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Russia Hits Back After Britain's Farnborough Airshow Snub

By The Moscow Times

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Russia is the world's second largest arms dealer after the United States.

Although Moscow responded stormily to the U.K. Foreign Office's refusal to invite Russian officials to the Farnborough International Airshow because of "Russian actions in Ukraine," analysts believe these outbursts are unlikely to impact the country's ability to strike military deals with foreign partners.

"That a large portion of the Russian delegates have been denied British visas is an unhealthy sign of dishonest competition, a sign of weakness, if you wish," said Sergei Kornev, the head of Russia's Rosoboronexport defense export delegation at the Farnborough Airshow, ITAR-Tass reported Monday. "A strong, self-confident player would not resort to such tactics."

The Russian Foreign Ministry released a statement Monday, saying it expected official clarification on the situation from British officials and that it reserved the right to reciprocate. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who oversees the country's military-industrial

complex, wrote on Twitter on Sunday that the members of the delegation who were already at the airshow should "return home."

Some Russian entities seem to have already reacted to Rogozin's plea. Sberbank, a major financial partner of Russian aerospace companies, announced Monday that it would not be taking part in this year's edition of the airshow because of "changing priorities in the implementation of exhibition activities," but said it would continue to cooperate with Farnborough in the future, RIA Novosti reported.

According to Ivan Konovalov, deputy director of the Moscow-based Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, Rogozin's reaction was "emotional" and his plea to withdraw from the event will ultimately have no impact on Russia's dealings with its partners in the civil and military aviation industry.

"Contracts are not made at these types of airshows," Konovalov told The Moscow Times on Monday. "When contracts are signed at Farnborough, it means that there has been a long negotiation process prior to the actual signing. And this, of course, does not take place at the airshow. Russia still has a stand at Farnborough; it is still being represented, despite any calls to boycott."

Kornev confirmed Monday that the organization's employees were already at Farnborough and ready to engage in negotiations.

The absence of certain Russian delegates at the Farnborough Airshow — including Sergei Chemezov, the CEO of Rostec and a friend of President Vladimir Putin who was not granted a British visa — is insignificant for Russia's European partners, according to aviation specialists.

Russia is the world's second largest arms dealer after the United States. India, China and Algeria accounted for more than 60 percent of Russian arms exports between 2009 and 2013, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. European countries only reflect a fraction of Russia's military deals.

"Let's be honest. Russia's arms deals are not geared toward Europe," Konovalov said. "They are focused on South Asia, Africa, Latin America. Apart from France, which has agreed with Russia on the Mistrals, Russia's military relations with Europe are rather marginal. I think Russia's partial absence at a European airshow will not mean much to a European audience."

Yet, analysts have noted that the country seems to have become more cautious in its approach to international military conventions in the aftermath of its falling-out with the West over the crisis in Ukraine.

"Russia is only presenting its civil aviation this year [the Sukhoi Superjet 100], fearing that a display of its military assets could entail more sanctions," said Maxim Pyadushkin, the editor-in-chief of the Air Transport Observer, a Russian aviation magazine. "Last year, at Le Bourget Airshow in France, another major aviation show, Russia presented loads of military planes. We can see that circumstances have changed."

Kornev told reporters Monday that Russia would not present its array of fighter jets, light

attack and military transportation aircraft, and combat helicopters at Farnborough this year.

The last Farnborough Airshow, in 2012, hosted 1,500 companies and 107,000 trade visitors, and amounted to $72 billion of confirmed aerospace contracts or agreements. This year's show is being held from July 14 to 20 and is set to host more than 1,000 companies from 37 countries.

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