

Serdyukov Signs Defense Pact With Israel

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Russia and Israel signed a framework military cooperation deal on Monday that Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov suggested would lead to further purchases of Israeli weapons and technology.

"We have just signed a long-term agreement on military cooperation," Serdyukov said after meeting with his Israeli counterpart, Ehud Barak.

He said they discussed both military and weapons cooperation.

"It's very important to us that in the transition to a new image, the Russian armed forces use the experience the Israeli armed forces have and the work they have done," Serdyukov said, according to the Defense Ministry press service.

The ministry did not reveal details of the agreement, which was the latest sign of tightening ties between the nations. Russia has drawn closer to Israel since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, a supporter of Arab nations in the Middle East.

Russia, which is beginning to buy foreign arms as it struggles to improve its rusty military, has sought to build up a fleet of Israeli-made spy drones since Georgia used such Israeli aircraft against Russia in their brief 2008 war.

Serdyukov said Russia has bought 12 of the pilotless aircraft and is training 50 servicemen to operate them.

Israel has pressed Russia not to sell weapons to its foes such as Syria and Iran. Moscow pleased Israel by promising not to deliver S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Iran while new UN sanctions over its nuclear program are in place.

"Russia is a central power in the world, and a very dominant and influential force in the Middle East," Barak told Serdyukov, according to a statement from Barak's office.

It said he outlined Israel's main security concerns, "foremost the Iranian threat and Syria's armament along with its support for terror organizations and Hezbollah."

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