



Iran's offensive capabilities are improving: Multi-domain operations in practice

July 18, 2026, by [Dr. Peter F. Mayer](#), reading time: 5.4 minutes

A recent analysis highlights how Iran has significantly expanded its precision strike capabilities in recent months. At its core is the integration of various military domains – from reconnaissance and navigation to coordinated drone swarms. The result is precise, rapid, and difficult-to-defend operations that challenge Western assumptions about Iranian weaknesses.

The investigation describes a specific attack on a US logistics center in Kuwait, carried out in just six hours from target acquisition to impact. Shahed-136 drones were used, launched from mobile, camouflaged launchers. The drones flew at low altitude over a distance of 950 kilometers, utilizing Chinese BeiDou navigation with jamming protection and receiving real-time target updates. Russian satellite imagery provided the necessary reconnaissance.

Swarm tactics and autonomous coordination

The swarm coordination of the drones is particularly remarkable. They communicate with each other via mesh networks, share sensor data, and autonomously adjust their formation. Part of the swarm serves as decoys, while others precisely target specific areas – such as particular sections of warehouses or fuel depots – using electro-optical and infrared seekers.

This tactic is part of the fourth wave of Iranian drone operations (“Ya Abul-Hassan”) and is being further developed by institutions such as Malek Ashtar University and the Revolutionary Guard's Aerospace Force. The systems are relatively inexpensive to produce and difficult to detect.

The tactic is quite successful, as satellite images show:



Multi-domain operations as a key

The analysis places these capabilities within the broader context of multi-domain operations. Unlike classic platform-versus-platform conflicts, the war is being waged as a system-versus-system confrontation. Iran combines electromagnetic warfare, unmanned systems, precision weapons, and reconnaissance into an integrated whole.

Similar concepts can be found in the US doctrine on Multi-Domain Operations (US Army 2028 Concept) and in Chinese guidelines for integrated joint operations. Iran has developed its own decentralized version of this – the so-called "Mosaic Defense" or "Mosaic Offense." This decentralized structure makes it possible to remain operational even in the event of losses at the command level.

This proliferation helps explain the situation the United States currently finds itself in. Iran's command and control systems, as well as its air and coastal defense systems, were specifically designed for survivability. Much of the United States' previous surveillance capability has been weakened or disabled. As a result, the United States is in a so-called "**force discovery phase**" —

a period of intelligence gathering in which attempts are made to decipher Iran's defenses—in which it does not yet have a clear, reliable picture of Iran's defenses and must actively gather intelligence during combat operations.

For this reason, many of the recent US attacks serve less as decisive strikes and more as reconnaissance-in-force. The goal is to both inflict damage and force Iranian systems to respond so that American forces can analyze those responses. By observing how Iranian radar systems are activated, how quickly missile units react, how command networks are coordinated, and how defenses behave under pressure, the US gradually assembles a picture of Iranian capabilities. This process continues even if drones are lost and Iranian counterattacks occur. While many US attacks may appear random or purely destructive, they are often part of a broader intelligence effort aimed at gathering information about Iranian capabilities.

The overarching significance is hard to miss. The same underlying methods can already be observed among Iran's partners in the "axis of resistance." In the Red Sea, Ansarallah has repeatedly conducted coordinated, multi-sector attacks on shipping—most notably in the July 2025 attacks on the bulk carriers "Magic Seas" and "Eternity C." These operations combined explosive unmanned surface vehicles, anti-ship cruise missiles and ballistic missiles, and armed speedboats in a single, converging attack, forcing defenders to simultaneously deal with threats at sea and in the air. In Lebanon, Hezbollah combines jam-resistant fiber-optic drones with rocket and missile fire to conduct layered attacks on Israeli positions, armored vehicles, and air defense batteries. By using these drones simultaneously as precision weapons and as real-time observation tools for follow-up fire, the group demonstrates that advanced multi-domain capabilities – such as link protection, coordination of unmanned systems and cross-domain effects – are no longer exclusively reserved for the armed forces of leading states.

Practical demonstrations

Recent operations demonstrate Iran's ability to strike mobile targets, such as US HIMARS missile launchers, while they are deployed and ready to fire. Response times have been significantly reduced, and accuracy has improved – despite ongoing sanctions and months of military strain.

These developments also have repercussions for Iranian partners and allies in the region, who are adopting similar tactics. At the same time, the improved defensive and offensive capabilities are forcing the US and Israel into a "force discovery" phase—that is, reconnaissance missions—to better understand Iran's true capabilities.

A realistic view of the abilities

While Western media and politicians often portray Iran as technologically backward, actual operations paint a different picture. The combination of inexpensive mass-produced weapons, resilient navigation, autonomous coordination, and external (Russian/Chinese) intelligence creates asymmetric advantages that can put expensive Western systems under pressure.

The ability to go from reconnaissance to precision strike within a few hours is not a coincidence, but the result of systematic development under real combat conditions. This raises fundamental

questions about how sustainable a strategy of military escalation against such an adversary can be in the long term.

Sources:

- [Iran's Strike Capabilities Are Improving: Multi-Domain Operations In Practice – DD Geopolitics Substack \(17. Juli 2026\)](#)
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- Analyses of the Iranian "Mosaic Defence" doctrine (including The Soufan Center, RUSI, Wikipedia summaries of military doctrines)