



Will the Garibaldi Become a Drone Carrier? The Future in Indonesia and the Opportunity Italy May Have Let Slip Away

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The **aircraft carrier Giuseppe Garibaldi** has concluded its operational history under the Italian flag, but it could be far from the end of its life.

As we reported [in our previous article](#), the Italian Navy unit, which entered service in 1985 and was placed in reserve in 2024, is destined for Indonesia, which is thus preparing to become one of the very few Southeast Asian nations to possess a ship equipped with a continuous flight deck.

But what could happen to the Garibaldi in the coming years is perhaps even more interesting than the handover itself.

The ship could indeed be transformed into a platform intended primarily for **helicopters and unmanned aerial systems**, effectively becoming one of the first major naval units in the region designed to significantly integrate drones into maritime operations.

The Fincantieri Project: Helicopters and UAVs

The hypothesis of transforming the Garibaldi into a sort of "drone carrier" does not arise solely from rumors circulated in recent months.

Already in July 2025 **Fincantieri had presented to Jakarta a detailed proposal to convert the ship into a "helicopter and unmanned aerial vehicle assault ship"**, that is, an assault platform designed to operate with helicopters and UAVs.

The presentation was also attended by specialists with direct knowledge of the ship, including a former commander of the Garibaldi and a former technical manager of the unit.

An element that demonstrates how the hypothesis was already subject to concrete technical evaluations and not simply a theoretical idea.

But Will It Really Be a Drone Carrier?

Probably **not immediately**.

According to an analysis published in March 2026 by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, in the first phase the Garibaldi should operate mainly with helicopters already available to the Indonesian Armed Forces.

Among these could be the **AS565 Panther** helicopters from the Navy and, after necessary qualifications for naval operations, other helicopters such as Mi-17 and H225M.

The ship would initially have primarily a function as a **naval air platform, command and support for HADR operations - Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**, particularly important for a country composed of over 17,000 islands and frequently affected by earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions.

Drones would instead represent a subsequent development.

And this is where the project becomes particularly interesting.

Bayraktar TB3 on the Garibaldi?

Among the systems most frequently cited is the **Bayraktar TB3**, a Turkish combat drone specifically designed to operate also from naval units equipped with relatively short flight decks.

The Indonesian company **Republikorp**, which has industrial relations with Turkish Baykar, has shown interest precisely in adapting the Garibaldi for UAV operations.

The TB3 is a particularly interesting candidate because it has already been tested by Turkey from the **TCG Anadolu**, a large amphibious unit equipped, like the Garibaldi, with a bow ski-jump.

Indonesia is also developing its own capabilities in the unmanned sector and the Indonesian Navy has also tested national UAV systems.

This does not mean we will necessarily see dozens of TB3s deployed on the Garibaldi.

It does mean, however, that **the ship has the structural characteristics to become an extremely interesting laboratory for the development of unmanned naval air operations.**

Indonesia Is Already Preparing

There are also concrete signals showing how seriously Jakarta is taking the arrival of the ship.

Satellite imagery analyzed by Janes showed at the Indonesian naval air base of **Juanda, in Surabaya**, the construction on the ground of a 1:1 scale silhouette of the Garibaldi's flight deck.

A solution usable for familiarizing personnel and crews with dimensions, aircraft movement, and flight deck procedures even before the arrival of the unit.

We are therefore not facing a ship simply destined to become a prestigious flagship.

Indonesia seems to want to progressively build a genuine naval air capability.

So the Question Arises: Could It Have Been an Opportunity for Italy?

It is inevitable to ask oneself a question.

If the Garibaldi can be transformed into a platform for experimenting with embarked drones, **why didn't Italy decide to use it precisely in this role?**

From a technological point of view, the idea would certainly have had interesting elements.

A ship with a flight deck approximately 174 meters long, hangars, elevators, structures for aircraft management, and decades of experience in flight operations could have represented an excellent **test bed for fixed-wing and rotary-wing UAVs**, without depriving space from the normal operational activities of the Cavour aircraft carrier or the new LHD Trieste.

In other words, the Garibaldi could have become a sort of **experimental ship for the future of Italian unmanned naval aviation**.

A sector destined to assume ever-increasing importance.

The Italian Navy Is Already Working on Drones

However, it should be emphasized an important point.

The Italian Navy is not ignoring this development at all.

In July 2026 the same Navy published a study relating to the definition of **Ship-UAS Operating Limits**, that is, the operating conditions necessary to allow a drone to approach and land safely on a ship.

The study, conducted with the support of the **Experimental Center for Maritime Aviation**, analyzed precisely the use of the **Leonardo AWHero drone on the LHD Trieste**.

During major exercises in recent years, the Navy has also significantly increased the use of unmanned aerial, surface, and underwater systems.

The capability, therefore, is developing anyway.

The question is rather whether maintaining the Garibaldi could have **accelerated and expanded this experimentation**.

The Problem: Maintaining an Aircraft Carrier Costs Money

And this is where one must confront reality.

The Garibaldi is over forty years old.

A ship of these dimensions cannot be kept operational simply by leaving it docked in port and using it occasionally for some trials.

Crews, maintenance, spare parts, fuel, periodic overhauls of equipment, technical personnel, and infrastructure are needed.

The Navy had moreover already decided to accelerate the decommissioning of previous generation units precisely to **recover personnel and resources to allocate to new ships**, including Trieste, FREMM, and PPA.

With Cavour fully integrated into the F-35B system and Trieste entered into the fleet, maintaining a third large unit equipped with a flight deck would therefore have had a non-negligible cost.

The Garibaldi itself also requires major work.

Indonesia has allocated very substantial resources for the transfer program, retrofit, systems, helicopters, and infrastructure. Some financial plans have indicated up to **450 million dollars** for the acquisition and related program, although this figure does not necessarily represent only the cost of work on the ship.

The Handover Nevertheless Brings Advantages to Italy

There is then another aspect often overlooked.

Italy is not simply handing over a ship to get rid of it.

In Parliament, the Government highlighted that modernization and adaptation interventions will be supported by the Indonesian counterpart and may involve **Italian shipbuilding and defense companies**.

The handover is also part of a much broader industrial cooperation between Rome and Jakarta, which also includes the two PPAs built by Fincantieri and transferred to Indonesia.

From the Italian point of view, therefore, the operation allows simultaneously to avoid part of the costs related to the management and scrapping of the ship and to strengthen an industrial and strategic relationship with one of the most important countries in the Indo-Pacific.

A Missed Opportunity? Perhaps. But Above All an Interesting Paradox

Defining the handover of the Garibaldi simply as a mistake would probably be excessive.

The Italian Navy now has the **Cavour**, capable of operating with F-35Bs, and the new **Trieste**, enormously more modern platforms on which unmanned systems will also be progressively integrated.

Maintaining in service a ship designed in the Seventies would have involved significant costs and especially the use of personnel that the Navy intends to allocate to new units.

Yet an interesting paradox remains.

A ship that Italy now considers to have reached the end of its operational life could become, on the other side of the world, **a platform used to experiment with one of the technologies destined to change naval air warfare most significantly in the coming decades.**

Perhaps the true opportunity for Italy would not have been to maintain the Garibaldi as a third aircraft carrier.

It could have been to use it for a few years as an **operational laboratory dedicated to embarked drones**, experimenting with takeoffs, landings, movement on the flight deck, maintenance, command and control, and integration between piloted and unmanned aircraft without interfering with the activity of the fleet's main units.

Indonesia seems to have glimpsed precisely this possibility.

And if the Garibaldi truly returns to sea with a flight group formed by helicopters and drones, its second life could prove technologically almost as interesting as the first.