

Argentine defense minister visits Moscow to discuss weapons purchases

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MOSCOW Argentina is interested in buying military helicopters and air defense missiles from Russia, the country's visiting defense minister said Friday.

Nilda Garre said after the talks with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Ivanov, that her country also wanted to purchase air traffic control systems from Russia.

Argentinian officials have handed a list of weapons and other equipment the country wants to buy, Ivanov said, adding that a bilateral commission would work out specific issues.

At a recent weapons exhibit, Russia's state arms exporter Rosoboronexport had offered Argentina delivery of armored personnel carriers, tanks, rocket launchers, fighter jets, military helicopters as well as anti-missile defense systems, the Interfax news agency said. The Russian Defense Ministry declined to comment on the report.

"The possible decision to buy military and weapons equipment will depend, among other things, on the conditions on which the Russian side will be ready to sign a contract with us," Garre was quoted as saying by Russian RIA Novosti news agencies on the eve of her trip.

Russia is already supplying arms to Venezuela, including helicopters, Sukhoi warplanes and 100,000 Kalashnikov rifles worth an estimated US\$3 billion (€2.4 billion). Leftist Argentine President Nestor Kirchner has close ties with anti-U.S. Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez.

"I think that purchase of armaments is an internal business of any country," Garre told reporters after her talks with Ivanov on Friday. "That's why accomplishment of this sovereign business of a sovereign country cannot cause any objections."

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