



Iran Conducts its Largest UAV Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian defense officials have long paid lip service to the increasing importance of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in their defense. This is not simply part of the Iranian political or military leadership's frequent rhetorical bombast. The Iranian military first used rudimentary drones in 1986 to conduct surveillance over Iraqi trenches during the Iran-Iraq War. Over the past 15 years, there has been a rapid expansion of UAV models in the Iranian arsenal. Range has also increased substantially after Iranian authorities reportedly incorporated GPS navigation into the platforms (See: "Iran Joins Satellite-Guided Armed UAV Club," *OE Watch*, May 2016).

The accompanying passage from *Mashregh News*, a news service close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), discusses Iran's largest UAV exercise to date. According to the report, there were 50 offensive UAVs in simultaneous combat operations operating over 600 miles from their controllers, which successfully hit and destroyed their targets. If the report is accurate, then the IRGC has demonstrated the ability to coordinate multiple UAVs launched from disparate locations in Khuzestan, Bushehr, Fars and Hormozgan provinces toward Bani Farour Island, 100 miles west of the Strait of Hormuz.

Also of note is the inclusion of drones modeled after the Lockheed Martin RQ-170 which Iran captured after one landed in Iranian territory on 5 December 2011. While Iranian authorities regularly claim to have reverse-engineered the "Sentinel," there is no indication that the resulting Iranian drone has any of the capabilities of the RQ-170.

Finally, the exercise name "To Jerusalem-1" may signal more than diplomatic hostility to Israel. Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy based in Lebanon, has previously utilized drones in both Lebanon and Syria and has claimed responsibility for sporadic UAV infiltration of Israel over the last several years. Iran's demonstration of the ability to utilize drone swarms launched from various locations to attack simultaneously reflects an increase in capability which could change the operational environment in the Eastern Mediterranean. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



A UAV Iran reports to be its equivalent of an RQ-170 launches a missile over the Persian Gulf during March exercises.

Source: Mashregh News, <https://cdn.mashreghnews.ir/d/2019/03/16/4/2474377.jpg>

“The sheer number of UAVs in simultaneous combat operations occurred for the first time in our country.”

Source: "Hamleh Hamzaman 50 Faravand Pehpad-e Irani beh Ahdaf (Simultaneous Attack by 50 UAVs upon Targets)," *Mashregh News*, 14 March 2019. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/944205>

Simultaneous Attack by 50 UAVs

According to a report by Mashregh, a large-scale UAV exercise conducted by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC] Aerospace Force called "To Jerusalem-1" occurred in the general area of the Persian Gulf.

In this exercise, in the presence of Major General Gholam Ali Rashid, commander of the Khatam al-Anbia Central Headquarters, IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Hossein Salami; Brigadier General Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC aerospace force, and other senior commanders in the armed forces [who operate] in the general area of the Persian Gulf, and for the first time, there were 50 offensive UAVs including from the Iranian RQ-170 which participated along with other assault and combat drone units.

The sheer number of UAVs in simultaneous combat operations occurred for the first time in our country, let alone other countries, and they operated more than 600 miles from their controllers and at the specified time they hit and destroyed their targets....

Commander Salami said all the UAVs participating in this exercise precisely destroyed their targets. These UAVs are an emerging phenomenon in the field of defense and our country's military industry....