

Syrian National Carrier Plans to Order 2 Planes

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The  **Moscow Times**

Syrian Air will purchase two Russian aircraft to upgrade its fleet, then make a decision about a larger order, the carrier's chief executive, Ghaida Abdullatif, said Monday.

"We have pre-approval to buy two planes as a trial at the beginning to see if they meet our needs," Abdullatif said. "We will then decide about buying more planes."

Syria turned to Russia after U.S. sanctions stalled negotiations on the purchase of as many as 50 Airbus planes, Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Abdallah Dardari said last month.

He said his country was looking for planes with less than 10 percent U.S. components, leaving Russia as the only option. U.S. parts content has also ruled out turning to Brazil's Brasileira de Aeronautica and Canada's Bombardier, Dardari said.

The Syrian government has been considering buying up to six medium-range Tu-204 planes on behalf of Syrian Air, which now has a fleet of five functioning aircraft, Syrian Transportation Minister Yarub Badr told Reuters on Sunday.

“Nothing happened regarding the Airbus deal,” Badr said when asked whether there has been any change since he announced in January that Washington had declined a request by Airbus for an exemption to sell planes to Syrian Air.

The U.S. imposed economic sanctions on Syria in May 2004, including a ban on transactions by U.S. entities with the Commercial Bank of Syria, the country’s largest bank, after then-President George W. Bush’s administration accused the government in Damascus of aiding militants in Iraq and destabilizing Lebanon.

The sanctions have prevented the sale of Airbus planes to Syria because some of the company’s aircraft parts are U.S.-made. Airbus suppliers include General Electric and United Technologies, which make aircraft engines, including models built in partnership with European companies, and U.S.-based Goodrich, the world’s biggest supplier of landing gear.

Dardari said in 2008 that Syria planned to modernize the commercial fleet. The carrier had sought to buy single-aisle Airbus A320s as well as twin-aisle A330, A340 and A350 models. It planned to lease four planes and then take delivery of the first 14 airliners from Airbus from 2010 to 2018 and a further 36 by 2028.

“The general number of aircraft hasn’t been decided yet as we’re still studying our needs,” Abdullatif said. “We are studying all the Russian models, including Tupolev.”

“The Russian option is real and very serious,” Badr said.

Moscow and Damascus have signed at least two memoranda of understanding for plane orders in the last five years, but no purchases happened. Badr indicated that a longer-term deal might not be imminent.

“Buying aircraft is not as simple as buying a kilo of bread. It needs time,” he said. ☒

(Reuters, Bloomberg)

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