

U.S. Congress Wants Answers Over Russian Afghan Contract

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WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers is demanding answers from the Pentagon over a contract to buy helicopters for the Afghan security forces from a state-run Russian arms exporter that is a top weapons supplier to the Syrian government.

More than 80 House members signed a letter sent Thursday to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel voicing their opposition to the deal.

They say the \$554 million arrangement for 30 Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters from Rosoboronexport announced last month ignores a congressional prohibition against signing contracts with the arms agency.

The Pentagon has said the Afghans have an urgent need for the Mi-17s and it is in the public interest to buy them from Rosoboronexport.

The lawmakers say it is "unconscionable" U.S. taxpayers are subsidizing a company providing weapons to the Syrian regime.

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