

Iran's Army Aviation Gets UAV Unit

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran prides itself on its indigenous military industries which, in recent years, have invested greatly in shipbuilding, ballistic missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). In the accompanying excerpted article from Iran's official state news agency, *IRNA*, Brigadier General Yousef Ghorbani, the head of the regular army's aviation unit, talks about starting up an army aviation UAV unit. Such an announcement suggests the advances in Iran's UAV program are real and that UAVs are well-integrated into Iranian military doctrine. Ghorbani speaks about five categories of Iranian UAVs: electronic warfare, assault, transport, surveillance, and suicide.

That the regular military will soon have a UAV unit is important to note. After all, the Islamic Republic has parallel militaries—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the regular military (sometimes called *Artesh*, the Persian word for army). The IRGC is the more elite of the two. Its job is to defend the revolution, meaning enemies can be domestic or foreign, while the regular military is charged with territorial defense and securing Iran's borders. The IRGC always has the first crack at cutting-edge technologies and new military platforms, while the regular military usually takes second fiddle. If the regular military is now integrating a UAV unit, that suggests both that the IRGC already has enough and that all Iranian strategists welcome the qualitative importance UAVs can bring to the nation's defense.

That the article mentions that UAVs now continuously monitor Iran's western border also signals the increasing difficulty Iran may have securing its border with Iraq, especially given the Kurdish insurgency and Arab unrest it faces across that frontier. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Guruh-e Pehpad-e Havaniruz Tashkil Mishavad (An UAV unit for the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Aviation is formed),” *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 17 December 2018. <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/83137088>

Brigadier General Yousef Ghorbani stated in an interview with the IRNA defense correspondent, with regard to the issue of the formation of a drone unit, the formation of a drone group for Army Aviation is on the agenda and it will soon be formed. He added, “Army Aviation had earlier conducted reconnaissance operations with helicopters, but today we will begin to transition to UAVs in this arena.

The commander of Army Aviation said, the military had previously used drones for “some missions.” According to IRNA, the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Ground Forces has one of the most powerful UAVs in the area and, so far, it has exhibited various UAV types like electronic warfare, assault, transport, surveillance, and suicide. Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari, commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Ground Forces, gave an interview with IRNA a while back [on 12 October 2018] in which he stated that this year, a new drone would be revealed, and he said, the new drone would carry out missions with new flight links. According to local army commanders, the Ground Forces are continuously monitoring the Western borders of this country with UAVs.

In another part of the conversation, Gen. Ghorbani, commander of the Army's air force, said Iran had great self-sufficiency in the manufacture of helicopter parts, and he said, “We use indigenous parts to maintain our helicopters and for our weapons, and in this context, not even the smallest part is manufactured abroad, and this military organization maintains the massive fleet of the Islamic Republic's helicopters....



General Yousef Ghorbani, commander of Iran Army Aviation.
Source: IRNA, <http://img6.irna.ir/1397/13970926/83137088/n83137088-72722155.jpg>.