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Assad: Syria Gets Russian Arms Under Deals Signed After Conflict Broke Out

By The Moscow Times

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A member of a Female Commando Battalion which is part of the Syrian Army, aims her weapon at the frontline in the government-controlled area of Jobar, a suburb of Damascus.

Russia is supplying weapons to Damascus under contracts signed since the conflict in Syria began in 2011, as well as under earlier deals, President Bashar Assad said.

Assad's comments, in an interview published by Russian government newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta on Monday, appeared to contradict Moscow's line that any Russian arms supplies to Damascus were agreed before the conflict began.

"There are contracts that had been sealed before the crisis started and were carried out during the crisis. There are other agreements on arms supplies and cooperation that were signed during the crisis and are being carried out now," Assad said.

"They went through some changes to take into account the type of fighting the Syrian army

carries out against the terrorists," he said in the full text of the interviews, excerpts of which were published last week.

Assad gave no details of the weapons being supplied by Russia, the world's second-biggest arms exporter, since the start of the conflict which has killed more than 220,000 people and displaced millions.

Asked about the interview, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov did not say whether Moscow was supplying arms to Damascus.

"In fact, Moscow has always highlighted that there have been and are no embargoes on military cooperation. There are no legal limitations no us," he told reporters.

Russia's Defense Ministry, contacted by telephone, declined immediate comment.

Russia is a longstanding ally of Assad and is hosting meetings in Moscow on April 6-9 involving some of the more moderate Syrian opposition representatives and Damascus envoys.

Expectations of a breakthrough are low after a first round of consultations made little progress. Many Syrian opposition figures shunned the January consultations, saying they would appear only at meetings that led to Assad's removal from power.

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