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U.S. Lawmakers Target Rosoboronexport

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WASHINGTON — Lashing out at Russia for its unwavering support for Syria, U.S. lawmakers have voted to stop the Pentagon from doing business with Rosoboronexport, the state-controlled arms exporter that has armed Bashar Assad's regime.

The overwhelming vote on an amendment to the defense-spending bill came just hours after Russia vetoed a UN resolution threatening nonmilitary sanctions against Syria late last week.

Incensed by the unending bloodshed in Syria, the House backed an amendment by Representative Jim Moran, a Republican, that would bar the Pentagon from contracts, cooperative agreements and loans with Rosoboronexport. The vote was 407-5.

The Defense Department has bought 33 dual-use Mi-17 helicopters for the Afghan military from the company, including an order for 10 aircraft last week. The no-bid contract for aircraft and spare parts is worth $640 million.

The Pentagon has relied on the company because of the Afghans' familiarity with Russian-made helicopters. But Russia reportedly sold $1 billion in arms to Syria last year and the Assad government bought 36 combat jets from the state-controlled firm.

"I should think it's troubling to all of us that we are purchasing helicopters from a Russian firm that is directly complicit in the deaths of thousands of innocent Syrian men, women and children," Moran said. "This has got to stop."

The House later passed the defense-spending bill for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The White House has threatened to veto the legislation, criticizing the House for reneging on spending levels that President Barack Obama and congressional Republicans agreed to last August in a deficit-cutting budget.

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