territorial waters, traffic separation schemes and exclusive economic zones, but it is also congested with fishing boats, trading vessels, oil platforms and pleasure craft, Elvin said.

“The high seas are easier; there are not that many people or regional influences out there,” he said. “But operating in the littorals is always a challenge.”

The course is designed for naval lieutenants, lieutenant commanders and commanders. Some exceptions may be made, and other ranks may attend on a case-by-case basis.

Upon course completion, students will be able to serve confidently as staff officers on a national or combined maritime staff and apply operational concepts to develop plans and conduct operations in a multinational maritime environment.

For more information about the course, see https://www.usnwc.edu/Departments--Colleges/International-Programs/I-MSOC-Overview.aspx or email the U.S. Naval War College at IMSOC@usnwc.edu