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U.S. Lawmakers Want to End Deals With Russian Arms Exporter Rosoboronexport

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U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal talking to reporters at the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

U.S. senators have introduced a bill that would scrap planned U.S. purchases from the Russian state-owned arms exporter, Rosobororonexport, under previous $1.1 billion contracts, and would ban any future deals on taxpayers' money.

The bill — introduced Thursday by senators Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, and Republicans Dan Coats and John Cornyn — would "immediately terminate existing existing contracts and agreements" with the Russian arms exporter, from which the Pentagon had commissioned helicopters for the Afghan Air Force, Blumenthal's office said in a statement published on the Senate website.

The bill would also block any American or foreign company that "cooperates" with Rosoboronexport from receiving U.S. contracts, the statement said.

"The hostile situation in Ukraine is yet another recent example of why the U.S. should stop doing business with Russia and its arms dealer," Blumenthal said in a statement. "This legislation sends a clear message to Russia and Rosoboronexport: America will not do business with countries that behave irresponsibly and companies that arm terrorist regimes."

Members of U.S. Congress have previously urged the Pentagon to scrap its contracts with Rosoboronexport over the Russian exporter's weapons sales to the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad, which the U.S. designates as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The Defense Department said last fall that it would remove a request for more helicopters from Rosoboronexport from its 2014 budget. But the remaining purchases under a $1.1 billion worth of contracts signed during previous years for 63 Mi-17 helicopters remained in effect.

"Given Russia's hostile actions in Ukraine, business as usual is unacceptable," Coats said in a statement Thursday.

Cornyn called for ending the Pentagon's "hypocritical relationship" with Rosoboronexport.

"Considering Rosoboronexport's close connection with Vladimir Putin and his cronies, and its ties to brutal dictators who've committed mass atrocities, there is no reason for our military to continue to rely on equipment from thugs masquerading as a legitimate business," he said in a statement.

Out of the 63 helicopters envisaged in the past U.S. contracts with Rosoboronexport, 45 have already been delivered, Itar-Tass reported Thursday.

The remaining 18 would be supplied by the end of October, the director of the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation, Alexander Fomin, was quoted by Itar-Tass as saying Thursday, before the bill was introduced in U.S. Congress.

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