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CM-302 Anti-Ship Missile — China-Iran Deal and Gulf Security Implications

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SUBJECTS COVERED**IR SECURITY & DEFENCE****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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CM-302 Anti-Ship Missile — China-Iran Deal and Gulf Security Implications

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WHY IN NEWS

Iran is finalising a deal to procure China’s CM-302 supersonic anti-ship cruise missile, raising alarms among US naval planners and Gulf states about a potential shift in the naval balance of power in the Persian Gulf and surrounding waters — waterways critical to India’s energy security.

THE CM-302: SPECIFICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

The **CM-302** is China’s export-grade supersonic anti-ship cruise missile, derived from the **YJ-12 (Eagle Strike-12)** used by the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). It represents one of the most capable anti-ship missiles available on the global arms market.

Feature	Detail
Speed	Mach 2.5–3 (supersonic; terminal phase may be hypersonic-adjacent)
Propulsion	Liquid-fuel turbojet + booster; four air intakes
Range	~ 290–400 km (export variant range-limited)
Guidance	Inertial navigation + active radar homing (terminal phase)
Warhead	~200–500 kg high-explosive
Launch platforms	Ships, aircraft, land-based mobile launchers

At Mach 3, the CM-302 gives naval defenders as little as **20–30 seconds of reaction time** after detection — far less than slower subsonic missiles like the French Exocet (Mach 0.9) or US Harpoon (Mach 0.85). Modern naval close-in weapon systems (CIWS) struggle against supersonic threats at close ranges.

Why this matters for Iran: Iran already possesses anti-ship missiles (Noor, Qader, Khalij Fars) but none with the speed and range of the CM-302. Acquiring it would significantly enhance Iran’s ability to threaten US carrier strike groups and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) naval assets in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

THE IRAN-CHINA ARMS RELATIONSHIP

The Iran-China relationship has deepened significantly in recent years:

25-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE COOPERATION AGREEMENT (2021)

In March 2021, Iran and China signed a **25-year strategic cooperation agreement** covering trade, energy, infrastructure, and — implicitly — defence cooperation. Key terms:

- China to invest ~**\$400 billion** in Iran over 25 years

- Iran to supply discounted oil to China

- Cooperation in banking, telecommunications, ports, railways

- Defence cooperation** mentioned in broad terms

SANCTIONS CONTEXT

Iran has been under severe US sanctions since 2018 (reimposed after Trump withdrew from the JCPOA). These sanctions restrict Iran's conventional arms imports — but China has been willing to supply arms despite the risk of secondary sanctions under **CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act)**.

China's calculation: the US cannot sanction the Chinese military-industrial complex without triggering a wider economic rupture; Beijing therefore accepts a degree of risk in arms sales to Iran.

GULF SECURITY: WHY INDIA CARES

The Persian Gulf and its chokepoints — **Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb** — are central to India's energy and economic security:

INDIA'S GULF EXPOSURE

- ~**65% of India's crude oil imports** transit through the Strait of Hormuz

- ~**9 million Indians** live in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries; annual remittances: ~**\$42 billion**

- India's **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)**: capacity ~5.33 million metric tonnes (~9.5 days of consumption) — providing limited buffer

THE HORMUZ BOTTLENECK

The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most critical oil chokepoint:

- ~**20 million barrels/day** of crude and petroleum products pass through (~20% of global traded oil)

- Navigable lane: only **3 km wide** in each direction

Iran controls both northern shores; can theoretically threaten shipping with a mix of anti-ship missiles, mines, and small-boat swarms

If Iran deploys CM-302 on mobile land-based launchers along its coast, it can threaten ships throughout the Persian Gulf without engaging at sea — a **sea-denial** strategy that does not require a blue-water navy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL MILITARY BALANCE

FOR THE US NAVY

The US maintains the **Fifth Fleet** at Bahrain. US carrier strike groups and surface combatants are vulnerable to **saturation attacks** using multiple supersonic missiles simultaneously — a strategy that overwhelms Aegis radar/missile defence systems. The CM-302's acquisition by Iran accelerates pressure on US naval dominance.

