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Iran to procure Chinese defense system

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Iran will turn to China instead of Russia to acquire an advanced air defense system after relations between Iran and Russia hit rock bottom, the official Iranian news agency PressTV reported.

For years Iran has been trying to purchase the S-300 anti-aircraft missile, which is considered to one of the most advanced systems available on the market and would dramatically increase Iran's air defense capabilities against any attacks on its nuclear installations.

The S-300 surface-to-air missile system, which can track targets and fire at aircraft 75 miles away, features high jamming immunity making it harder to incapacitate the system electronically, and is able to engage up to 100 targets simultaneously.

Teheran will now turn to China for the HongQi-9/FD-2000 system which reportedly combines elements "borrowed" from the Russian S-300 and the American MIM-104 Patriot system, according to the Iranian news agency.

The negotiations between Teheran and Moscow began in 2007, but neither side has ever issued an official confirmation of the deal.

The Russian sale of arms to Iran is a thorn in Moscow's relationship with Washington, which opposes Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and labels it "a sponsor of state terrorism," according the United States State Department.

In addition to American pressure on Russia not to sell weapons to Iran, Israel is also trying to persuade Russia not to export the system.

It is believed that when Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu meets with US President Barack Obama in Washington on May 18 that Iran's nuclear program will top the agenda.

In April, *London's Times* reported that Israeli military forces were in the final stages of preparation for launching a "massive aerial raid" on Iranian nuclear facilities "within days of being given the go-ahead by its new government."

The paper cites the acquisition of three AWACs (early warning system) platforms and planned civil defense drills in support of its theory. The *Times* quoted an unnamed Israeli defense official as saying that Israel's "message to Iran is that the threat is not just words."

However, an airstrike against Iran's nuclear installations will be much tougher than the bombing raid that Israel launched in 1981 to destroys Iraq's nuclear reactor in Osirak, since the Iranian installations are not only further away from Israel but also spread out all over Iran in addition to being heavily fortified.

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