

**RIANOVOSTI**

## Iran boosts air defenses with new missile system

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Iran has developed and successfully tested its first domestically-built air defense system capable of destroying aircraft at low and medium altitudes, Press TV cited the country's defense minister as saying.

Ahmad Vahidi announced on Sunday that the new system, dubbed Mersad (Ambush), is equipped with a sophisticated radar, an advanced launcher, and modern guidance and target acquisition electronics.

"The system is highly dynamic, capable of combat in electronic warfare and can be linked with other radar and air defense systems," Vahidi said.

According to the minister, the Mersad system will incorporate Iran's domestically manufactured Shahin missile, which is an upgraded version of the U.S.-made Hawk missile supplied to Iran in the 1970s.

"Its [the Shahin's] production has begun and a sizeable number will be delivered to the armed forces this year," Vahidi said.

The minister did not specify the effective range of the new system, but the Hawk missile has a range of 15 miles.

The development of an advanced air defense system could mean that Tehran has achieved a significant level of self-sufficiency in protecting its nuclear facilities from potential airstrikes.

Both the United States and Israel have not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the dispute over Iran's controversial nuclear program.

Iran laid hopes in the past on Russian-made air defense systems, including the S-300, but the delay in the implementation of the 2005 contract on the delivery of at least five S-300 systems has apparently forced Tehran to expedite its own missile development.

Russian defense industry officials have repeatedly said that Russia is interested in fulfilling the contract, which is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, but the future of the contract would largely depend on the current situation in international affairs and the Kremlin's position.

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<http://en.rian.ru/world/20100412/158529509.html>