EVERYONE'S TRYING TO SCORE ONE OF RUSSIA'S NEW WARPLANES

News / Manufacturer

The jet fighter war between the United States, China and Russia expanded this week when Moscow unveiled a new, export version of its Sukhoi-30 warplane.

"The Su-30SME aircraft (the export version of the Su-30SM fighter jet) has been shown on the international market for the first time," a source in the defense and industrial sector told TASS, Russia’s state-owned news agency.

The new aircraft will be equipped with Russian-made avionics unlike previous versions that contained French components.

The idea is to boost the jet’s air-to-air and air-to-ground combat capabilities. The industry source told TASS that Southeast Asian, Middle East and North African countries have already shown interest in the new fighter jet, which is already in service in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Earlier this month Russia inked a deal to sell Su-30 fighters to Iran. However, the Obama administration on Thursday said the proposed sale would violate a U.N. arms embargo on Tehran,

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creating another potential flare-up in relations following last year's nuclear negotiations.

State Department spokesperson Mark Toner said the jets--comparable to American F-15E fighter-bombers--count as "combat aircraft" and therefore the deal requires the U.N. Security Council's approval. Toner said that the US will raise the matter of the sale with Russia, adding that all six countries that negotiated July's landmark nuclear agreement with Iran "should be fully aware of these restrictions."

The accord keeps the arms ban on Iran in place for up to five years.

US Air Force Photo US Air Force F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter crew chief, Tech. Sgt. Brian West, watches his aircraft approach for the first time at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., July 14, 2011.

Not to be outdone, Sweden-based Saab plans to roll out a new generation of its Gripen fighter this spring, officials told Defence News. The Swedish and Brazilian air forces have already signed orders for the jet, which likely won't be airborne until 2018. Croatia, Bulgaria and possibly Colombia have also expressed interest in the fighter, company officials said.

The Czech Republic, Thailand and Hungary already fly Saab-made machines, which cost around $43 million each, and the company is in talks to add Slovakia to its roster. It's possible that any of those nations could decide to upgrade their arsenal and go with the new model once it's tested and ready.

While Washington and Moscow duke it out for aerial supremacy, Saab has been flying under the radar, racking up small and mid-sized orders around the globe. It's a different approach from the one the US had taken with manufacturer Lockheed Martin and its pricey F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

The fifth-generation F-35 warplane is being developed in tandem with eight partner nations -- Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey, and the United Kingdom – and has already cost the U.S. around $400 billion, making in the most expensive weapons effort in the country's history.

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SOURCE: BUSINESS INSIDER
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