



BAVAR-373: BOOSTING IRANIAN AIR DEFENCE

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Missiles have become an important part of Iran's military modernisation. Iran today has the largest number of ballistic missile arsenal in West Asian region. In the same quest, recently, Iran released images of its first indigenously built long-range missile defence system on the occasion of, Iranian National Defence Industry Day on August 21 this year.¹ Iranian President Hassan Rouhani himself visited Aerospace Industries Organisation (AIO) to take a tour of the military capabilities in various areas including fighter and civil aircraft, helicopters and drones as well as new technologies.² Iran's perceived danger to defend itself against any military attack as well as attacks on its nuclear facilities has been one of important motivating factors for the development of this missile defence system.

Bavar-373 is a long-range mobile air defence system which has been designed and constructed by Defence ministry scientists and experts in cooperation with country's Khatam-al-

Anbia Air Defence Base. Bavar-373 uses a phased array radar like Russian 96L6 radar for tracking aerodynamic targets and ballistic missiles in medium to long range, mounted on a ZAFAR heavy truck.³ Recently, the development of this began in response to sanctions imposed on the export of Russia's advanced S-300 surface-to-air missile defence systems to Iran. The Iranians claim that Bavar-373 system is capable of handling 100 targets—just as S-300 can—but targeting capability of the Iranian system is superior over Russian S-300. The Iranians also claim that their system can be deployed on a ten wheel missile carrier, deploying four missiles in ready to launch canisters.⁴

This was the project that was started when the country was still under the sanctions imposed by the United Nations along with other western powers. Back in 2007 Moscow and Tehran signed an agreement for the delivery of five battalion sets of Russian S-300 PMU1 air defence missile systems. In 2010, Russia halted

the deliveries due to a United Nations Security Council resolution 1929 imposing sanctions—which included a ban on the sale of high-tech weapons.⁵ It is pertinent to mention here that most of Iran's military arsenal is older than the Islamic Revolution itself which holds true in the case of Iranian air force too. In the pre-nuclear deal period, the presence of US military bases in the nearby countries of the West Asian North African (WANA) region had made it compulsory for Iran to indigenously develop its missiles, radars, air defence mechanisms etc. in order to ensure the safety and security of its own borders.

In the past, the US and Israel had been too vocal about their criticisms related to the sale of Russian S-300 to Iran. No doubt, both the US and Israel have been watching this new development with concern considering that Iran claims that Bavar-373 is superior to Russia's S-300 missile technology. This can be regarded as the 'game-changing' weapon in itself in the region. With this air defence mechanism in place it can be said that Iranian air defence system has improved considerably in order to defend the country's airspace along with Russian S-300s. Moreover, a combination of the two should be too formidable for the US, Israel or any of their allies in the region to consider an airstrike on Iran.

Russia and China had been Iran's only potential sources of direct sales of missile defence systems. It is quite clear that missile defence technology is becoming a key aspect of

rocket, ballistic missile and cruise missile warfare and can have great impact on Iran's military capabilities.⁶ In the past, the hostilities between US and Iran had been something that other nations like Russia and China have long taken advantage for fulfilling their own agendas. At the same time, Moscow fully recognises that with the normalisation of relations between Iran and US, it needs to undertake earnest steps to cement its ties with Iran. In the same quest Moscow gave a green signal to the halted shipment of S-300 Russian missile defence system to Iran just before the nuclear deal was signed.⁷

In the recent years, Tehran has made significant progress in its air defence capabilities with various new and indigenously produced missiles also being integrated into its existing air defence system. Along with it the development and possible future deployment of Bavar-373 air defence system will give Iran a significant strategic advantage against regional states and significantly complicate US air operations in the region. The presence of Bavar-373 in Iran—which is an upgraded version of Russian S-300 missiles—indicates that US would need to recalibrate its current mix of air frames in the West Asian region. This would lead to frenzy among Iran's neighbours to consider developing or upgrading their air and missile forces. If they wish to retain the capability to strike targets in Iran in order to deter against any future Iranian offensive attacks.

Iranian military budget had been more than doubled compared to what it was in the pre-nuclear deal years. Iranian military technicians have in the recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous military equipment, thereby making Iranian armed forces self-sufficient. Iran had been, clearly involved in an active competition with the US (after Iranian Revolution and Hostage crisis of 1979) and its Arab neighbours in an effort to win strategic influence and leverage. At present, Iran faces competition in terms of Iraq, the emerging threat of ISIS and growing uncertainty over the future of its alliances with the Assad regime in Syria and its future support to Hezbollah in Lebanon. At the same time Tehran has made it a point to convey assurance to the other nations in the region that its military doctrine is based on deterrence and therefore poses no threat.

Tehran has always assured other nations that its military might poses no threat to regional countries, stating that its defence doctrine is based entirely on deterrence. Tehran has constantly stressed that it has never relied on the support of the other states but only on its own capabilities. At the same time, Iranian military defence complex needs an inflow of the foreign ideas and advanced foreign technology for the gradual development of its military and defence industry. The Iranian priority has been to maximise the independent production of its own strategic armaments.⁸ However, the Arab world is sceptical of the usage of this system specifically

for the offensive purposes. Adding to that, there is suspicion amongst the neighbouring countries that Iran could use the system in a possible confrontation against the US aircraft in the Persian Gulf or the Arab countries. With this indigenously developed missile defence system, it seems that Iran will be able to extend its influence across the Arab dominated neighbourhood.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ "President Rouhani unveils Bavar-373 missiles", August 21, 2016, <http://theiranproject.com/blog/2016/08/21/president-rouhani-unveils-bavar-373-missile/>. Accessed on August 24, 2016.

² Ibid.

³ No.1, Ibid

⁴ TamirEshel, "Iran plans fielding Bavar 373 air & missile defence system this year", April 19, 2015, http://defenseupdate.com/20150419_bavar_373.html. Accessed on August 23, 2016.

⁵ On 9 June 2010 Security Council Resolution 1929, not unanimously adopted, imposed further restrictions on arms exports to Iran. Resolution 1929 inter alia prohibits states to directly or indirectly supply, or help to supply, Iran with major conventional weapons as defined by the UN Register of Conventional Weapons--battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, certain missiles and missile launchers. The resolution also prohibits the supply of related spare parts along with 'technical training, advice, services or assistance related to the provision, manufacture, maintenance or use of the listed items. Available at https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un_arms_embargoes/iran. Accessed on August 28, 2016.

⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iran's Rocket and Missile Forces and Strategic Options", Report of the CSIS Burke Chair in Strategy, <https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs->

public/legacy_files/files/publication/141218_Cordesman_IranRocketMissileForces_Web.pdf. Accessed on August 27, 2016.

⁷ Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, "Will America's New Deal With Iran Leave Russia Out In The Cold?", July 17, 2015, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/will-americas-new-deal-with-iran-leave-russia-out-in-the-cold/5463490>. Accessed on August 30, 2016.

⁸ "Ready to Compete: Is Iran's Bavar-373 system an answer to Russia's S-300?" August 23, 2016, <http://sputniknews.com/middleeast/20160823/1044540026/russia-iran-missile-defense.html>. Accessed on August 26, 2016.

