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Analyst Questions Kremlin's Threats Against Iran

By Rachel Nielsen

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A S-300 surface-to-air missile system on Red Square during a military parade in 2009. The military hardware is at the center of the Russian-Iranian dispute.

With Iran suing Rosoboronexport for as much as $4 billion over the arms exporter's refusal to deliver S-300 missile systems, the Kremlin's recent diplomatic threats are unlikely to stop the lawsuit, a top defense consultant said Sunday.

Igor Korotchenko, chairman of the Defense Ministry's public council, said in a telephone interview that the Kremlin's tough words over Iran's lawsuit in Geneva were short-sighted.

For more than a week, the government has said it will abandon its long-time support of Iran and take a harder line on Tehran's nuclear program if it presses ahead with the lawsuit, Kommersant reported.

But Iran won't drop its case unless the Kremlin finds a way to provide it with the surface-to-

air missile systems, said Korotchenko, who supports Russian arms deals with Iran.

A Geneva-based arbitration court is hearing the case.

Korotchenko called the situation over the S-300 "really unclear" and predicted that President Vladimir Putin wouldn't make a decision about the lawsuit until after the U.S. presidential election, which will be held in early November.

With the S-300 suit, it isn't even clear how much money Iran is seeking.

The Russian-language media have widely reported the figure as $4 billion, but Iran's ambassador in Moscow, Sayed Mahmoud Reza Sadjadi, told Izvestia that Iran was suing for only $900 million and the court had added $3 billion.

Korotchenko said compensation isn't the issue. "Iran is not interested in the money. Iran is interested in the S-300," he said.

Under the 2007 contract for the antiaircraft weapons, Russia agreed to sell five S-300 missile systems to Iran for about $800 million, according to RIA-Novosti.

Iran made a deposit of tens of millions of dollars for the weapons, but Russia returned that down payment when then-President Dmitry Medvedev suspended the contract in 2010, citing UN sanctions against Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry accused the media of using the disagreement to hurt Iranian-Russian relations.

"We are only trying to have the contract fulfilled," ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said in Tehran last week, RIA-Novosti reported.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit are the Iranian Defense Ministry and the country's Aerospace Industries Organization.

Iran's push for the long-range missiles comes amid Hezbollah's threats against Israeli civilians and the Israeli government's announcement that it could attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

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