

Russia Says Syrian Rebels Have Shoulder-Fired Missiles

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The  Moscow Times

Syrian rebels have acquired portable surface-to-air missiles, including U.S.-made Stingers, Russia's senior general said Wednesday.

Like Syrian President Bashar Assad, Russia has laid most of the blame for continuing violence on armed government foes it says are aided by encouragement and arms from abroad.

Russia's military has learned "that militants fighting Syrian government forces have portable missile launchers of various states, including American-made Stingers," General Staff chief Nikolai Makarov said, Interfax reported. "Who supplied them must still be determined."

NBC News reported in late July that the rebel Free Syrian Army had obtained nearly two dozen shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles, also known as MANPADs. An adviser to the Free Syrian Army denied that.

In contrast to the Libya crisis, the West has shown little appetite to arm the Syrian rebels, worried that weapons would fall into the hands of Islamist militants.

Russia sold the government in Syria \$1 billion worth of weapons last year and has made it clear that it would oppose an arms embargo in the United Nations Security Council because of what it says are concerns that rebels fighting Assad's government would get weapons illegally anyway.

The West has criticized Russia and China for vetoing three Security Council resolutions aimed at putting pressure on Assad to end the 19-month conflict. Moscow says it opposes foreign interference in Syria's affairs.

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