



### Iranian drones outdo foreign ones

The prowess exhibited by Iranian pilotless aircraft stands validated even by the Americans themselves. Farzin Nadimi, an arms expert, in a report by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) underlined this fact: "Despite the challenges, the performance of Iranian drones is at par with the competition, and in some respects, even better." According to the USIP report, "by the fall of 2022, Tehran had also exported drones or drone technology to at least five countries on four continents as well as to at least seven proxy militias in the Middle East". Moreover, the National Interest magazine, based in Washington D.C., acknowledged in a report that the Western sanctions,

while intended to stifle Iran's progress, ultimately proved futile in deterring its ascent as a dominant player in the realm of drones. The report accentuated that "Iranian drones are cheaper than their Western counterparts and have proven to be effective on the battlefield". Thus, Iran's emergence as a contender in the drone market defied the expectations tied to Western sanctions.

# IRAN TO UNVEIL INDIGENOUS UNMANNED JET



Iranian Qaheer-313 single-seat stealth fighter aircraft  
● TASNIM

An Iranian Defense Ministry official says the country plans to unveil the unmanned version of the domestically-developed Qaheer-313 (Conqueror-313) stealth fighter aircraft within the next few months.

Brigadier General Afshin Khajeh Fard, who is also the head of Iran Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO), announced on Monday that the unmanned fighter jet is being built in two versions and will be put on display in the coming months, according to Press TV.

"Iranian military experts have managed to acquire the cutting-edge know-know and modern technologies since multinational arms corporations do not share the technology with Iran," Khajeh Fard said.

The Iranian fighter jet Qaheer-313 was unveiled in February 2013. The single-seat stealth fighter jet can take off and land on short runways.

He added that Iranian military specialists and technicians, despite the fact that the country is under sanctions and coercive measures, have managed to repair and overhaul all aircraft operated by the country's Armed Forces over the past four decades.

He also said 15 different types of helicopters are among the fleet of aircraft made available to various units of the country's Armed Forces.

According to Khajeh Fard, Iran now manufactures Simourgh light transport aircraft, which weighs between 4 and 6 tons.

Homegrown Yasin training jet will also undergo a test flight in the next few weeks, he added.

Iranian technicians, he said, are currently upgrading bombs and missiles intended to be furnished in Kowsar fighter jets with a radar that was specifically developed for it.

Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient. Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities — including its missile power — which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never subject to negotiations.

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities.

### Mohajer-6 drones in the Horn of Africa

The features garnering media acclaim and receiving validation from foreign military experts have laid the groundwork for the rising global demand for Iranian drones. "The fact that newer drones, such as the Mohajer-6, are now being seen in places like the Horn of Africa shows that countries see them as a potential game-changer," he added, referring to an advanced Iranian drone claimed to have a range of about 125 miles and the ability to carry precision-guided munitions. Seth Frantzman, an Israeli defense analyst and drone expert has told New York Times that: "The fact that newer drones, such as the Mohajer-6, are now being seen in places like the Horn of Africa shows that countries see them as a potential game-changer." Frantzman was apparently referring to media reports that Ethiopia has received Mohajer-6

drones. But the impact of the drones was striking — pummeling Tigrayan rebels and their supply convoys as they pushed down a major highway toward the capital, Addis Ababa. The rebels have since retreated roughly 270 miles by road to the north, erasing months of battlefield gains. In November 2021, as Tigrayan rebels inched toward Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, they were pounded with a relentless barrage of drone attacks that halted their advance. According to the New York Times, "the impact of the drones was striking." Tigrayan rebels reportedly took to social media to communicate their grievances in Persian, which was an explicit nod to Iran. Drones have predominantly fortified Iran's defensive capabilities and their usage was initially limited to bolstering Iran's allied

factions in the Middle East such as southern Lebanon and Gaza which effectively altered the military equilibrium in favor of allied groups. Nevertheless, faced with the US policy of maximum pressure, aimed at isolating Iran and severing its revenue streams, Tehran turned to expanding the export of weapons, particularly drones, beyond the Middle East. The above-mentioned USIP report mirrored this evolution, noting: "By 2022, Iran's drones had altered the strategic balance — to varying degrees — in war zones in Europe, Africa and Asia. "They have made considerable impact on any battlefield they have appeared in," the USIP report said, citing Nadimi. This succinctly encapsulates Iran's trajectory from regional drone influence to a burgeoning worldwide force to be reckoned with.



