

Chinese 'Dark Sword' is the First Sixth-Generation Warplane – Military Experts

Description

via Sputnik

The recently-revealed Chinese 'Dark Sword' unmanned aircraft, already dubbed a "nightmare for the US," might be the first military flyer to achieve the "sixth generation" milestone.

The recently-unveiled Chinese unmanned combat air platform known as Dark Sword might be the first sixth-generation warcraft, according to [Militarywatchmagazine.com](https://militarywatchmagazine.com).

At this point, "4++"- and fifth-generation aircraft are mostly limited by the durability of the human pilot. Today, pilots survive thanks to pressurized inflatable suits, oxygen masks and extreme physical training. Increasing a plane's maneuverability would certainly crush a human pilot, necessitating a call for unmanned warcraft.

?Both the United States and Russia have experimented with unmanned aircraft, with the US cancelling its program despite Northrop Grumman presentation of an X-47B demonstrator vehicle which looked like the infamous F-117 but squashed flat by a steamroller.

?Russia, on the other hand, seeks to implement unmanned capabilities into its existing machines, very much like it did with its ground armored vehicles.

At this point, it is unknown whether Dark Sword will also operate as manned or will whether it will be strictly unmanned. Being unmanned embraces being susceptible to electronic attacks, particularly command channel jamming. Similar to a cyberattack, this becomes a constant race for more sophisticated swords and shields. The expenses are justified, however, by granting an unmanned jet maneuverability beyond anything that armies enjoy today.

"The Dark Sword is also likely to carry the most advanced Chinese-made air-to-air missiles and be able to operate at several times the speed of sound over extreme ranges, making it a lethal threat to hostile platforms across the South and East China Seas and a potentially invaluable asset," cited by [Militarywatchmagazine.com](https://militarywatchmagazine.com).

It should be noted that the definition of a 'sixth-generation jet' is not yet defined. According to some, the jet must include direct-energy (laser) weapons and missile defenses and/or cyber-attack capabilities — apparently this means the plane should be able to hack the adversary's systems remotely — and travel at much longer range.

Taking the US Navy's Triton heavy surveillance drone as a starting point — with a 15,186-mile maximum range, 30-hour endurance and a flight ceiling of 18,000 feet — reports claim that the Chinese machine would likely surpass those figures, allowing Dark Sword to operate in Japan, much of Southeast Asia and significantly increase China's anti-access-area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the East and South China Seas.

One proposed possibility would see a Dark Sword operating in conjunction with manned J-20 fifth-generation fighters. If AI systems are sophisticated enough, a J-20 pilot would only need to point at a target using a brief wireless communication burst for the autonomous Dark Sword to engage.

What makes Dark Sword particularly unsettling, though, is that it does not need to be that sophisticated.

"At the very least [Dark Swords can] soak up missiles from US fighters," Justin Bronk of British think tank Royal United Services told Business Insider. "If you can produce lots of them, quantity has a quality of its own."

The definition of a sixth-generation aircraft would then simply entail: "cheap, expendable and swarm-capable unmanned drone."