

Iran Announces Ultra-Long Range Drone

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Since using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in 1985 during the Iran-Iraq war, drones have increasingly become a pillar of Iran's force projection, conducting surveillance and offensive military strikes. Drone flights regularly monitor Persian Gulf shipping traffic, for example, and Iran has proven its ability to use drones with great accuracy and increasing ranges against both Saudi Arabia and targets in Iraq. Iran's provision of drone technology to proxies in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon give it plausible deniability on other strikes.

Nevertheless, Iranian military leaders often exaggerate their UAV capabilities, as in other areas. There is little evidence, for example, that Iran successfully reverse-engineered the RQ-170 it recovered inside Iran in December 2011. Nor is there evidence that Iranian drones were useful in the battle to liberate Ramadi from the Islamic State as Iranian authorities claimed (see: "Iran: Were Iranian Drones Useful in the Battle for Ramadi?" OE Watch, February 2016). Likewise, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) claims that it had extended its drone range to 1,865 miles (see: "Iran: Revolutionary Guard Brags of New Range to UAVs," OE Watch, October 2015) appears more

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aspirational than real. So, too, does the most current IRGC claim made in the accompanying excerpted article from the Defense Ministry's official news service that more than doubles the range attributable to Iranian drones. Importantly, the article, which was included later that same week in a Defapress list of the most important military and defense stories, did not include drone model names or other details. In contrast, Iranian officials say that they have limited their ballistic



The Russian-made "Lancet-3" drone which Iran claims to have.
Source: Defapress.ir, https://defapress.ir/files/fa/news/1400/4/2/1359688_150.jpg

missile ranges to 1,250 miles (see: "IRGC: Iran can Extend Ballistic Missile Range," OE Watch, February 2019) and so it is curious that they would claim such an extended range for their UAVs.

That said, even if the claim to a 4,350-mile drone is aspirational, as Iran invests heavily in such technology, it is likely only a matter of time before Iran develops a high-endurance, long-range UAV. Because of weight restrictions necessary for a solar-powered drone with such a range, it would likely serve a mainly surveillance role. Still, if Iran did develop a drone capable of flying 4,350-miles, it would extend Iran's surveillance range to all of Europe, and from the Sea of Japan and just off the shores of Indonesia to all but the southern and western tips of Africa.

Source: "Pehpadha-ye ba Barad 7,000 Kilometer Darim (We have drones with a range of 4,350 Miles)," Defapress (Iran defence ministry's official news agency), 27 June 2021. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/463994>

According to the Defapress correspondent, Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), said this morning at the opening ceremony of the clinical trial center of the Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, "It is hard to climb the peaks. It is difficult to cross hard rocks, but no country or nation can achieve progress and dignity without traversing the tough paths. A nation will not grow until it embraces great aspirations and turns them into external values...."

The commander of the IRGC added, "When the coronavirus spread, the world's major powers became thieves. They imagined that Iran would strain and fall in the face of this disease, but Islam and the guardianship shone, the nation mobilized, and we all became one heart. We connected and helped each other...."

He said, "The revival of a human being is the revival of all humanity, and this is the word of God. We have really decided to be among the best in the world from now on in everything, in the scientific arena, in the aerospace field where we launch satellites, in nanotech industry, and in the military arena, we have drones flying 4,350 miles with recovery which means we are pioneering in various fields."