Defections and Leadership Losses are Leading to Abu Sayyaf's Demise

Jacob Zenn

Philippine army operations are further eroding the threat from Abu Sayyaf at the same time as Indonesian security forces are neutralizing remnants of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT). If these trends continue, terrorism in Southeast Asia will largely become an obsolete threat. This does not mean future attacks will not occur, but major bombings, such those in Bali, Indonesia in 2002 and 2005 or at cathedrals in Jolo, Philippines in 2019, or

the territorial control achieved by JI-affiliated militants in Aceh in 2010 or Abu Sayyaf-affiliated and Islamic State (IS)-loyal militants like in Marawi, Philippines in 2017 will be unlikely to reoccur. Rather, the ascending conflicts in Southeast Asia are to be found southern Thailand and Myanmar, which involve Muslims on the militants' side, albeit without any explicit jihadist agenda in both theaters.

One of the latest successes in the Philippine army's counter-terrorism efforts has been the October killing of Alal Jil Ismin Jupakkal in Sulu. He was wanted for years for conducting robberies and other crimes that financially supported Abu Sayyaf. Jupakkal could have surrendered, but instead he

began shooting at police along with four fellow militants, who, unlike Jupakkal, were able to escape. ([New Straits Times](), October 17).

In contrast to Jupakkal, other Abu Sayyaf members in Basilan, including one who was only 14-years old and another who was 20-years old, did surrender to the Philippine National Police (PNP) in September ([pna.gov.ph](), October 6). They had been part of the cell led by Furuji Indama, but after Indama's death in October 2020, they appear to have become disaffected and ultimately decided to leave the group ([philstar.com](), October 30, 2020). As part of the government's amnesty program, they were then offered a chance for employment and other forms of social support. With other Abu Sayyaf leaders also being killed by the Philippine army in recent months, including Indang Susukan in Zamboanga, Mindanao, who had conducted at least six kidnappings for ransom in Sabah, Malaysia, more defections are likely. As a result, Abu Sayyaf's finances will only become further depleted ([thestar.com](), October 9).

Leadership losses and increasing numbers of defections are not the only headwinds working against Abu Sayyaf. On September 28, the army also chased Abu Sayyaf militants from a Basilan hideout and uncovered machine guns and other gun parts as well as the now government-allied Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) uniforms, which Abu Sayyaf probably used as disguises ([manilatimes.net](), September 28). As Abu Sayyaf has come under increased pressure, it has also attempted to embed its own fighters in the Philippine army as double-agents ([manilatimes. net](), October 15). However, this is a mostly desperate measure and is unlikely to lead to demoralization in army ranks or any

letdowns in counter-insurgency operations unlike when, for example, the Taliban conducted "green-on-blue" attacks on U.S forces in Afghanistan.

If anything, "counter-terrorism" efforts by the Philippine army will only increase against Abu Sayyaf in the coming period. The army's battle against the Communist New People's Army (NPA) suffered a setback when a court in Manila declared that the NPA's political wing could not be labeled a "terrorist" group because although it commits violence, it primarily seeks to achieve its goals through advocacy and other political means ([gmanetwork.com](), September 22). While the army will still combat the NPA, Abu Sayyaf will remain the primary—and officially the main—terrorist group that the Philippine government and army seek to defeat.

Papuan Separatists Continue Infrastructure Attacks in Indonesia

Jacob Zenn

In an escalation of a now decades-long insurgency that has increased its tempo in recent years, on September 30, the Papuan separatist insurgent group, West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), which is the armed wing of the Free Papua Movement (OPM), claimed it killed four Indonesian "intelligence officers" ([bdnews24.com](), September 30). However, according to Indonesian security forces, 12 construction workers were also killed in the attack ([news.cn](), September 30).

Whatever the exact victim total was, the attack reflects a trend of the TPNPB

conducting attacks on infrastructure in Papua. This is intended to disrupt the Indonesian government's plan to economically develop the province, which, according to TPNPB, would further the government's legitimacy and enable it to win more popular support. In a previous attack in March, for example, the TPNPB killed eight telecom workers, who were developing the province's communication infrastructure (benarnews.org, March 3). The group then used the attack to warn the Indonesian government against granting approvals to foreign companies to operate gold mines in Papua, which the OPM alleges is harmful to the environment while providing little benefit to the indigenous people living in Papua province.

