

Iran Sails Naval Assets toward Venezuela for First Time

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OE Watch Commentary

For the first time Iran sailed naval vessels around the Horn of Africa and into the Atlantic Ocean. According to El Salvador based *El Diario de Hoy*, Venezuela is the likely destination. The ships, possibly in an effort to confuse regional security analysts, changed course several times. According to satellite imagery, the ships may intend to transfer arms to the Maduro regime. Specifically, one of the vessels may be carrying small fast attack boats of the type that Iran operates frequently in the Persian Gulf. The Spanish-language version of the well-known U.S. media outlet *CNN Español* noted the importance of fast attack boats to Iran's Persian Gulf operations, which include invading commercial and military ships. Further, the article notes that these boats are often equipped with anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. Iran has long sought to develop an open water navy, and uninterrupted passage from the Persian Gulf through the Atlantic to Venezuela could be considered significant progress toward that goal. Further, the transfer of fast attack boats to Venezuela, specifically, could alter the dynamics of naval deterrence and area denial capabilities in the southern Caribbean.



The formal commissioning of new Iranian naval vessels in 2019 in the port city of Bandar Abbas.

Source: Mehr News Agency, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New_vessels_join_Iranian_Navy_Dec_2019_-_2.jpg

“One of the Iranian ships, a floating base called Makran, was seen in late April in satellite images from Maxar Technologies in the port of Bandar Abbas with seven small fast attack ships on its deck.”

Source: “Buques iraníes con armamento llegan a Venezuela por Maduro (Iranian ships with weapons to arrive in Venezuela for Maduro),” *El Diario de Hoy* (a morning newspaper in El Salvador with broad coverage of Latin America), 22 June 2021. <https://www.elsalvador.com/opinion/nota-del-dia/libre-expresion-venezuela-iran/851094/2021/>

Two ships sailing from Iran to Venezuela have been detected by U.S. satellites, which could carry high-speed ships on their deck and other packages that are presumably military weapons. This could further aggravate the situation in the region, especially in the face of the imbalance of military force...So far, the U.S. reaction to the boats has been one of ‘concern.’

Source: “Estados Unidos rastrea barcos iraníes que navegarían en dirección a Venezuela (The United States tracks Iranian ships that would sail in the direction of Venezuela),” *CNN Español* (the Spanish-language version of the well-known U.S. media outlet), 4 June 2021. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/06/04/estados-unidos-rastrea-barcos-iran-direccion-venezuela-trax/>

One of the Iranian ships, a floating base called Makran, was seen in late April in satellite images from Maxar Technologies in the port of Bandar Abbas with seven small fast attack ships on its deck...These fast and agile vessels are often used by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the Persian Gulf to invade commercial or military ships, including US Navy and Coast Guard ships operating there. They can be equipped with a variety of weapons ranging from small arms, anti-ship missiles, and torpedoes.