

IRAN WATCH

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPEDING THE IRANIAN DRONE PROGRAM

Russia's use of Iranian drones in Ukraine has invigorated Western efforts to slow the development of Iran's drone program and limit Iranian drone exports. How can sanctions and export controls support these efforts?

Iran's drone production relies on imported components, most of which are commercially available and do not appear on export control lists.

Focus on controlling higher-end items like satellite data links, advanced sensors, and jet engines to delay progress on more capable drones.

Invest in cost-effective counter-drone defenses, interdictions, and prosecutions as a complement to export controls.



Controls on unlisted items that could have a military end use offer the best chance of preventing drone-related goods from reaching Iran.

Expand capacity building efforts for export control regime members exploited by Iran for drone-related procurement.

Emphasize the legal basis for these "catch-all" controls provided by U.N. Security Council resolutions.

U.S. economic sanctions have deprived Iran's defense industry of resources and indirectly slowed Iran's drone development.

Focus new sanctions on smaller Iranian companies involved in drone production.

Use secondary sanctions to punish companies in third countries supplying Iran.



China serves as a key supplier of drone parts to Iran, challenging export control policies aimed at restraining Iran's drone program.

Apply private and public pressure on manufacturers using Chinese distributors that transship Western parts to Iran.

Press Chinese companies with U.S. market exposure to increase their due diligence on trade with Iran.

These findings are drawn from a [private roundtable discussion](#) with a group of experts, hosted by the [Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control](#).