### Iranian technology in Tajikistan

As reported by USIP, Iran's largest exports included long-range Shahed-136 suicide drones and shorter-range Mohajer-6 attack drones "provided to Russia, beginning in August 2022, for use in Ukraine". However, Iran vehemently maintains that the drone sale predates the Ukrainian crisis and was part of the enduring military cooperation between Tehran and Moscow. In an intriguing twist, Tajikistan, nestled to the northeast of Iran, has also voiced its interest in procuring Iranian drones. As part of efforts to

bolster joint military collaboration, Tajikistan last year launched the production line of Iran's Ababil-2 reconnaissance and attack drones in its capital Dushanbe, during a ceremony attended by high-ranking military officials from both nations. Major General Baqeri, Iran's top military official, told the ceremony that Iran had reached a position to "export military equipment to its allied and friendly nations, a move aimed at enhancing security and maintain lasting peace, in addition to satisfying domestic demands."

### Flexing muscles in US 'backyard'

The canvas of global drone utilization paints a diverse picture, as underscored by the USIP. According to its report, Sudan deployed Iran's Ababil-3 against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and other rebels in Darfur "as early as 2008". It also claimed that: "Around 2010, Venezuela started assembling Mohajer-2 surveillance drones." Meanwhile, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria have all embraced Iranian drones, harnessing their potential for varied purposes. The Asia Times claimed two years ago that Iran had supplied the Myanmar military with weap-

onry, including drones. In the Latin American theater, Venezuela, an amicable nation to Iran, announced in 2012 its collaboration with Iran to produce drones. This collaborative effort bore fruit when, in 2022, Venezuela unveiled Iran-assembled drones during its military parade. Originally christened "Mohajer-2" in Iran, these drones now bear the name "Antonio José de Sucre" in Venezuela. The allure of Iranian drones transcends Venezuela's borders in the US "backyard" — namely Latin America. On July 20, Bolivian Defense

Minister Edmundo Novillo inked an agreement centered on security and defense cooperation during his visit to Tehran. The development sparked criticism from Argentina, prompting Novillo to affirm Bolivia's intent to tap into Iran's drone technology. Brushing off Argentina's worries and addressing domestic opposition, Novillo labeled them as "exaggerated." He firmly stated that Bolivia seeks Iranian drone technology to secure its borders and combat drug trafficking.

### Stunning admission

The essence of Iran's defensive prowess found unequivocal affirmation from Marine General Kenneth McKenzie, the former commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM), during a hearing before the US House of Representatives' Armed Services Committee. In response to an inquiry regarding America's retention of air superiority in the Middle East, McKenzie acknowledged that "for the first time since the Korean War (1950s), we are operating without complete air superiority," because of small and medium-sized armed Iranian drones. This transformation has not escaped the atten-

tion of the New York Times, which delved into Iran's strategy of exporting its military hardware. The newspaper said such experts have emerged as a significant revenue stream and a channel for political influence for Iran. According to Iran's Tasnim News Agency, the global military drone market held a valuation of around \$11.3 billion in 2021. Projections anticipate this figure to reach \$26.1 billion by 2028. Nations such as Iran and Turkey possess a relative edge over their European counterparts in drone production, leveraging this advantage to create cost-efficient UAVs.

Assuming Iran can substantiate the superior quality of its drones, it stands to reason that its earnings from UAV sales could potentially hit \$6.5 billion by 2028. The 2015 nuclear deal played a pivotal role in reshaping Iran's military landscape. With the termination of the UN Security Council's arms embargo in October 2020 after 13 years, Iran was able to engage in buying and selling conventional weaponry. Thus, Iranian drones now wear a dual mantle: a robust deterrent against foreign threats and a conduit for bringing revenues.