

Reports of Small Arms Being Sold to Bahrain

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia for the first time is selling weapons to Bahrain after Britain and France banned deliveries of security equipment to the Gulf monarchy because of its crackdown on protesters.

State arms trader Rosoboronexport says it wants more business in Bahrain. The country is selling AK-103 Kalashnikovs with grenade launchers and ammunition for tens of millions of dollars to Bahrain, according to a person close to the Russian Defense Ministry who declined to be identified because the information is not public.

In February, France and Britain revoked export licenses for security equipment that could be used to quash internal unrest in Bahrain after government forces shot dead several protesters. At least 30 people were killed in this year's uprising in Bahrain, a U.S. ally situated between Qatar and Saudi Arabia that is home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

"The relationship between Russia and Bahrain has been increasingly getting stronger,"

Abdul-Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, a Bahraini government spokesman, said by phone on Aug. 24 from the capital, Manama. "We are looking to cooperate with Russia in trade and technical services. One of the fields is in the area of light arms."

He declined to comment on the details of specific contracts. Rosoboronexport chief executive Anatoly Isaikin said last week that Bahrain has become a new customer for Russian armaments.

"States in the region are interested in Russian air-defense systems, aviation equipment and weapons for ground forces," the company said in an e-mailed response late last week to questions about the arms deal.

Bahraini security forces beat paramedics, doctors and nurses who treated the wounded during the uprising, and prosecutors charged dozens of medical workers with crimes such as "incitement against the regime," according to Human Rights Watch. In June, the United States put Bahrain on its list of human rights violators.

"We will not issue licenses where we judge there is a clear risk that the proposed export might provoke or prolong regional or internal conflicts, or which might be used to facilitate internal repression," British Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt said Feb. 18.

Rosoboronexport said a mutually beneficial partnership between the two countries would help strengthen Russia's position among the Gulf's U.S.-allied monarchies.

Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa sat in the cockpit of a Russian Su-27 fighter jet at an air show in Manama last year.

"His majesty's interest in sitting in a very respectable Russian fighter jet does mean a lot, and it means that Russian capabilities today are some of the top in the world," said Al Khalifa, the government spokesman.

Russia will not halt weapons deliveries to its Soviet-era ally Syria, Rosoboronexport's Isaikin said Aug. 17. "There are no sanctions, and we have received no such government instructions. So we are obliged to fulfill our contracts," he said.

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