In response to these developments, the Indonesian governments has renewed its partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to realize an economically "prosperous Papua region," which would consequently reduce recruitment to TPNPB (id.embassy.gov, October 19). On the security side, Indonesia will continue accepting Australian assistance in military training, including conducting joint exercises, as well as the provisions of weapons to the Indonesian military (aljazeera.com, October 19). Both the U.S and Australia initially assisted Indonesia when they formed the special counterterrorism detachment known as Densus-88, which has successfully uncovered a series of JI plots and arrested or killed many of its key leaders (Terrorism Monitor, August 12, 2011).

What could undermine this Australian, and potentially U.S, support to Indonesia are, however, the accusations of Indonesian human rights abuses in Papua. Complicating matters for Indonesian counter-insurgency forces, for example, is the suspicion that certain villages in conflict areas raise money for the TPNPB and hide weapons for the TPNPB, allowing it to conduct attacks (antaranews.com, October 28). Thus, the Indonesian security forces must distinguish between TPNPB-supporting civilians and other "ordinary" civilians, which is a difficult task. When mistakes are made, the security forces risk alienating civilians and subsequently prompting them to support the TPNPB even where that support did not exist in the first place.

In the South Pacific region, Indonesia has used a combination of diplomatic influence and financial assistance, including building a football stadium in the Solomon Islands, to blunt criticism of its human rights record in Papua (benarnews.org, October 7). Nevertheless, the OPM has attempted to link its cause with other social justice movements popular in the West, such as Black Lives Matter, to garner popular support for its cause and put pressure on Indonesia to relinquish Papua or at least withdraw troops from the province and allow greater autonomy for the indigenous inhabitants living there (thewire.in, July 10, 2020). The OPM and TPNPB, therefore, function as a typical political and militant wing of an insurgency, with each putting pressure on Indonesia diplomatically and militarily. Notwithstanding their efforts, the OPM and TPNPB's cause still remains peripheral on the international stage while Indonesian influence and infrastructural development of the region is steadily increasing.

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The Pakistani Taliban's Re-Emergence in Swat: Reasons and Potential Responses

Ali Zahid

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, or "Pakistani Taliban") now has a confirmed presence not only in northwestern Pakistan's Swat district, but also in Dir, Bajaur, and Buner districts. After a military operation in Swat in 2009, the TTP had been expelled from the area, but TTP have re-emerged. The TTP first became active in Swat in 2008 and demanded the implementation of sharia law in that area, but they were not violent initially. However, after gaining some strength, the TTP became violent and began beheading government security forces, elders and other civilians opposed to the group. Although Swat, which is known today as the Switzerland of Asia, also was the area where the Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai was shot by the TTP in 2012, the government writ strengthened in the district after a military operation in Swat in 2009. No major incidents occurred after the Malala assassination attempt, for example ([India Today](), August 12). Nonetheless, the recent re-emergence of TTP in Swat may bring another wave of renewed chaos and instability in Swat.

Causes of the TPP Re-emergence in Swat

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, TTP attacks have accelerated in Pakistan ([Terrorism Monitor](), July 1). However, there are several reasons why the TTP has been emboldened to expand its presence into Swat specifically. Firstly, the U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan allowed the TTP to enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan without any international forces to pressure the group. Moreover, not only has the TTP been strengthened, but Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) and especially its Tajik jihadists have been resurgent as well

([Dawn](), November 11, 2021; [Islamic World News](), July 17). The TTP emergence in Swat is an indication of the TTP's ability to operate across the border between Swat, which is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and eastern Afghanistan, especially Kunar.

Secondly, the absence of a comprehensive border management mechanism between Pakistan and Afghanistan hinders efforts to stop TTP militants' movements across the border, including into Swat. Pakistan has completed roughly 95 percent of its border fencing, but this does not compensate for the lack of a broader agreement between the two states ([The Express Tribune](), January 27). The Durand Line, moreover, still represents a point of contention between the two countries, and Afghanistan does not recognize it as a legitimate border ([The Express Tribune](), February 11). Thus, without Afghanistan's cooperation, the flow of militants across the border will be a constant problem for Pakistan. This porous border has provided the TTP with a relatively easy way to enter Swat.

Thirdly, the Taliban's connection with the TTP is a significant factor, with the Taliban interior minister Jalaluddin Haqqani acknowledging how years of fighting together against U.S forces drew them together ([Dawn](), June 4). The Taliban are facilitating negotiations between Pakistan and the TTP, but have not taken any significant counter-terrorism actions against the latter despite Pakistan's repeated requests ([Terrorism Monitor](), July 1). The Afghan Taliban's lack of pressure on the TTP to halt attacks could alternatively be construed as providing support for the TTP to expand into different parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Swat.

