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## 'Iran downing drone, body blow to US'

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“If truth be told, the downing of the spy drone has surely delivered a heavy blow to the intelligence apparatus of the CIA and rustled many feathers in Washington,” Ismail Salami, an Iranian author and Middle East expert, wrote in an opinion piece published on Press TV on Thursday.

The Iranian “electronic ambush” ensnared the aircraft -- while it was in violation of Iran's airspace -- “to the humiliation of US officials,” he pointed out.

The US RQ-170 Sentinel spy drone crossed Afghanistan's border with Iran recently, but was brought down with minimal damage by the Iranian Army's electronic warfare unit. The aircraft was flying over the northeastern Iranian city of Kashmar, some 250 kilometers (156 miles) away from the Afghan border.

On December 6, two US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the drone had been part of a US Central Intelligence Agency reconnaissance mission, involving the US intelligence community stationed in Afghanistan.

The prolific Iranian author further explained that "it is manifest that Washington has recently ramped up its espionage activities in Iran."

Iran's Intelligence Ministry announced on May 21 that it had arrested a network of 30 individuals on charges of sabotage and spying for the US and that 42 CIA operatives had been identified in connection with the network.

Regarding the issue, the Iranian Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi stated that the spy ring had been directly taking orders from the CIA, while being headed and operated by top field agents working for the US spy agency.

Pointing out the US “bizarrely ridiculous” demand that Iran give the aircraft back, Salami further noted that “Washington's insistence on having the drone returned springs from some secret concern over the nature of what the Iranians would glean technologically from the spy drone.”

Following days of silence on the capture and unveiling of the aircraft, US President Barack Obama said on December 12 that Washington had asked Tehran to return the reconnaissance drone.

“We've asked for it back. We'll see how the Iranians respond,” Obama said in a news conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Washington.

Iran has announced that it intends to carry out reverse engineering on the stealth aircraft, which is also known as the Beast of Kandahar, and is similar in design to a US Air Force B-2 stealth bomber.

The Iranian political analyst also pointed to the former US Vice President Dick Cheney's recent angry criticism of Obama for his failure to recover the top-secret aerial vehicle and said, “It would be better if the US officials confessed to the military prowess of Iran instead of attributing the desperate loss of their drone to their president's ineptitude.”

"The right response to that would have been to go in immediately after it had gone down and destroy it," Cheney said in an interview with CNN on Monday, adding.

Salami concluded that, “The secret mission of the drone... consolidates the idea that Washington is more than ever bent on carrying out secret black operations inside Iran and that it is harboring a malicious plan to orchestrate an attack on the Iranian nuclear sites if not an Armageddon in the region.”