

## From Shaheds to Strait Control: Why Iran Can Still Influence Global Trade

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On Saturday, the 14th of March 2026, President Donald Trump [stated](#) that the United States had destroyed ‘100% of Iran’s military capability’. If there is one thing that the war in Ukraine has taught, it is that when properly motivated, a state can scale its wartime arms production with serious speed. President Trump may have dealt a series of painful blows to Iran’s toolkit, but it will not take much for the regime to sustain a war effort or continue to choke world trade.

In 2022, when Russia first invaded Ukraine, it did not domestically produce any Geran-2 (Shahed-136) drones. They initially purchased a small quantity ([up to around 6000](#)) from Iran and quickly set their sights on building manufacturing plants. By 2023 they had the Alabuga drone factory where they were able to produce around [200 Geran-2 drones per month](#). In 2024, they saw a major increase in production and by December of that year it was reported that they were able to produce [up to 2000 Geran-2 drones per month](#). By May of last year, Russia’s production capacity was up to around [2700 Geran-2 drones and another 2500 ‘simulator’ drones](#) used to overwhelm air defenses in a single month (according to Ukrainian intelligence), and production is likely to increase further.

Mass production of these drones has changed what it means to be ‘war ready.’ A massive reduction in Iran’s arsenal of missiles, air capabilities, and ground capabilities would weaken the regime but Trump’s pronouncement should not convince anyone they are no longer a threat. If Iran follows Russia’s blueprint, even heavy losses today are unlikely to prevent them from sustaining a long campaign of drone attacks tomorrow.

Besides, Iran’s strategy is to delay. They retain the ability to threaten American bases in the Gulf, as well as Gulf allies, with their current stockpile of drones and missiles. From almost anywhere in Southern or Central Iran they can launch a Shahed which could reach the Strait of Hormuz, meaning that even if missile and naval drone production slows, they will continue to threaten global trade flows, should the status quo continue.

Russia’s continuation of the war against Ukraine should have shown to the United States what modern war looks like, and how a state can remain a threat at a low cost. Iran is more than capable of continuing this conflict, and their recent statements reaffirming their lack of interest in diplomacy makes that clear.

Iran’s current stockpile of Shahed-136 drones has not been made public. Before the war started, estimates indicated it could be up to around 80,000 drones. Considering Russia’s demonstrated ability to create and grow a drone industry whilst at war, there is no reason Iran’s drone industry will not grow similarly. Between 2023 and 2025 Russia’s Geran-2 drone production grew by 1250%. Iran will not require this level of growth and is in a better placed position to start having produced a significant quantity of these drones.

The significance of this threat lies in the unique importance of the Strait of Hormuz to the global economy. A sizable portion ([around 25%](#)) of the world’s oil supply passes through the Strait, so even limited disruptions can have huge consequences for energy prices. Crucially, Iran does not need to secure a complete shutdown of the Strait to achieve its aims, as even the threat of attacking merchant ships drives insurance premiums and forces ships to reroute. By demonstrating that the Strait can be reached, Iran has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and can maintain this very atmosphere without their arsenal of long-range missiles by building Shahed-136 drones.

In this instance, drones are not strictly a military asset, but a way of exerting economic pressure on adversaries.

Securing the Strait of Hormuz to a point of trade continuation will prove to be almost impossible without either a negotiated settlement or a complete capitulation from the Iranian regime. If during this conflict Iran retains even a small portion of their current Shahed-136 stockpile, or the ability to manufacture them, then ships passing through the Strait cannot be guaranteed safe travel.

In short, claims that the Iranian threat has been significantly reduced are short sighted and ignore many of their existing capabilities. Their existing missile stockpile, combined with their production capacity, means that even heavy strikes will not eliminate their ability to project their power across the region. Just as Russia's war in Ukraine has demonstrated, modern warfare requires cheap and easily mass-produced systems, and Iran is very well positioned to meet these requirements. Until a diplomatic solution is reached, or the Iranian regime is somehow forced to end their war efforts, the threat to world trade and to the world energy market will persist.

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