FOR GCC STATES

Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain host US bases and are alarmed by Iranian missile capabilities. The Abraham Accords (2020) partly reflected Gulf states' desire for collective security arrangements.

FOR INDIA

India is diplomatically engaged with both Iran (Chabahar Port, energy imports) and GCC states (diaspora, trade). A Gulf military escalation would:

Spike crude oil prices — every \$10/barrel rise adds ~₹70,000 crore to India's import bill

Threaten Indian workers and their remittances — Operation Rahat (2015) evacuated ~4,640 Indians from Yemen

Disrupt IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor) — announced at G20 2023 as India's alternative connectivity route

CHINA'S ARMS EXPORT STRATEGY

China's arms exports have grown from niche supplier to major player. Through CM-302 sales to Iran:

Diplomatic leverage over Iran — a dependent customer

Technology signal to other buyers (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE) that China has world-class anti-ship technology

Revenue for the Chinese defence-industrial base

Strategic pressure on the US — every Iranian capability enhancement requires greater US naval spending

China's arms export growth has been concentrated in Asia and the Middle East. The **SIPRI Arms Transfer Database** tracks China as the world's fourth or fifth-largest arms exporter.

UPSC RELEVANCE

CM-302, YJ-12, CAATSA, JCPOA, Strait of Hormuz, Fifth Fleet, SIPRI, Bab-el-Mandeb, Operation Rahat, IMEC.

MAINS GS-2:

India's West Asia policy; energy security; Gulf security architecture; China's arms export strategy.

GS-3:

India's SPR; oil price vulnerability.

INTERVIEW:

“How should India balance its relationships with Iran, GCC states, and the US amid rising Gulf tensions?”

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

CM-302 MISSILE — CORE DATA:

Export name: **CM-302** | PLA Navy variant: **YJ-12 (Eagle Strike-12)**

Speed: **Mach 2.5–3** (supersonic)

Range (export): **~290–400 km**

Propulsion: Liquid-fuel turbojet with 4 air intakes + solid rocket booster

Guidance: Inertial + active radar homing

Launch platforms: Ship, aircraft, ground mobile launcher

Reaction time for defenders: **~20–30 seconds** at supersonic terminal approach

IRAN'S ANTI-SHIP ARSENAL (PRE-CM-302):

Noor (subsonic, YJ-82 derivative): ~120 km range

Qader (subsonic): ~200 km range

Khalij Fars (ballistic, anti-ship): land-based

CM-302 would be Iran's first supersonic anti-ship cruise missile

CHINA-IRAN 25-YEAR AGREEMENT (2021):

Signed: **March 2021**

Chinese investment: **~\$400 billion** over 25 years

Iranian commitment: Discounted oil supply to China

Sectors: Trade, energy, infrastructure, defence

STRAIT OF HORMUZ:

Daily throughput: **~20 million barrels** of oil (~20% global traded oil)

Navigable lane: **3 km wide** each direction

Location: Between Iran (north) and UAE/Oman (south)

India crude via Hormuz: **~65%**

CAATSA:

Full name: **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (2017)**

Targets: Russia, Iran, North Korea

Mechanism: Secondary sanctions on third-country entities dealing with these states

India relevance: India bought Russian S-400 air defence system despite CAATSA threat

INDIA'S GULF EXPOSURE:

Indians in GCC: **~9 million**

Remittances from GCC: **~\$42 billion/year**

SPR capacity: **~5.33 million metric tonnes** (~9.5 days)

SPR locations: Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur (Udupi, Karnataka)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Operation Rahat (2015): Evacuated 4,640 Indians + 960 foreigners from Yemen during civil war

JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal, 2015); US withdrew 2018 (Trump), re-entered 2021 (Biden); talks ongoing

IMEC: India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; announced G20 New Delhi Summit, September 2023

Fifth Fleet: US Navy fleet based in **Manama, Bahrain**; responsible for Gulf/Red Sea/Arabian Sea

Abraham Accords (2020): UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco normalised relations with Israel, brokered by US

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, SIPRI

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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