



Iran to Re-Launch “Helicopter Carrier”

OE Watch Commentary: The Iranian navy has had a tough couple of years. In November 2016 the Iranian frigate *Alvand* and the supply ship *Bushehr* became stranded in the South African port of Durban on the Indian Ocean, curtailing a high-profile mission to sail into the Atlantic Ocean. Not only did the mission fail, but the Iranian navy had to rely on the generosity of the South African government to feed its crews while the ships underwent multi-month repairs. More recently, the Iranian destroyer *Damavand* sank after striking a jetty in the Caspian port of Bandar Anzali. After the Iranian navy denied the incident, bloggers subsequently released video footage of the *Damavand* sinking (See: “Iran: Warship Sinks after Mishap,” *OE Watch*, March 2018).

Source: “Nav-e Balgardabir ‘Kharg’ beh Darya Bazgosht (Kharg [Helicopter] Carrier Returned to the Sea),” *Fars News Agency*, 20 June 2018. <https://www.farsnews.com/news/13970330000921>

Kharg a helicopter carrier of the Islamic Republic of Iran, after major overhauls taking four years, has been deployed as the largest Western Asian vessel on the maritime mission. According to the *Fars News Agency*, the *Kharg* helicopter carrier along with the *Sabalan* destroyer have deployed as the 54th marine flotilla to the Gulf of Aden, northern Indian Ocean, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

The accompanying excerpted article seeks to reset the Iranian navy’s image: It describes the return to service of the Iranian “helicopter carrier” *Kharg* and the destroyer *Sabalan*. What the article glosses over, however, are the capabilities of the ships. The *Sabalan* was a Vosper frigate built in 1969 by the British. The *Kharg*, meanwhile, is more than 40 years old and is a large tanker and supply ship which the Iranian navy named a helicopter carrier after stationing three helicopters on it. That Iran conducted a four-year retrofit and repair of the *Kharg*, however, does show a growing maintenance capability, one born of necessity given the age of Iran’s fleet.

That said, the fact that Iran has now sent its largest ship to the Bab al-Mandab and Gulf of Aden, however, shows the degree to which Iran wants to show its flag in and around Yemen, especially as its proxy war with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continues. Should the *Kharg* be damaged in those crowded waters or fail at sea as the 2016 flotilla to Atlantic Ocean did, the loss of face to the navy within Iran would be significant. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Kharg, after major overhauls taking four years, has been deployed.”



The *Kharg* helicopter carrier.

Source: *Fars News Agency*, https://media.farsnews.com/media/Uploaded/Files/Images/1392/07/19/13920719000178_PhotoA.jpg, CC 4.0.