

China steps up drone race with stealth aircraft

November 9 2018, by Ludovic Ehret



China's drones are now flying in the Middle East, as Beijing is more willing than the United States to sell its military UAVs to other nations.

China is unleashing stealth drones and pilotless aircraft fitted with AK-47 rifles onto world markets, racing to catch up to US technology

and adding to a fleet that has already seen combat action in the Middle East.

Combat drones were among the jet fighters, missiles and other military hardware shown off this week at Airshow China, the country's biggest aerospace industry exhibition.

A delta-winged stealth [drone](#) received much attention, highlighting China's growing production of sophisticated unmanned aerial vehicles seeking to compete with the US military's massive fleet.

The CH-7—a charcoal-grey UAV unveiled at the air show—is the length of a tennis court with a 22-metre (72-foot) wingspan. It can fly at more than 800 kilometres (500 miles) per hour and at an altitude of 13,000 metres (42,650 feet).

"We are convinced that with this product clients will quickly contact us," said Shi Wen, chief engineer of the Caihong (Rainbow) series drones at state-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp (CASC).

The CH-7's maiden flight is slated for late next year.

CASC has clients in around 10 countries, Shi told AFP, while declining to name them.

"Some things remain sensitive," he said.

'Competitive prices'

China's drones are now flying in the Middle East, as Beijing has fewer qualms than the United States when it comes to selling its military UAVs to other nations.


China's new stealth drone

Unmanned aerial vehicle unveiled, adding to a range of Chinese drones that have already seen combat in the Middle East

CH-7 (Rainbow-7)

Maiden flight set for late 2019

Wingspan: 22 m



Max. takeoff weight: 13 tonnes

Speed: +800 kph
Altitude: 13,000 m

- For reconnaissance, electronic surveillance, detection of stealth fighters, attack: *CAAA
- China's series of drones have been sold to around 10 countries: Shi Wen, chief engineer of CH drones
- Iraqi army has used CH-4 drone to conduct at least 250 strikes against Islamic State group, Chinese media has reported

Source : State media/ China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics/CASC/Global Security © 

Factfile on China's CH-7, a new stealth aircraft slated for its maiden flight late 2019

