

The battle over Western Sahara: Morocco strengthens its unmanned aircraft force

Morocco is fighting the Polisario organization that according to open sources is being assisted by Algeria in Western Sahara. A large part of the operations against the organization is carried out by unmanned aircraft

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Morocco is making major efforts to acquire unmanned aircraft, precision weaponry and stealth weaponry as part of its Air Force's modernization program. The Moroccan military is already operating three Heron drones, acquired from France in January 2020 (for \$48 million), which were jointly manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries and Airbus Defence and Space. The Moroccan military also acquired drones made by Israel's BlueBird. The recent improvement of Israel's ties with Morocco may help Morocco's buildup of power in the field of unmanned aircraft.

Regarding this topic, Samuel Ramani, a defense expert at the University of Oxford, told the Defense News website that Morocco is developing ties between its military and other militaries, and is cultivating

ties with defense companies to modernize its Air Force. Morocco considers unmanned aircraft to be of great importance in the modernization efforts.

The Moroccan military first used armed drones in April 2021 in an attack on targets of the Polisario organization in Western Sahara. The U.S. supplied Morocco with drones and laser-guided precision munitions, and Turkey has sold Morocco 12 Bayraktar TB2 drones. Morocco was also close to signing a deal with the Trump administration for the acquisition of MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones.

As part of the Air Force modernization effort, Morocco acquired 25 F-16 fighters and 24 AH-64 Apache helicopters from the U.S.