Fourthly, during Pakistan's negotiations with TTP, the former reportedly allowed the local members of TTP to return to their homes and spend some time with their families ([Pakistan Observer](), August 11; [Dawn](), October 12). TTP members, therefore, returned to Swat and reasserted

their influence in the area. A video circulating on social media in August, for example, showed a wounded police officer and a captured army officer in Swat, which indicated the TTP's strong presence in the area (Facebook, August 9). Although those captured security officials were later released, the incident raised questions about who allowed the TTP to return to the area. Thus, the Pakistani government's own actions have seemingly provided room for the TTP to re-emerge in Swat.

Conclusion

The TTP in Swat is now capable of challenging Pakistani government forces there. However, the current circumstances are different from the previous TTP emergence in Swat in 2007-2008. The people in Swat are now more aware of the nature of TTP rule and oppose any kind of militancy in the area, which mostly harms civilians. On October 11, for example, thousands of people gathered at Nishat Chowk in Swat to demonstrate against the rise of the TTP (The Express Tribune, October 11). Such a situation will provide valuable support to the Pakistani government as they attempt to handle the situation and make it difficult for the TTP to sustain a presence in the area. In many areas of Swat, civil society representatives and politicians have also held demonstrations against the growing insecurity in the province and demanded the Pakistani government take stern action against the TTP (Dawn, October 12).

The emergence of the Taliban in Swat is, therefore, not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is a concerning development for the local people, who fear an insurgency could gain strength. Unless Pakistan and Afghanistan agree on a mutual strategy to handle the TTP, there will be constant insecurity in different parts of Pakistan, including Swat, which will only bolster the TTP presence despite popular opposition to the TTP.

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Kashmiri "Hybrid Militants'" New Phase of Terrorism

Sudha Ramachandran

On October 17, two migrant laborers from the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh came to work in the Kashmir Valley, and were later killed in a grenade attack in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)'s Shopian district. Just two days before this, a Kashmiri Pandit (Hindu of Kashmiri origin) was also shot dead outside his home in the same district. These killings are the latest in a string of militant attacks on Kashmiri Pandits and non-Kashmiri migrants from other parts of India.

According to Indian police, the grenade attack that killed the two laborers was the work of "hybrid militants," which refers to the dual lives of militants, and "faceless militants," which refers to their anonymity (Indian Express, October 19; Deccan Herald, August 16). They placed emphasis on how the current phase of the militancy in Kashmir is different from the social media-driven militancy of the 2014-2019 period and previous phases when militants were trained in Pakistan or Kashmir's forests. The key question, therefore, is this: why is this latest wave of militancy in Kashmir of particular concern to India's security establishment?

The Bygone Burhan Wani Era

Since its eruption in 1989-90, anti-India militancy in Kashmir has passed through several phases. In the initial years, the militants enjoyed mass support. However, weariness of the violence and criminal activities of the militants by the mid-1990s began eroding popular support for the militants (Terrorism Monitor, April 15, 2016). This changed in 2014-2015 when Hizbul Mujahideen's charismatic commander, Burhan Wani, burst onto the scene.

Audio clips of Wani's speeches and videos of his activities inspired Kashmiri youths,

some of whom took up arms against the Indian state. The subsequent 2014-2019 period, which is often described as the "Burhan Wani era," was a phase of social media-driven militancy. Militants flaunted their faces and activities on social media, which won them adulation from the masses (Terrorism Monitor, April 15, 2016). However, the exposure of their identities enabled counter-insurgency forces to easily track them down and dozens them were swiftly eliminated (Scroll, February 8, 2017).

The elimination of militants dealt a severe blow to the Kashmiri militancy of the 2014-2019 period. However, anti-India sentiment in the Kashmir Valley surged after the Indian government revoked article 370 of the constitution in August 2019, which guaranteed J&K autonomy, and Article 35A, which granted J&K residents special rights, including a few related to property. To quell mass protests against its unilateral moves, the Indian government arrested hundreds of political leaders and activists while implementing internet shutdowns and other restrictions on freedom of speech and movement, but this all failed to curb the militancy (Observer Research Foundation, August 22, 2020). Instead, it served to fuel a new wave of anti-India belligerency in Kashmir, which has been far less easy to track than the publicized violence of the "Burhan Wani era."

