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Russia to Give Belarus Anti-Aircraft Systems Free of Charge

By The Moscow Times

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Russia has signed a contract to give Belarus four S-300 air defense systems.

The Russian Defense Ministry has signed a contract to give Belarus four S-300 air defense systems, which are worth hundreds of millions of dollars, free of charge, a top Russian military official told ITAR-Tass on Thursday.

The S-300 is one of the world's most sought after air defense systems. Its radar can hone in on aircraft, cruise missiles and even ballistic missiles, and destroy targets as far away as 150 kilometers, launching one missile every three seconds.

The S-300s will be handed over as soon as the Belarussian Defense Ministry signs the contact, said Konstantin Biryulin, deputy director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu first told reporters about the planned deal in October

2013, saying that both sides were looking to beef up their joint air defense system, which was created as part of a 2009 agreement between Moscow and Minsk.

Minsk is not stopping at the S-300s, however, having recently agreed to buy four Yak-130 combat training aircraft from Moscow, and an unspecified number of Tor-M2 air defense systems, Biryulin said.

Iran has been trying to buy S-300s from Russia for years, but to no avail.

An $800-million-purchase of five S-300s by Iran was halted in 2010 by then-President Dmitry Medvedev, who was worried that the deal would tarnish Russia's image at a time when the United Nations was imposing sanctions on Tehran to pressure it into abandoning its nuclear ambitions.

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