

U.S. Cancels Russian Helicopter Deal Over Syria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The United States has scrapped plans to purchase additional helicopters from state-run arms exporter Rosoboronexport amid pressure from federal lawmakers over Russian arms deliveries to Syria, a top U.S. senator said Wednesday.

"I applaud the Defense Department's decision to cancel its plan to buy 15 additional Mi-17 helicopters from Rosoboronexport," U.S. Senator John Cornyn said in a statement, The Associated Press reported.

Cornyn, a Republican from Texas, has been leading a push in Congress to oppose the Pentagon's purchase of Russian helicopters for deployment in Afghanistan in light of Russia's weapons shipments to the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad as his forces battle rebel groups in a fierce civil war.

Russia insists that it is only abiding by its existing agreements with Syria and that

the deliveries do not violate international law.

A Pentagon spokesperson confirmed to RIA Novosti on Wednesday that the United States does not have plans to purchase additional Mi-17s from Rosoboronexport beyond previous orders.

U.S. defense officials had requested funds for next year "to provide additional enhancements for the Afghan National Security Forces" but have since "re-evaluated requirements in consultation with Congress," the spokesperson said.

The 15 Russian-built Mi-17s were slated to be purchased by the Pentagon next year for \$345 million, AP reported.

"Doing business with the supplier of these helicopters has been a morally bankrupt policy, and as a nation, we should no longer be subsidizing Assad's war crimes in Syria," Cornyn said in the statement cited by the AP.

The United States has purchased a total of 63 Mi-17V-5 military transport helicopters from Russia for use by the Afghan National Army.

The United States and several other countries accuse Assad's government of being behind an Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack outside Damascus that Washington claims left more than 1,400 dead.

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