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Silent Nuclear Submarines Add to Iran Tensions

Dave Eberhart, NewsMax
Thursday, April 13, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The silent submarine forces of the United States, Israel and Iran are all ramping up for a hot war, adding yet more tension to an already volatile Middle East - made all the more uneasy by Iran's relentless march to become a nuclear power.

Leading off the always lurking and deadly wolfpacks is Israel's fleet of Dolphin-class submarines, each carrying U.S.-supplied Harpoon cruise missiles - armed with nuclear warheads.

The Israel submarines can remain at sea for a month and are equipped with six torpedo tubes appropriate for conventional torpedoes. The tubes can also be used to launch the nuclear-tipped cruise missiles - missiles that could reach some of the targeted sites in Iran critical to its nuclear development.

Starting with just three of these Dolphin-class undersea intruders, the Israeli inventory quickly went to a fourth and a fifth. And there are reportedly at least a half-dozen in the pipeline - two being built by the People's Republic of China.

Although most particulars of Iran's military assets - both personnel and hardware - are closely held by that country, military experts opine that Iran has up to six Russian-built SSK or SSI Kilo-class diesel submarines prowling the Gulf.

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Most recently, Iran's armed forces added to this fleet by deploying a new locally built submarine in Persian Gulf waters, state television reported.

The vessel was christened the Nahang, meaning whale. Built by the Iranian Defense Ministry, the sub has the capability "to carry multipurpose weapons for different missions," according to Iranian Rear Adm. Sajjad Kouchaki.

"The submarine is fully adapted to the Persian Gulf," he said, adding that the Iranian navy is pursuing a policy of deterrence in the strategic waters.

Perhaps even more significant, is the recent Iranian deployment of a super high-speed torpedo. The new torpedo was reportedly successfully tested last month during war games that Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards held in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.

State news sources touted the successfully test-firing of the new torpedo, called the "Hoot." The development ups the profile of Iran's power in the Gulf, where the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet is based to, among other things, safeguard the flow of oil.

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Gen. Ali Fadavi, deputy head of the Revolutionary Guards' navy, said that the torpedo, speeding at 223 miles per hour, was too fast to elude.

"It has a very powerful warhead designed to hit big submarines," Fadavi told state television.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration recently announced plans to add conventional ballistic missiles to the armory of its nuclear Trident submarines — adding yet another potential arm to any military option considered against Iran, if diplomacy and/or sanctions fail to persuade that country to give up its nuclear designs.

According to Defense Daily last January, four ultra-stealthy Ohio-class Strategic Nuclear Submarines, or SSBNs, were having their 24 Trident II D-5 nuclear ballistic missiles removed and replaced with up to 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles.

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