ISSN(O): 2320-5407 | ISSN(P): 3107-4928

International Journal of Advanced Research

ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Publisher's Name: Jana Publication and Research LLP

www.journalijar.com

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-58816

Title: "Deterrence by Assets: How UAV Localization Under Saudi Vision 2030 Reshapes Gulf Security Architecture."

Recommendation:
Accept with Minor Revisions.....

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality		✔		
Clarity		✔		
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer Report

Overall Assessment

The manuscript, "Deterrence by Assets: How UAV Localization Under Saudi Vision 2030 Reshapes Gulf Security Architecture," examines the strategic implications of Saudi Arabia's efforts to localize unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) production under Vision 2030. The paper connects defense-industrial localization with strategic autonomy, deterrence, supply-chain resilience, the economics of drone warfare, and the changing security architecture of the Gulf. Its central proposition is that locally controlled and replenishable UAV capabilities can strengthen Saudi Arabia's resilience and bargaining position without necessarily replacing its external alliances.

The manuscript has a clear and relevant research focus and brings together several important contemporary debates in strategic studies. The discussion of localization as more than simple domestic assembly, particularly the emphasis on maintenance, software, testing, supply chains, adaptation and

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institutional learning, is one of the paper's stronger contributions. The treatment of the relationship between low-cost UAVs, expensive air-defense interceptors and the economics of attrition is also timely and provides a useful foundation for the proposed concept of "deterrence by assets."

The manuscript is primarily a qualitative and conceptual policy analysis based on publicly available material, which is appropriate for an emerging and partially opaque defense-industrial subject. Some aspects, however, require clarification and strengthening. In particular, the paper should distinguish more carefully between established deterrence theory and the proposed concept of deterrence by assets, provide stronger source support for several empirical claims, and moderate some statements that currently present projected effects of localization as already established outcomes. The discussion of the 2026 conflict and the reverse-engineering/LUKAS case would also benefit from more explicit evidentiary support. These are mainly matters of analytical precision and documentation rather than fundamental weaknesses.

Strengths of the Paper

The manuscript's principal strength is its attempt to connect defense-industrial policy with strategic studies. Rather than treating localization merely as an economic-development objective, the paper explains how domestic production, maintenance, testing and technological learning can influence military resilience and deterrence. The distinction between complete autarky and "strategic partial independence" is particularly useful because it reflects the realities of contemporary defense production.

The discussion of UAVs as modular and relatively adaptable systems is also effective. The manuscript explains how localization can develop incrementally through final assembly, component production, software integration, testing and maintenance, allowing capabilities to accumulate through learning-by-doing. This provides a reasonable theoretical basis for linking industrial capability with strategic autonomy.

Another strong aspect is the analysis of attrition economics. The manuscript correctly focuses attention on the cost imbalance between inexpensive drones and expensive defensive interceptors and argues that prolonged saturation can create an economic problem for the defender. This is a useful dimension of contemporary military-strategic analysis and helps explain why production capacity and replenishment may matter alongside technological sophistication.

The discussion of GAMI and SAMI is also valuable because it introduces an institutional dimension that is sometimes missing from discussions of defense localization. The paper explains their complementary roles in regulation, industrial development, technology transfer, quality assurance and workforce

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development. This strengthens the manuscript's argument that localization depends on an institutional ecosystem rather than simply political declarations.

The paper also avoids presenting localization as complete independence from external partners. Its argument that Saudi Arabia may use localization to diversify partnerships and negotiate with foreign suppliers from a stronger position is balanced and consistent with the broader argument concerning adaptive sovereignty.

Areas to be Improved

The concept of "deterrence by assets" should be clarified more explicitly in relation to established deterrence theory. The manuscript usefully connects the concept with punishment and denial, but it should explain more clearly what analytical value the new formulation adds beyond existing concepts such as deterrence by denial, resilience-based deterrence and defense-industrial resilience. A short conceptual comparison would strengthen the originality of the argument.

The paper should also distinguish between **demonstrated effects and anticipated effects**. The title suggests that UAV localization is already reshaping the Gulf security architecture, while much of the manuscript uses terms such as "may," "could," and "if successfully implemented." The argument would be more precise if the authors clearly identified which effects are already observable and which represent projected strategic consequences of successful localization.

The methodology section is appropriate in broad terms, but it could provide slightly more information about the source-selection process. The paper states that it draws on official Saudi documents, defense-industrial reports, strategic literature and open-source reporting, but the reader is not told how these materials were selected or evaluated. A brief explanation would improve methodological transparency without requiring a more elaborate methodology.

The manuscript would also benefit from **more consistent in-text citation of its empirical claims**. The reference list is extensive, but the main body contains relatively few direct citations connecting specific claims to particular sources. This is particularly important for claims concerning Saudi defense-industrial targets, Chinese technology cooperation, air-defense cost ratios, the Shahed-136, LUKAS and the 2026 conflict. The authors should ensure that major factual and contemporary claims are directly supported by appropriate primary or highly reliable secondary sources.

The section on the **2026 Iran-American conflict** is potentially one of the most important sections of the paper, but it needs particularly careful documentation. The manuscript presents the conflict as a major empirical demonstration of drone-swarm saturation and air-defense depletion. Because the argument

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relies heavily on this episode, the authors should provide clear and authoritative sources for the specific operational claims and distinguish documented observations from the authors' strategic interpretation. This would considerably strengthen the paper.

The same applies to the discussion of the **Shahed-136 and LUKAS programme**. The case is relevant to the argument concerning reverse engineering, low-cost production and military learning, but the paper should provide more precise sourcing for the claims concerning the capture of the system, its technical characteristics and the institutional development of LUKAS. The authors should also be careful not to imply that reverse engineering automatically translates into successful indigenous innovation; institutional absorption and production capacity remain separate questions.

Some sections repeat the same basic argument that localization reduces supply-chain dependence, increases resilience and improves replenishment. This point is important and well established in the paper, but it could be stated more concisely. The space gained could be used to deepen the discussion of possible limitations, including the continuing dependence of localized systems on imported electronics, sensors, propulsion components or other critical inputs. The manuscript itself recognizes that complete self-sufficiency is neither realistic nor necessary. Developing this tension would make the argument more balanced.

The discussion of the Gulf balance of power could likewise be made slightly more cautious. The paper argues that localization will reduce Saudi vulnerability and increase its bargaining power with external partners. This is a plausible proposition, but the actual effect on the regional balance of power will depend on the scale, reliability and operational effectiveness of Saudi production, as well as the responses of Iran, the UAE, Qatar and other regional actors. A brief acknowledgement of these conditions would strengthen the analysis.

Finally, the manuscript would benefit from a modest editorial revision. Some terminology, including "UAV localization," "localisation," "asset-based deterrence," and "deterrence by assets," should be standardized throughout. The reference list should also be checked for consistency in bibliographic formatting. These are straightforward editorial matters.

Recommendation

The manuscript presents a timely and relevant analysis of Saudi defense-industrial localization and its possible implications for Gulf security. Its strongest contribution is the attempt to connect domestic UAV production with deterrence, industrial resilience and the economics of attrition. The discussion of

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adaptive sovereignty, GAMI and SAMI, and the relationship between low-cost UAVs and expensive air-defense systems provides the paper with a useful analytical foundation.

The revisions required mainly concern clearer conceptual positioning, stronger citation of empirical claims, greater distinction between established and projected effects, and modest tightening of repetitive sections. The paper does not require a fundamental restructuring, and its central argument is sufficiently coherent and relevant for publication.

Recommendation: Accept with Minor Revisions.