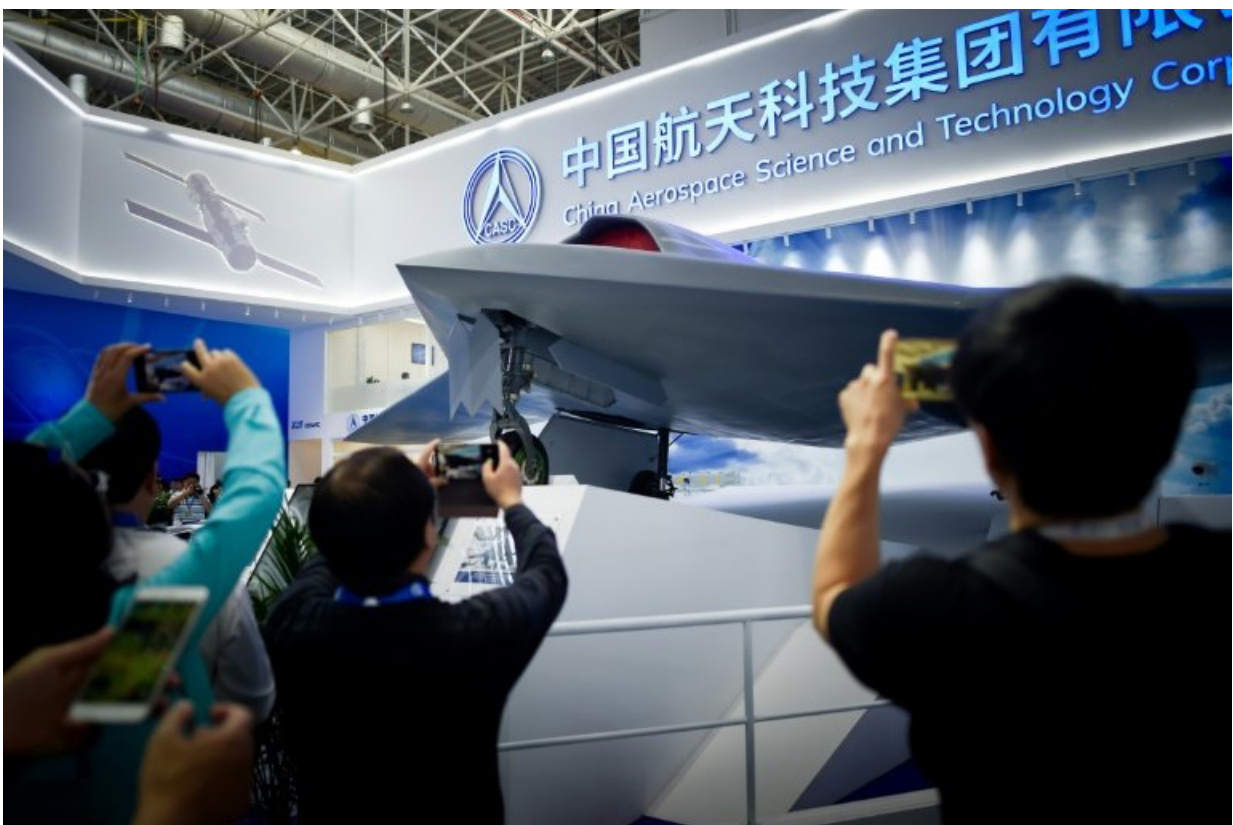
The Iraqi army has used CASC's CH-4 drone to conduct at least 260 strikes against the Islamic State group, Chinese media reported earlier this year.

In Yemen, where a civil war has sparked what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the United Arab Emirates military has reportedly targeted a Shiite rebel chief with a Chinese-made drone.

"The Chinese have produced an enormous range of drones, and this seems to be an area that they expect to make great progress," said Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.

"The export and deployment of them should enable them to improve on design as they get tested in a real combat environment," Tsang said.

The United States has plenty of lethal drones, but it has had restrictions on exporting them out of concern that the technology could be copied or used against its own troops.



The Iraqi army has used a China-made drone to conduct at least 260 strikes against the Islamic State group, according to Chinese media.

Some of those restrictions were lifted in April for US allies, with President Donald Trump's administration citing competition from Chinese "knockoffs", but even a solid ally such as Jordan has not been able to buy US drones.

The US rules gave Beijing the opportunity to fill the void and sell its drones to other countries, but China's "competitive" prices also helped, said James Char, an expert on the Chinese military at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

China has exported its armed UAVs to countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Char said.

Armoured Blowfish

At the Zhuhai air show, Chinese drone makers are rubbing their hands at the business opportunities.



Combat drones were among the jet fighters, missiles and other military hardware shown off this week at the country's biggest aerospace industry exhibition.

"Security is a real problem in the Middle East. There's a real need for [military drones](#) over there," said Wu Xiaozhen, overseas project director at a company named Ziyan.

At the company's stand, Wu handed out a brochure showing its star product: the Blowfish A2, a 62-centimetre (24-inch) tall helicopter drone with Kevlar armour.

"We can add an AK-47 or a machine gun. Different weapons can be installed, whatever the customer wants," she told AFP.

Abu Dhabi is already a customer while Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are in discussions with the company to acquire the drone.

"We are targeting Western markets, too. Our product is of great quality," she said. "We don't fear competition from the Europeans and the Americans."



Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are in discussions to acquire the Chinese-made Blowfish A2 helicopter drone.

Citation: China steps up drone race with stealth aircraft (2018, November 9) retrieved 6 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-11-china-drone-stealth-aircraft.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.