Kashmiri Hybrid Militancy

A key feature of the current anti-India militancy in J&K is its "hybrid" nature because of the dual life of the militants. Security officials have observed that many militants operating in Kashmir since 2020 lead mostly "regular" lives, including being engaged in activities like studying or working for the most of the day, until they slip out to carry out an assigned attack and then return to their normal routine. Unlike militants in the past who were full-time combatants trained in Kashmir's forests or in camps in Pakistan, hybrid militants have been radicalized online and receive an easy-to-use weapon, such as a pistol or grenade, after which they are assigned to kill a specific individual. Importantly, most hybrid militants do not have a track record of engaging in anti-state activity and therefore they are often not found in police records. Unlike militants of the Burhan Wani era, their identities are not known to authorities (Deccan Herald, August 16 and Scroll, August 16).

In the past, security forces were the main targets. Now, however, civilians, Hindus, and unarmed policemen are bearing the brunt of Kashmiri militant attacks. More than 70% of the 55 targeted killings since 2021 by "hybrid militants," according to J&K police, have been civilians (Article 14, October 6). Since August 2019, militants have not carried out major attacks on "hard targets," except for the December 2021 attack on a bus carrying police personnel at Zewan in the outskirts of Srinagar, which left three policemen dead. Other than that, there haven't been any major assaults on army or police establishments in recent years (NDTV, December 14, 2021).

Thus, while the number of total militant attacks has dropped, unarmed civilians are bearing the brunt of the militant attacks. From August 2019 to July 2022, 118 civilians, including 21 Hindus and five Kashmiri Pandits, have been killed in J&K, according to the Indian government (The Tribune, July 21). The government's scrapping of article 35A, which would change the demographic composition of Muslim-dominated Kashmir as well as its distinct culture and identity, appears to be the main trigger for the attack on local Pandits and non-Kashmiri migrants. The goal of the attacks, in essence, is to drive out those who are not Kashmiri Muslims. Several Pandit families and migrants have consequently begun leaving the Valley (The Hindu, October 26).

Conclusion

Although J&K has not witnessed major terrorist attacks on security establishments or convoys over the last few years, there

have been several targeted killings of civilians, including religious minorities and of unarmed policemen. Most of these attacks have been carried out by "hybrid militants." While it is evident that these militants do not have the capacity or training to carry out attacks on well-guarded security establishments or armed personnel, they are a source of concern because they are able to kill civilians easily. Such killings have the potential to trigger an exodus of religious minorities from predominantly Muslim Kashmir.

Additionally, hybrid militants maintain a low profile and are not found on police records. Unlike the militants of the Burhani Wani era, little is known about them, which makes it hard for security agencies to track them down and eliminate them. It also makes the current phase of the militancy a new, dangerous, and especially challenging one for India.

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Iranian Drones Are Changing the Battlefields of Eurasia

Sine Ozkarasahin

On October 10, Iranian loitering munitions rained over Ukraine's urban centers, including Kiev. Two weeks later, Israeli forces struck an Iranian drone factory in Syria ([Al Arabiya](#), October 23). This demonstrated how Iran's drone program is now beyond Iran, both in terms of production and operational impact. Iran has become a drone-exporting nation and Iranian drones are creating new flashpoints in different geopolitical axes.

Tehran's drone program is hardly new, however. In fact, it dates back to the 1980s

war of attrition with Iraq and rests on a decades-long significant research and development (R&D) effort. Iran's unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) strategy is aggressive ([Farsi Al Arabiya](#), April 23, 2021). It mainly focuses on utilizing UAVs to support the government's capabilities and strengthen its proxy forces abroad. Led by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its drone-maker Qods Aviation Industries (QAI), some of Iran's existing drone technologies are developed from reverse-engineering Western systems that have crashed or landed on or near Iranian territory (including the ones allegedly intercepted or captured near its coast). For example, some of the Iranian government's most sophisticated systems, including the Shahed-141 and 191, are modeled after the American RQ-171 Sentinel UAV that crashed in Iran back in late 2011 ([Iran Press](#), December 16, 2020).

Complementing Iran's proxy warfare, these drones have also been provided to the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. As a result, Iranian drones have proliferated Middle Eastern battlefields. Although open-source intelligence on the specifics on Iran's drone strategy is limited, Tehran has certainly developed a large-scale domestic production base with a rapid production-manufacturing cycle. Iran's current portfolio includes even an advanced suicide drone (Arash-2) that can strike Tel Aviv, which would pose an imminent threat to the West ([Tehran Times](#), September 12).

