Iran Reportedly Using New Carrier, Submarines To Expand Reach of Drones

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OE Watch Commentary

Iran was among the first countries in the Middle East to recognize the military utility of drones. Whereas Turkey developed its indigenous drones only a decade ago, Iran began building drones in 1985 to fly over and surveil Iraqi trenches during the Iran-Iraq War. Over subsequent decades, the stable of Iranian drones proliferated with different models available to the regular Iranian military, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and domestic law enforcement agencies. While drones allowed Iran to project force within range of its land borders, unless the Iranian military was to outsource drone operation to its proxies—as it has in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen—it was unable to utilize them farther afield. The problem with outsourcing drone operations, however, is that it gives control to militias that are not always in sync with Iranian aims and objectives.

The excerpted article from the *Iranian Students News Agency*, a semi-official agency supposedly run by students, but which projects the government's official line, discusses July exercises in the northern Indian Ocean in which the Iranian Navy unveiled a "drone carrier" capable of launching numerous drones with surveillance, general attack, and kamikaze capabilities. It is unclear from the reporting if the drone carrier will be able to recover the drones it launches. Such a capability enables the Iranian military to strike with drones over the open ocean where, previously, Iran's capabilities were limited. A greater concern for those seeking to counter Iranian aggression would be the article's claim that Iran also launched drones from both its domestic-made submarine and its Russian-built Kilo-class import. While the range and underwater endurance of Iranian submarines are limited compared to U.S. nuclear submarines or the German-built diesel submarines, which Israel uses, submarine-launched Iranian drones would enhance Iran's special operations by enabling the Iranian military to evade radar when conducting offensive drone operations throughout the region.

Source: "Ravanmaye az Avalin Navdasteh Pehpadbar Niruye Daryayi (Unveiling of the Navy's First Drone Carrier)," *Iranian Student News Agency* (semi-official student led news agency projecting the government line), 15 July 2022. https://www.isna.ir/news/1401042416384

The army's first strategic navy drone fleet was unveiled with the presence of Army Commander-in-Chief Amir Maj. Gen. Mousavi in the Navy's Southern Fleet. According to the Iranian Student News Agency quoting the public affairs department of the Army, the regular Navy unveiled its first drone carrier fleet in the presence of both the commander-in-chief of the Army and the Navy. It consisted both of surface and sub-surface units carrying all types of combat, surveillance, and suicide drones in the southern fleet of the regular Iranian Navy.

In the unveiling ceremony for this flotilla, a variety of advanced and cutting-edge drones produced by the Army and the Ministry of Defense including the Pelican, Homa, Arash, Chamrosh, Zhubin, Ababil-4, and Bavar-5 drones flew over the waters of the Indian Ocean.

According to this report, in addition to the flight of vertical and sea-based UAVs from the deck of surface units, for the first time, combat UAVs were flown from the Iran-made Fateh submarine and Kilo-class Tareq submarine....

Major General Seyyed Abdul Rahim Mousavi, commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army, expressed his satisfaction with the successful deployment of combat drones... He added, "As seen, surveillance drones have actually increased the intelligence capability of our vessels by hundreds of kilometers beyond the country's borders, and combat and kamikaze drones are considered the Islamic Republic of Iran's long hand in international waters and the open sea. Both deter threats and, if necessary and the enemy makes a mistake, they will ensure the enemy will face a regrettable response.