

‘All It Takes is One’: Iran Gives Russia Help From the Air

Russia’s new Iranian-made drones put Ukraine “a bit more on the defensive,” one expert said.

The Iranian-made drones that Russia has sent in swarms high over Ukraine’s battlefields are not particularly fast, running on an unsophisticated two-stroke engine akin to a lawnmower. They’re not going to sneak up on anyone, either: Russian troops have nicknamed them “mopeds” because of the buzzing noise the motor makes. And at about \$20,000 apiece, you might find more high-tech gadgets in a pre-owned vehicle at a used car lot.

But the Shahed-136 loitering munition, which carries an 80-plus-pound warhead and is launched from the back of a truck, doesn’t need to be goosed up with the snazziest technology in modern warfare to pack a punch. The drones featured heavily in Russia’s cross-country air and missile salvo against Ukraine on Monday, though Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said 13 of 24 of those launched by Russian forces this week were shot down.

That’s baked into the concept of cheap drone warfare. It’s a little bit like Iran’s approach to maritime warfare: Swarm any enemy with low-grade weapons, and hope one gets through.

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