Iranian drones are proliferating rapidly and this trend is not limited to the Ukrainian battlefield. Successfully curtailing Tehran's rise as a drone exporter will not only depend on boosting counter-drone capabilities, but also drawing a detailed

map of Iran's global military-industrial network. This network is prominent in the developing world and fragile states, which the West will have to keep on its radar.

Iran's Alternative Drone Markets in Conflict Zones

In the past, Iran has successfully inserted itself into conflict zones and fragile states by providing its military systems to proxies. Iranian drone systems have proved to be high-value strategic assets for Tehran's proxy allies, especially Hezbollah, which changed the power dynamics in their favor in asymmetrical conflicts against, for example, Israel. The fact that Iranian drones are also now in Venezuelan bases is another alarming factor for U.S counterterrorism strategy. Iran and Venezuela have signed a 20-year cooperation roadmap, which likely includes exchanges in drone production. Their military-strategic relations are improving fast, as exemplified by the approximately 80 Iranian defense companies which participated in the Iran-Venezuela Industrial Scientific Expo fair in Caracas between September 16-19 (Dialogo Americas, October 25).

The factors propelling the Iranian military's industrial complex, and specifically its drone systems, are not limited to finding rogue clients. Another important aspect is the international production facilities of the Iranian government. In the past decade, Iran has built drone manufacturing factories and maintenance facilities in conflict-ridden and fragile states and developing countries, including Venezuela, Syria and, most recently, Tajikistan. The factory in Dushanbe is particularly crucial because it marks the first official and open announcement of an international Iranian UAV production line (Eurasia Daily Monitor,

June 14). It is also a significant step that shows Iran is striving to expand its footprint in Central Asia and saturate the regional market with its own UAV solutions before Turkey or other NATO allies are able to do the same. Tajikistan's potential purchase of Iranian drones would directly escalate tensions in the region, especially vis-à-vis Turkey's ally, Kyrgyzstan. As Kyrgyzstan hosts a Turkish TB-2 base and is a fresh customer for the Turkish produced Akinci UAV bomber, Turkey and Kyrgyzstan share significant military-strategic ties that cause concern for Iran, if not also Iran's ally, Russia (Anadolu Agency, September 13).

After Tajikistan, the Iranian drones have also entered the Armenian market. In short, this demonstrates Tehran is using drone sales to assert influence in the broader Central Asian and Turkic region and position itself as an alternate option to Turkish drone solutions that are becoming increasingly popular in the region, especially after their success in the Second Karabakh War, which featured Turkey's ally, Azerbaijan, defeating Iran's ally, Armenia, largely because of Azerbaijan's UAV dominance (Hetq, October 20). Having Iranian drones crop up on NATO's doorstep is not only a threat to Turkey and its regional allies, but a threat to the collective security of the Transatlantic Alliance. The most imminent strategic risk is that without the restrictions of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran can now purchase and sell conventional weaponry, including drones, which opens up the path for Iran to become a rival to Western and Transatlantic countries for military exports.

Russia's Route to Using Iranian Drones

Russia is using Iranian drones to enrich its strike package, but the loitering munitions it purchases are mainly motivated by a simple cost-benefit analysis. With a price estimated around $20,000 per unit, Tehran's "kamikaze drones" are much cheaper than missiles while also carrying out their tasks perfectly well to destroy Ukrainian critical national infrastructure. Iranian Shahed-136s (known as Geran-2 in Russian) have been instrumental in Russia's attacks on Ukraine's major cities, including Kiev and Odessa, which the Russian Armed Forces failed to occupy through ground assaults. With Russian missile stocks running low (13% left of the Iskanders and approximately 45% left of the Kh-101 and Kh-555 missiles, which has forced Russia to use emergency stocks), Iranian drones provide Russia with a swift and effective alternative (Pravda, October 24).

Simple to manufacture and cheap to purchase, Iranian loitering munitions might help Russia sustain a higher assault tempo. Yet, the payload of these systems is not sufficient to completely destroy large-scale targets, such as bridges or factories. For such strikes, ballistic and cruise missiles are still key. However, the Iranian loitering munitions can still paralyze Ukraine's public services and force the Ukrainian government to expend resources to repair damaged infrastructure all while the drones terrorize the local population in the process. In short, Iran's loitering munitions are doing their job.

