

U.S. Lawmakers Cut Pentagon Ties with Russian Arms Exporter

By [Global Research](#)

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The bill, introduced by Democrat Congressman Jim Moran, was passed by an overwhelming 407-5 vote and was attached to the 2013 U.S. military budget, according to the House of Representatives' statement.

"It is beyond unacceptable for the United States Government to work with a firm that is arming the oppressive Syrian regime," Moran said. "The United States does not condone the massacre of innocent men, women and children. Furthering contracts with Rosoboronexport contradicts our nation's commitment to the principles of freedom and democracy."

The passage of the bill came several hours after Russia and China vetoed for the third time a UN Security Council resolution on Syria authorizing non-military sanctions against President Bashar al-Assad's regime if it fails to withdraw heavy weapons and troops from urban areas within 10 days.

Rosoboronexport declined to comment on the move when contacted by RIA Novosti on Friday.

According to the statement by the U.S. lawmakers, Rosoboronexport has supplied nearly \$1 billion in arms to Syria over the last year, including high-explosives, mortars, sniper rifles, ammunition and attack helicopters which could have been used by Assad's forces to kill civilians.

Rosoboronexport signed a \$367.5 million deal with the United States in May 2011 for delivery of 21 Mi-17V5s. All those helicopters have now been delivered, according to the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), a Moscow-based think-tank.

The break with the United States could affect an option contract signed on July 18 for a further ten machines worth \$171 million. Deliveries of the second batch were due by 2016.

"There has never been a competition for supplying rotorcraft for the Afghan National Security Forces. Had there been one, I'm confident American firms would have done exceptionally well," Moran said.

Some analysts doubt the Afghan government would want another helicopter type in its inventory, however.

"In terms of follow-on orders the Mi-17 makes a lot of sense because of fleet commonality, crew and ground crew familiarity with the type, and the helicopter's robustness and ability

to be operated in austere conditions,” said Douglas Barrie, air warfare analyst with the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

CAST’s Ruslan Pukhov agrees. “It would be possible to buy Sikorsky helicopters, but they would have to wait three years for them and they would be more expensive, and be more complicated from the point of view of training. This is a political move, pre-election demagogery,” he said.

Another potential contract that looks set to be lost is for ammunition supplies to Afghanistan. In April, five U.S. defense firms invited Russia for the first time to become a subcontractor on the delivery of Russian-made ammunition for coalition forces in Afghanistan, Rosoboronexport said.

In mid-June, U.S. Senator John Cornyn called on the Pentagon to take action against Rosoboronexport, but the Pentagon dismissed his claims, saying that dealing with Russia’s arms exporter was the “only legally available method” to supply the helicopters to Afghanistan.

Rosoboronexport was subject to U.S. sanctions from 2006 to 2010 for allegedly providing nations including Iran and Syria with equipment that could be used to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Russia is the biggest supplier of arms to Syria, and maintains its only military base outside the former Soviet Union there. In June, President Vladimir Putin said Russian arms were not being used against pro-democracy protesters fighting to oust Assad, a claim derided as “patently untrue” by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who accused Russia of sending combat helicopters to Syria.

Frans Klintsevich, a Russian lawmaker and a member of the ruling United Russia party said that the U.S. move was just the first in what he predicted would be a series of anti-Russia measures.

“The US is continuing to reshape the world and Russia is the only thorn in its side in this process,” Klintsevich said, adding that recent unprecedented anti-Putin protests were part of Washington’s attempt to “split us up from within.”

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