**[The use of drones by Azerbaijan](https://nation.com.pk/07-Dec-2020/the-use-of-drones-by-azerbaijan" \t "_new)**

Masud Ahmad Khan December 07, 2020

Azerbaijan and Armenia became a part of the Soviet Union when it formed in 1920. At that time, the control of Nagorno-Karabakh was given to Azerbaijan by the Soviets. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the regional parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh–overwhelmingly Armenian–voted to become part of Armenia. This led to a war between the two countries after which, the Armenians gained control of Nagorno-Karabakh and other areas in the region.

The latest conflict broke out on September 27, 2020, when Armenia launched an offensive attack against Azerbaijan and in response a riposte was launched by the Azeri forces. The war started on September 27 and ended on November 9, in 2020, after the Russians brokered a peace deal. According to the deal, 2000 Russian troops will monitor the truce and Azerbaijan will hold on to the areas it has captured while Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh must have returned Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin districts to Azerbaijan by December 1, 2020.

During the six weeks of the war, the performance of the Azerbaijan forces were exemplary compared to its earlier wars with Nagorno-Karabakh. A study on swift military victories by Azerbaijan forces revealed that extensive and effective use of drones played an upper hand and turned the tables. According to the Washington Post, ‘Nagorno-Karabakh has become the most powerful example of how small and relatively inexpensive attack drones can change the dimensions of conflicts once dominated by ground battles and traditional air power’.

Historically, the first pilotless vehicles were developed in Britain and the USA during WW1 but not used during the war. Surveillance and reconnaissance drones were used during the Vietnam War and also as decoys in combat and dropping leaflets. Since 9/11, the US had used drones massively against militants in Afghanistan and erstwhile FATA and killed thousands of members of Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban at large, including high value targets. Drones were also used in Yamen in 2002 under the Bush administration and continued during Obama’s as well. The US increasingly relies on drones to target militants around the world. Even the Iranian General, Qasem Soleimani, was killed in a US drone strike near the Baghdad airport in January 2020.

During the six weeks war, the Azeri forces used drones to their best and created havoc in the defences of the Armenian forces. Azerbaijan purchased state of the art drones from Turkey and Israel –Turkish Bayraktar TB2 and Israeli Kamikaze respectively. The two drones can carry bombs weighing 15-55kgs. Turkey is considered as the pioneer for the manufacturing and exporting of advanced combat drone technology. The Israeli Kamikaze also proved lethal against Armenia since they are small in size, which makes it possible to avoid detection by ground based radars. Kamikaze was born out of a Japanese incident where their aircraft, loaded with explosives, deliberately crashed on an enemy target during WW2. 3800 Kamikaze pilots died during the war and more than 7000 naval personnel were killed during these attacks.

The Azeri forces also converted the Soviet An2T multipurpose aircraft in order to fly over Armenian defensive positions. These unmanned biplanes were used as decoys to locate Armenian air defence and artillery positions.

In Asia, China is the leading country in the manufacturing of surveillance and combat drones. China recently displayed its ‘Wing Loong-10’ drone at the Nanchang air show. The range of this drone is 2500 miles and it can loiter in the air for 20 hours as well. China also possesses anti-drone technology which jams signals and is considered the best at disrupting the electromagnetic spectrum. India is also developing its indigenous surveillance drone, ‘Rustom-2’. It was tested in October this year and is expected to achieve 18 hours of continued flying at a height of 26000 feet. India purchased armed drones from the Israel Heron in 2018 to carry out standoff cross border strikes against Pakistan.

In the recent past, many Indian drones have flown past the LOC and have been downed by the Pakistan army. Now, India’s concern is that Pakistan is likely to get Chinese and Turkish drones which can be used against them. General Bapin Rawat went on the record to threaten Pakistan and said, at the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses in Delhi, “The Indian army is capable of using drones to attack hostile targets inside Jammu and Kashmir and across the LOC”.

According to media reports, Pakistan is getting 4 latest versions of the Chinese armed drones for the protection of CPEC. Pakistan has already developed its indigenous remotely piloted aircraft, Burraq, which was used against terrorists effectively in 2015. The drone is equipped with motion sensors and high resolution cameras for reconnaissance and its primary offensive tool is the laser guided air to surface missiles. Pakistan has another multi-purpose drone, Shahpar, which is capable of flying at an altitude of 17000 feet for up to seven hours. The effective use of drones in the recent conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has changed the future of warfare. Now air support does not have to be called in. Instead, drones can respond quickly as they can loiter for hours.

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