Open-source intelligence indicates that Russia has ordered 2,400 Shahed-136 loitering munitions from Iran (Pravda, October 11). According to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Russian Armed Forces conducted approximately 30 kamikaze strikes in a two-day period in late

October, despite 23 being shot down by Ukraine (Twitter/@kyivindependent, October 28). Besides the famed loitering munition Shahed-136, Russia might soon welcome new Iranian drones into its arsenal. In July, a Russian delegation visited Iran's Kashan Air Base to see the Shahed-191 and Shahed-129, which suggests that the Kremlin is also potentially interested in these systems (Radio Farda, July 16). The former comes with a twin-missile support, allegedly has a maximum range of 1500 kilometers, and has a flight duration of 4.5 hours, while the latter allegedly has a payload of 400 kilograms (Iran Press, January 27, 2021).

Some Ukrainian news outlets have also claimed that Russia might soon purchase the Meraj-521, which is the Iranian analogue of the U.S. firm AeroVironment's Switchblade 300 (Sundries, October 20). According to the same sources, the new batch of Russian orders may include the Arash-2 drone, which are UAVs equipped with optical and thermal cameras that the Shahed-136 lacks. While the Shahed-136 can carry a combat payload of 40 kilograms, the Arash-2 can carry approximately 272 kilograms of explosives, making it a much deadlier asset than the Shahed-136 (Sundries, October 27).

Yet, the use of kamikaze drones to hit high-value targets is not a new phenomenon for Iranian drones. Some of Iran's drones, including the Shahed-136 that is used in Ukraine and the Shahed-131, have both been used by the Houthis to strike Saudi Arabian high-value targets, Israel-affiliated cargo ships, and U.S bases in Iraq (Fars News, December 26, 2021). But what makes Iranian drones extremely dangerous in Ukraine is that in the hands of General Sergey Surovikin, who is the new top commander of the ongoing

Russian invasion of Ukraine, they can be increasingly used to launch indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population and cities. According to Ukrainian generals, around 40% of the Shahed-136s reach their target, which is not a high success ratio, but is still sufficient to cause large-scale damage, especially in urban centers ([Radio Svoboda](#), October 6).

The Dilemma of Defending Against Iranian Drones

The characteristics of the Iranian drones used in Ukraine involve advantages and disadvantages for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. On the positive side, they make a distinct, buzzing sound, which enables them to be detected mid-flight. Second, they are rather large for a loitering munition, which again, increases ease of detection.

Due to their low flight altitude and lack of light-reflective composites, however, the Shahed-136 has a low radar and thermal signature, which makes it a struggle for air defense systems to intercept. Since Russia began using them, most Iranian loitering munitions were intercepted by the Ukrainian armed forces using anti-aircraft missiles, such as the Stinger ([Eurasian Times](#), October 18). However, due to the price tag attached to stinger missile systems, shooting these kamikaze drones down ends up becoming more costly than the threat itself. This makes targeting Iranian kamikazes with anti-aircraft missiles an extremely inefficient option for Ukraine.

In terms of military effectiveness, base defense systems, short to mid-range air defense systems, and electronic warfare assets are also required to create a layered air defense. At present, a layered strategy

combining MANPADS, air defense systems, and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), such as the German Gepards, seem like the ideal solution for Ukraine. Although insufficient for area defense, when used together with AAAs, systems such as NASAMS can also provide a point defense solution for defending Ukraine's critical facilities.

Conclusion

Iran's drone production lines now extend beyond the country's borders, which creates a much more complicated picture for U.S and allies' counterterrorism strategies. For example, recently, Israel bombed an Iranian drone factory near the Dimas military airport in Syria as recently as October ([Haaretz](#), October 23). However, due to the close links and coordination between the IRGC and Iran-backed proxies, halting the transmission of Iranian drone technology, production and maintenance facilities between various host countries and proxies will necessitate more than destroying a single factory.

In several regions with a heightened threat level, such as Eastern Europe, the Indo-Pacific, and Central Asia, if not also East Africa, the demand for drone systems will only continue to grow. This is mainly because UAVs have proven themselves to be cost-effective assets that significantly change the power balance in favor of a country with limited military resources, especially in asymmetrical conflicts. When it comes to reducing or eliminating Iran's drone capabilities, neutralizing the strategic 'masterminds' within the IRGC, filling in the gaps in demand with Western solutions, especially among the Turkic states with NATO military solutions before Iran can, and returning to the JCPOA must all be at the top of Washington's agenda. In this regard, boosting intelligence and

surveillance capabilities both on Iranian territory as well the host countries that field Iranian drones would also be key for the West's counterterrorism strategy vis-à-vis Iran.

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