Suicide drones deployed in Yemen by Iran within striking distance of Israel

Workers prep an Iranian drone. (YouTube/ali javid/Screenshot)

The mullahs would hope for "plausible deniability" if Yemeni rebels launch a strike on their behalf, says Iranian expert.

The Houthi movement that controls almost all of northern Yemen has received so-called "suicide drones" from Iran that could hit Israel, *Newsweek* reported in an exclusive on Wednesday.

The extremist Shiite group, officially called Ansar Allah, has as its slogan, "Allah is Greater, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam." Its years-long attempt to take over Yemen has been steadily supported by Iran while being opposed by a Saudi-led coalition.

The Iranian Shahed-136 loitering munitions are said to have a range of 2,000 to 2,200 kilometers (1,240 to 1,370 miles), putting the Jewish state within striking

distance.

The Houthis have also used Iranian-made UAVs to attack Saudi Arabia over recent years.

The report said that an anonymous expert on Iran's doings in the region confirmed images of the drones that the weekly had received.

"What [the Iranians] are trying to achieve is plausible deniability," the expert said, "as in being able to strike either a U.S., Saudi, Gulf, or Israeli target and then having the strike traced back to Yemen, and hoping for deniability against any kind of retribution."

As the closest U.S. ally in the region, Israel has been on high alert for weeks in case Tehran decides to avenge the Jan. 3, 2020 American assassination of one of its most senior military commanders, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani. The mullahs also blame Israel directly for the November assassination of its top nuclear weapons scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Israel has not admitted any responsibility for the targeted killing.

IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi openly warned Iran weeks ago not to try attacking Israel either directly or through any of its terrorist proxies. He said the army was prepared, whether for infiltration attempts by Hezbollah on Israel's northern border, or missile strikes from further afield, such as by the Houthis.

On Sunday night, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States would be designating the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity.

"These designations will provide additional tools to confront terrorist activity and terrorism by Ansarallah, a deadly Iran-backed militia group in the Gulf region," Pompeo said. "The designations are intended to hold Ansarallah (the Houthi rebels) accountable for its terrorist acts, including cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, infrastructure, and commercial shipping."

The latest attack attributed to the Houthis was a Dec. 30 missile strike on the airport in Aden meant to kill the Yemeni prime minister and Cabinet members of a new government, who had just landed in the country. At least 25 people were killed and 110 wounded in the attack.