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Iran's Silent Hunters: How 'Midget' Ghadir Submarines Are Fighting The War In Strait Of Hormuz

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Iran is reportedly conducting the Strait of Hormuz through Ghadir class midget submarines. Here are they designed? How many Iran has deployed in all? Secret explain

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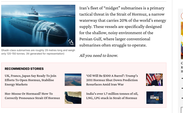

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All you need to know

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All you need to know

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THE 'INVISIBLE' FLEET: GHADIR-CLASS SUBMARINES

The backbone of this undersea threat is the Ghadir-class midget submarine.

These submarines are roughly 29 meters long and weigh only 120–150 tonnes — about one-tenth the size of a conventional attack submarine. Their small displacement and diesel-electric propulsion makes them nearly "invisible" to sonar systems optimized for deeper waters.

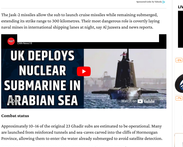
While US nuclear submarines require significant depth, the Ghadir can operate in waters as shallow as 30 meters. They can "sit" on the seabed or hide near the tangers to pass above, using the high ambient noise of shipping traffic to mask their acoustic signature.

Iran is estimated to have over 20 Ghadir-class vessels currently deployed, according to news reports.

Lethal armament

A "tonnes-armed" torpedo that travels at 250 mph (350+ km/h) by creating a bubble of air around itself, making it nearly impossible for ships to countermeasure.

The Jack 2 missiles allow the sub to launch cruise missiles while remaining submerged, extending its strike ranges to 300 kilometers. Their more dangerous cousin is the covertly lying naval mines in international shipping lanes at night, only 42 meters and news reports.

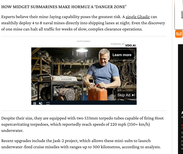


Combat status

Approximately 10–16 of the original 23 Ghadir subs are estimated to be operational. Many are launched from reinforced tunnels and sea caves carved into the cliffs of Bandar Abbas. Iran is reportedly attempting to enter the water already submerged to avoid satellite detection.

HOW MIGHT SUBMARINES MAKE HORMUZ A 'DANGER ZONE'

Experts believe their voice large propellers cause the greatest risk. A nearby Ghadir can reportedly deploy 4 to 6 naval mines directly into shipping lanes at night. Even the discovery of one mine can halt all traffic for weeks of time, complex clearance operations.



Despite their size, they are equipped with two 533mm torpedo tubes capable of firing fiber opposeratinting torpedoes, which reportedly reach speeds of 250 mph (350+ km/h) underwater.

Recent upgrades include the Jack 2 project, which allows these mini subs to launch cruise-range cruise missiles with ranges up to 300 kilometers, according to analysts.

WHY IT IS AN OPERATIONAL FRICTION FOR THE US NAVY

For US commanders, the threat is an "operational friction" campaign rather than a traditional sea battle. The US must dedicate significant assets — including 8-10 aircraft and Apache helicopters — just to monitor these shallow threats. The risk of ambush forces carrier strike groups to operate at slower speeds than standard distances, hampering their ability to maintain secure operations.

By maintaining the credible ability to disrupt the Strait, Iran uses these submarines as an economic weapon, driving up global oil prices and insurance rates, says news reports.

OTHER THAN GHADIR, IRAN'S SUBMARINE ARSENAL

Fateh (Coastal)

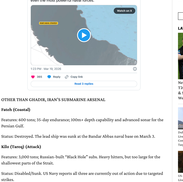
Features 400 tons, 35 day endurance; 100mm depth capability and advanced sonar for the Persian Gulf.

Status: Destroyed. The lead ship was sunk at the Bandar Abbas naval base on March 3.

Alfa (Tareq) (Iranian)

Features: 3,000 tons; Russian-built "Black Hole" subs. Heavy bitmen, but too large for the shallowest parts of the Strait.

Status: Doubtful/Sunk. US Navy reports all three are currently out of action due to targeted strikes.



Nabang (Midget)

Features: Specialized for special operations and "silent" mine-laying. Carries divers and netsonar delivery vehicles (SDVs).

Status: Active. Primarily used for covert sabotage missions near shipping lanes.

Specialized Underwater Systems

Iran also employs "minisonic" underwater tools for covert missions:

Al-Sabehat & e-Gharaab: Small swimmer delivery vehicles (SDVs) used by naval commandos for mine-laying and reconnaissance.

Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs): Five displayed in 2023, these are used for autonomous reconnaissance and potentially as "suicide" drones against hull targets.

The primary risk to global shipping remains the mine-laying capability of the unremarkable Ghadir midget sube, which can block the Strait of Hormuz more effectively than a direct naval confrontation.

IRAN'S UNDERSEA STRATEGY

Iran's "undersea" strategy is concentrated in three main areas:

The bedrock bases Infrastructure are positioned near the islands of Qeshm and Larak. They "sit" on the sandy seabed to wait for tankers, making them nearly impossible for sonar to distinguish from the ocean floor.

Coastal Tunnels: Many midget subs are launched from reinforced mountain pens along the Hormuzgan Province coastline. These tunnels allow them to enter the water already submerged, avoiding satellite detection.

The Choke Point: Small subs are deployed near the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, where the shipping lanes are narrowest, allowing them to lay mines across the entire path of traffic.

The US confirmed the sinking of the 80ft Fateh (Iran's most advanced coastal submarine) near its pier at Bandar Abbas on March 3. US officials claimed in 30 that up to 10 Iranian submarines had been destroyed, effectively neutralizing their "heavy" surface and underwater fleets.

Despite these losses, Iran is estimated to still operate 10 to 16+ Ghadir-class midget submarines.

KEY FAQs

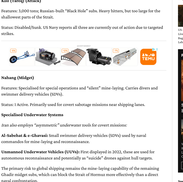
What are Iran's "midget submarines"?

They are small, stealthy submarines, mainly Ghadir class, designed for shallow waters like the Strait of Hormuz. They are used to detect due to size and quiet engines. They can lay torpedoes and lay naval mines. They can even sit on the seabed and "hide". They are underwater ambush weapons.

Why do they make the Strait of Hormuz dangerous?

Because they turn a narrow all-route into a hidden-threat zone. The strait is shallow and crowded and detection is difficult. The submarines with mines can target oil tankers. Even fear of mines can stop shipping.

Can they really challenge powerful navies?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