

Israeli spy planes patrol Iraq

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Jerusalem – Small Israeli pilotless planes are gathering intelligence for US-led forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, said the manufacturer in a statement on Monday.

Elbit Systems, one of Israel's leading defence electronics companies, said the little "Skylark" can be carried and operated by a single soldier, covering an area within a range of 10km day or night, said the company.

"Skylark is operational and currently deployed in the global war on terror in Israel, Iraq and Afghanistan," said the statement.

It described the Skylark as suited for "close range, beyond-the-next hill, counter-terror missions".

There was no immediate comment from US military officials.

Elbit said the Skylark would be unveiled to the public at the March 20-25 Australian International Airshow.

State-of the-art armoured vehicles

The Skylark is just one of several items of Israeli defence hardware deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Earlier this month, state-owned arms-maker Rafael said it had won a contract to supply the US marine corps with state-of the-art armoured vehicles for use there.

Military analysts said Israeli firms had long been supplying and maintaining equipment for American ground and naval forces in Iraq, although both buyers and sellers generally preferred to keep a low profile.

Israel has used drones since the early 1970s, and its fleet has steadily increased.

Air force officials say drones have become such an integral part of Israel's air power in recent years that their flight hours now outnumber those of manned fighter planes.

'Heron used in Lebanon war'

Two weeks ago the Israeli military unveiled the “Heron,” Israel’s largest surveillance drone, with a wingspan of 16.6m and an ability to fly for as long as 30 hours at a time at a speed of 225kph and a height of 9 000m.

The military said it used the Heron during last summer’s war in Lebanon.

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