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OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

Iran's involvement in the Ukraine conflict via the alleged sale of Iranian drones to Russia has been one of the topics that is almost consistently brought up by Western parties or even West's allies in the East during almost every telephone or in-person negotiation with Iran in the past year. The matter is also raised in indirect negotiations involving Iran, the United States, and the European Union. In nearly all these negotiations, the Western parties insist that a precondition for any agreement between Iran and the West is Iran's commitment to cease sending drones to Russia. Iran, in turn, has consistently retorted that it has not exported any drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict.

There are crucial points to be made regarding the reasons and motivations of the West to continue raising the drone issue and conducting extensive propaganda against Iran for its alleged interference in the Ukraine conflict. The West's policy on Iranian drones — like its policy on Iran's other armaments that have consistently been a point of contention — needs to be analyzed and evaluated from realistic perspectives. The analysis should encompass aspects such as the West's traditional policy of isolating and weakening Iran, global trends in geopolitical competitions, and established theoretical discussions in international relations regarding military capabilities as indicators of power. Five such points will be made here.

Why are Iran's drones non-negotiable?

1 From a realist perspective, one of the indicators of a country's power is its effective military and weapon capabilities within its borders. This extends to protecting its borders, confronting regional and international threats, and deterring any form of aggressive action in neighboring or distant regions. While proponents of idealistic theories prioritize economic power and the alignment of interests among countries to prevent war, strategists emphasize both defensive and offensive capabilities as the ultimate measure of a country's power. This is because their perennial assumption about the international environment is one filled with threats against the very existence of states. Consequently, in today's transformative international conditions, military effectiveness plays a more significant role in national security.

2 Simultaneous with shifts in the global order, intensified geopolitical competition and actors' inclination to alter power dynamics weaken arms control regimes, making them susceptible to a collapse. This occurs while effective control over armaments, especially modern technologies, is lacking. The trend is evident in indirect aerial and naval conflicts and the pivotal role that smart weaponry plays. These armaments possess numerous advantages, which have increased their popularity. They reduce human costs, create more disruption, disturb rivals' concentration, and serve intelligence and espionage purposes. An added advantage is that they are more effective in targeting military objectives while mitigating traditional warfare and extensive civilian casualties. Drones, among other things, have thus transformed into effective weaponry. Hence, while Western nations focus on accusing Iran of transferring drones to Russia — among other issues of arms technology — covert and discreet subterranean efforts by Western allies to attain newer military technologies with artificial intelligence and semi-autonomous or autonomous capabilities are rapidly progressing.

The indigenous Mohajer-10 drone unveiled in a ceremony in Tehran, Iran, on August 22, 2023
● president.ir



3 In the face of myriad security challenges spanning decades, Iran grapples with the question of why it should prioritize military might over economic prowess. Why embrace the world as anarchic, relying on realist theories of security? Amid escalating international tensions, Iran's security concerns have deepened. It's essential to remember that the security of nations and governments are intertwined. In such circumstances, a focus on unrealistic idealistic theories is unwise.

Western creators of idealistic economic functionalism theories, particularly Americans, exhibit paradoxes of morality and immorality. The annals of international relations are rife with diverse evidence of Western warmongering, justified through various means, albeit appearing legitimate. As seen in the context of the Ukraine conflict, while Russia is labeled the aggressor, American strategists like John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt admit that the actions of the US and NATO provoked Russia.

Although Russia's attack on Ukraine lacked ethical justification, the reality was that Russia sought to ensure its own existence. Post-conflict, the US and European allies hinder negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, exacerbating the conflict. While vociferously denouncing Iran's alleged sale of drones to Russia, Western powers supply Ukraine with weapons, fanning the flames of war. Furthermore, Western parties have repeatedly demonstrated unreliability in honoring their agreements with Iran. The US exited the JCPOA, and Europe failed to support the deal's revival.

This doesn't negate the necessity of potential negotiations and agreements with the West. Instead, it underscores that such interactions must be approached with a strategic outlook, factoring in long-term costs.

4 The previously mentioned point emphasizes that continued focus on deterrence logically contributes to securing long-term interests. In a changing international landscape, a complex interplay exists between "deterrence" and the construction of a security regime. Failing to transition power amidst anarchic conditions implies being confined to a limited new order, blocking power elevation for an indefinite period. While a significant portion of a country's power indicators stems from economic prowess, such economic power is attainable through various means. Iran, due to its geographical, political, and ideological circumstances, should establish a stronger link between technological and military advancements and its economy. Military-technological progress could become a future income source. Issuance of drones and modern weaponry is also part of Iran's commercialization of its defense industry.

5 One of the additional objectives of the West's extensive propaganda against Iranian drones is to undermine Iran-Russia relations. Despite the ups and downs, weaknesses, and challenges, Iran-Russia relations present an opportunity for both countries on regional and global levels. West's policy aims to isolate Iran and disrupt Tehran-Moscow ties. Despite criticisms, the Iran-Russia relationship has yielded effective technical and military advancements. During sensitive times and under regional and international pressures, Iran has received direct and indirect political support from Russia. The anti-Iranian propaganda regarding the alleged Iran-Russia drone deal seeks at least to hinder the deal, with broader goals of creating disruption and mistrust in this relationship. Given recent efforts by Iran and Russia to strengthen ties, adhering to the principle of deterrence, alongside diplomacy and regional cooperation, remains a vital security strategy for Iran.

The West's surprise at the progress Iran has made in drone production is notable. Past resolutions against Iran primarily focused on impeding its technical-military progress. However, Iran has invested heavily to neutralize these resolutions and achieve a level of deterrence. This underlines the significance of deterrence as a central security tool for Iran's future, running parallel to diplomacy, multilateralism, and regional engagement.