



Powerful Russian UAV Images

OE Watch Commentary: It appears that Russia's problem fielding an attack unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) could soon be resolved. As discussed last month ("Karabakh War Might Spur Russian Attack UAV Development," *OE Watch*, January 2021) Russian defense analysts clearly understand the advantages that attack UAVs play on the modern battlefield and have expressed concern at their country's apparent lag in developing these weapons. In what may be an attempt to assuage these apprehensions, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) included two images of new Russian attack UAVs in their 2021 promotional calendar. The brief excerpt from the mostly pro-Kremlin site, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, describes the characteristics and a few of the problems in fielding the Orion, one of the new Russian attack UAVs.

The author, military journalist Victor Baranets, begins by reminding readers that "for several decades, Russian military scientists and designers have been struggling to create an attack drone, [and despite]... billions of rubles spent," the MoD still had not produced such a weapon. Baranets posits that this new attack UAV "was already being developed in the depths of secret design bureaus," thus explaining the lack of public knowledge of this weapon. He describes some of the characteristics of the Orion, stating that it can be armed with "several KAB-20 precision aerial bombs... can loiter in the sky for up to 24 hours... and in total carries a payload of as much as 250 kilograms." The Orion also "automatically takes off and lands, operates at a distance of up to 250 km from the control center... [with] a maximum speed is 200 km/h."

To partially explain the delay in fielding this system, Baranets asserts that "the West cut off the supply of many components for UAVs to Russia." Quoting an expert, however, these supply restrictions have worked in Russia's favor, since "technologies have been developed in the country that did not exist at all before we started solving this problem." Baranets concludes his analysis by stating that "a couple years ago" the Orion UAV "was first tested in a real combat situation in Syria," and since it "successfully passed the exam" will now "enter service with the Russian army."

End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)



Orion attack UAV from 2021 Ministry of Defense Calendar.

Source: mil.ru, Attribution: CCA 4.0 Intl

“...For the first time, a portrait of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) “Orion” in an attack version appeared on the calendar from the Ministry of Defense...”

Source: Victor Baranets, “Высокоточные авиабомбы и 24 часа в воздухе: что из себя представляет российский беспилотник «Орион» в ударном варианте (Precision bombs and 24 hours in the air: what is the Russian drone ‘Orion’ in the attack version?),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (mostly pro-Kremlin news organization), 28 December 2020. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/1712105/4345955/>

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For several decades, Russian military scientists and designers have been struggling to create an attack drone that would be no worse than Israeli, Turkish or American combat vehicles of a similar class. Billions of rubles were spent on this, but such a “winged hawk” that would suit the Ministry of Defense did not work. Although rumors were still leaked in the media that a “product” was already being developed in the depths of secret design bureaus, which was not inferior to the best foreign models.

And so the Russian Ministry of Defense published its calendar for 2021 with photographs of modern weapons. And there for the first time “officially” appeared a portrait of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) “Orion” in the attack version (earlier it was spoken of only as a reconnaissance vehicle). Moreover, some curious details of the creation of this (previously covered by a veil of secrecy) combat vehicle and its characteristics have become known.

...It carries several KAB-20 corrected aerial bombs under its belly. Such ammunition weighs about 21 kilograms and has a high-explosive fragmentation warhead of 7 kilograms. The bombs are equipped with satellite or laser homing and are designed for high-precision destruction of lightly armored vehicles and enemy personnel. The installation of up to four air-to-ground missiles is also envisaged...

Orion belongs to the class of medium-altitude (can climb to an altitude of 8 thousand meters) long-duration spacecraft. Yes, yes, it can loiter in the sky for up to 24 hours. Such a UAV weighs 1100 kilograms, and in total carries a payload of as much as 250 kilograms. ...Orion automatically takes off and lands, operates at a distance of up to 250 km from the control center. The maximum speed is 200 km/h.

...The West has cut off the supply of many components for UAVs to Russia. “For five years, technologies have been developed in the country that did not exist at all before we started solving this problem,” stressed Nikolai Dolzhenkov, general designer...

...A couple of years ago, the “Orion” in the attack version was first tested in a real combat situation in Syria. And it successfully passed the exam for the right to enter service with the Russian army.