

Iran stops funding for Russian MiG-31E Interceptor sale to Syria

Contributed by DebkaFile
Tuesday, 19 May 2009

DEBKAfile's military and Iranian sources report that Moscow cancelled the \$1 billion dollar sale because Tehran withheld funding as a cautionary step for Damascus against its going too far in its flirtations with Washington and Ankara.

The transaction signed in 2006 provided for Russia to sell the Syrian air force an unspecified number of advanced MiG-29M/M2 fighter-bombers and 8 MiG-29M/M2 fighters.

Wednesday, May 20, the official Russian arms export company Rosoboronexport announced the deal was off without explanation. Industry sources then released a mixed bag of pretexts.

One, that Moscow had never contracted to sell MiG planes to Damascus (even though on March 30, Russian military sources announced that 5 of the eight planes had been delivered.)

Another claimed that Moscow was unable to stand up to Israeli pressure to call the sale off.

A third that Syria had run out of funds to pay for the Russian warplanes because of the world economic crisis: "We never give them away gratis – even to our friends," said this Russian source.

Our sources disclose the real reason was Iran's refusal to pay for this important augmentation for the Syrian air force –partly because it was short of funds but mostly to caution Syrian ruler Bashar Assad that he had better stop or at least moderate his dialogue with the US and Turkey.

The MiG 31 E is rated one of the most effective interceptor aircraft in the world. Its Russian manufacturers boast that only four of these aircraft are enough to shield a territory 800-900 kilometers long from hostile aerial penetration. The stretch of land between the Israeli-Syrian border at its connecting point with Jordan and the Israel-Syrian-Lebanese border junction is 120 kilometers. Damascus had banked on a close formation of MiG 31 E warplanes to protect the country from Israel aerial encroachments across this border, through Lebanon or the Mediterranean from the west.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=6085>