UK Defense Secretary: "Turkey's Use of UAVs & Electronic Warfare in Syria & Libya are Game-Changing"

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Speaking at the Air and Space Power Conference, the U.K.'s Defense Secretary Ben WALLACE drew attention to Turkey's recent use of domestically made unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in Syria and Libya, along with electronic warfare (EW) systems.

On the 15th of July, WALLACE gave a speech at the Air and Space Power Conference, highlighting the importance of air and space power to the future combat environment in an age of constant competition.

Referring to Turkey's involvement in Syria and Libya, WALLACE outlined that the U.K. needs to look at others' lessons. "Look how Turkey has been operating in Libya where it has used BAYRAKTAR TB2 UAVs since mid-2019.

Those UAVs have conducted intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and targeting operations against frontlines, supply lines, and logistics bases."

Stressing that the U.K. needs to think carefully about the role of air and space forces in a world of constant competition, Defense Secretary Ben WALLACE pointed out that they should evaluate the use of such technologies by other exemplary countries.

"In July of last year, they struck the Libyan National Army controlled Jufrah airfield destroying several command and control nodes and two transport aircraft.

Or consider Turkey's involvement in Syria and its use of Electronic Warfare (EW), lightly armed drones and smart ammunition to stop tanks, armored cars, and air defense systems in their tracks."

WALLACE also emphasized, "According to reports the Assad regime suffered heavy losses "3,000 soldiers, 151 tanks, eight helicopters, three drones, three fighter jets, vehicles and trucks, eight aerial defense systems and one headquarters among other military equipment and facilities. Even if only half of these claims are true, the implications are game-changing."

The New Military Doctrine: Is it Game-Changer?

Turkish drones in Syria have played a significant role in cross-border operations, providing ISR (Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) and Close Air Support (CAS).

In February 2020, provoked by an Assad regime attack that martyred 36 Turkish soldiers in the Idlib de-escalation zone in northwestern Syria, these domestic drones, BAYRAKTAR TB2, developed by Turkey's leading unmanned aerial platform developer Baykar Makina, and ANKA-S, produced by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAŞ), ended up causing significant damage to Assad regime elements, hitting and destroying everything from tanks and air missile defense systems to howitzers as well as military bases and chemical warfare depots and clearly demonstrated the efficiency of such devices.

Turkey's extensive use of armed drones during Operation Spring Shield (OSS) to fight against Syrian regime forces put forward a new military doctrine regarding the deployment of UAV in contested air space in conventional warfare. The OSS constituted the largest ever deployment of ANKA-S and BAYRAKTAR TB2 drones in terms of scale and intensity. Ankara introduced a new military doctrine that prescribes drones as an air force in a conventional battle taking advantage of the drones to dominate the skies without the need for a traditional air force and inflict massive damage on the enemy from above without ground engagement.

Turkey's electronic warfare systems have also played a vital role in the OSS, allowing Turkish armed drones to destroy the Russian-made Syrian Panstir S-1 air defense systems deployed inside Idlib. During the OSS, Turkish drones had two significant advantages that enhanced their performance. One was the weapons, smart micro-munitions MAM-L and MAM-C developed and produced by Turkey's Roketsan, and the other was the electronic warfare (EW) system, known as the KORAL which is to a large extent an integral part of the success of the OSS campaign.

The multi-functional KORAL system can carry out sophisticated tasks such as locating, intercepting, analyzing, classifying, and determining the direction of multiple types of radar signals, including complex ones. It can also jam, deceive, and paralyze hostile radar systems. The domestic EW system also likely contributed to blinding the Syrian regime's Russian radar network.

Over the past ten years, Turkey has quickly developed its national UAV industry and emerged as a drone power. The country has designed and produced its indigenous unmanned platforms that have proved to be very effective in counter-terrorism efforts inside Turkey and cross-border operations, mainly in Syria and Iraq, and more recently in Libya, where the TAF deployed drones in 2019 to support the UN-recognized Government of National Accord.

These systems have become a symbol of national pride as Turkey seeks to eliminate its dependence on foreign suppliers and become a leading defense exporter.