

Russian Analysts Reevaluating UAV Successes in Regional Conflict

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

Russian analysts continue to examine the factors which led to the Azeri victory over Armenian forces in and around Nagorno-Karabakh late last year. Initially, many Russian observers attributed much of the Azeri success to Turkish and Israeli strike UAVs, which helped the Azeri military destroy Armenian weapon systems (see for instance, *OE Watch*, December 2020 “Early Lessons-Learned from Nagorno Karabakh”). However, as the excerpt from the popular privately owned military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* indicates, some Russian analysts are now modifying their assessments on the overall effectiveness of strike UAVs during this conflict.

The article interviews military journalist, Viktor Baranets, who, quoting a high-level Armenian officer, asserts that during the conflict, “the [Turkish] Bayraktars stopped bombing for a whole four days.” Quoting another source, Baranets suggests that the “Russians with their electronic warfare (EW) systems” were responsible for grounding the UAVs. He goes on to claim that the delay in using the Bayraktars did not last long since “the Turks managed to find an antidote and install electronic warfare protection.” According to Baranets, “this countermeasure

worked for about two days,” when “unknown electronic warfare devices again started making the Bayraktars land or go astray.”

Responding to a question about the apparent weakness of “Soviet-era and Russian air defenses operating in the conflict zone,” Baranets claims that this is false and is “part of the information war that inevitably accompanies a hot war.” Moreover, he asserts that “13 to 15 of these machines [Bayraktars] came down in Nagorno-Karabakh,” and that “exactly half of the drones downed... were hit by Pantsirs [AD system].” The others were presumably downed by Russian EW assets. As the chief supplier of armaments to Armenia, Russia may have a vested interest in touting the capabilities of its weapon systems.

“The fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh died down as suddenly as it erupted, but the talk of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 strike drones delivering victory to Azerbaijan continues to this day.”



Pantsir-S1 Air Defense system.

Source: <http://vitalykuzmin.net/?q=node/459>, CCA-SA 4.0

Continued: Russian Analysts Reevaluating UAV Successes in Regional Conflict

Source: Oleg Falichev, “Ловушка для Байрактаров (Bayraktar Trap) *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (popular privately owned military weekly),” 27 April 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/61894>

Interview by Oleg Falichev with military expert Colonel (Retd) Viktor Baranets... Why the Much-Vaunted Turkish Drones Could not Operate for Four Days Over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh died down as suddenly as it erupted, but the talk of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 strike drones delivering victory to Azerbaijan continues to this day. Is it true and can we regard the Bayraktar as a kind of wonder weapon that on any sector of the front and in any circumstances guarantees a win? Colonel (ret'd) Viktor Baranets, a member of the Defense Ministry's Public Council, answers these and other questions from VPK.

[VPK] Viktor Nikolayevich, the Bayraktar TB2 is a Turkish operational-tactical medium-altitude unmanned aerial vehicle with long endurance. It can remain on duty in the air for more than 12 hours and strike fast when targets are found. It has hardpoints for four UMTAS laser-guided antitank missiles or Roketsan MAM-C and MAM-L gliding guided precision bombs which can hit targets from up to 8 km away while the missiles have a range of up to 14 km. It's true to say that these are good specifications. But do you think that the praise for the Bayraktars has been excessively partisan? And in particular, is it wrong to say that they successfully dealt with the Pantsir gun and SAM system?...

...[Baranets] It has to be said that the Azeris, helped by Turkish specialists, were focused and businesslike. They began to steadily destroy the targets. But that it was hard to counter this in any way is untrue. And here is why. Without doubt, major damage was inflicted on the Armenians. But few at the time noticed something said by a former first deputy chief of the Armenian Armed Forces General Staff, Lieutenant General Tigran Khachatryan, which was that after the initial flights something wondrous happened to the UAVs. The Bayraktars began to either majestically hit the ground or fly into Armenian territory. And then Khachatryan said something simply sensational. He pointed out that the Bayraktars stopped bombing for a whole four days.

[VPK] Why?

[Baranets] This was quite a mystery to me as well. What was actually going on during those four days? ...According to his information, the Bayraktars' electronic brains were affected by a powerful force... it was those damned Russians with their electronic warfare systems, luring the UAVs over to the Armenian side....

[VPK] But then the flights resumed ...

[Baranets] They did, but not for long. It turned out that the Turks managed to find an antidote and install electronic warfare protection. This countermeasure worked for about two days, until unknown electronic warfare devices again started making the Bayraktars land or go astray, by hijacking their radio channels. After that the truce entered force.... We can conclude that from 13 to 15 of these machines came down in Nagorno-Karabakh....

[VPK] So the disparagement of the Soviet-era and Russian air defenses operating in the conflict zone was premature? They did their job?

[Baranets] They certainly did. But we should be relaxed and even-handed with that kind of reporting. It's all part of the information war that inevitably accompanies a hot war.

Bayraktars can be easily destroyed in two ways, with electronic warfare assets and antiaircraft missiles. So, exactly half of the drones downed in Nagorno-Karabakh were hit by Pantsirs....