

# Israeli official says drones could replace planes

April 21 2013, by Daniel Estrin

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Israel's air force is on track to developing drones that within four to five decades would carry out nearly every battlefield operation executed today by piloted aircraft, a high-ranking Israeli officer told The Associated Press Sunday.

The officer, who works in the field of [unmanned aerial vehicle](#) intelligence, said Israel is speeding up research and development of such unmanned technologies for air, ground and naval forces.

"There is a process happening now of transferring tasks from manned to [unmanned vehicles](#)," the officer said, speaking anonymously because of the classified nature of his work. "This trend will continue to become stronger."

Isaac Ben-Israel, a former Israeli [air force](#) general, said however there was no way drones could entirely overtake manned airplanes. He said there are just some things drones can't do, like carry heavy [payloads](#) needed for major assaults on targets like underground bunkers.

"The direction is drones playing a bigger and bigger role in the air force," he said. "In a decade or two they should be able to carry out a third or half of all missions. But there are still certain things you cannot do without a piloted plane."

Israel is a pioneer in drone technology. Its military was the first to make widespread use of drones in its 1982 invasion of Lebanon and Israeli

companies are considered world leaders and export [unmanned aircraft](#) to a number of armies, including U.S.-led forces that have used them in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The unmanned aircraft have been a major part of Israel's arsenal in battling Gaza rocket launchers over the years. Drones were seen as crucial by giving soldiers eyes in the air, keeping watch over [rooftops](#) and alleyways in congested urban areas and notifying troops of threats or obstacles in their path. Israel insists its drones only perform surveillance missions but Palestinian witnesses have long claimed that Israeli drones fire missiles in Gaza.

The officer claimed Israel is second only to the United States in the range of unmanned aerial systems it produces. He said he was "aware" that American drones are capable of firing missiles, but refused to say whether Israeli [drones](#) could do the same.

The officer cited one technology recently unveiled: the unmanned Hermes 900 aircraft, developed by the Israeli military manufacturer Elbit Systems Ltd. and recently rolled out for Israeli military use.

It features double the performance capabilities of the previous generation of the same unmanned aircraft, the Hermes 450. It can carry up to 350 kilograms, features advanced systems of surveillance and reconnaissance and offers support to forces on the ground and at sea, according to a description of the technology on Elbit's website.

Israel is also looking to develop small tactical satellites that warplanes could launch into the earth's orbit, the officer said.

Unlike satellites in permanent orbit which are more easily monitored by other leading armies in the world, the tactical satellites Israel hopes to develop would be cheaper to build and less susceptible to interception

because they would be launched during wartime and there would be less time for foreign armies to track their orbit, Israeli military officials said.

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