



Russia-UAE eye win-win Su-75 stealth fighter deal

Description

RUSSIA/UAE: Russia aims to [co-produce](#) its new Su-75 Checkmate stealth fighter with the United Arab Emirates, a move that could revitalize Russia's struggling defense industry while at the same time reducing the UAE's dependence on the United States and West for its fighter aircraft.

The two sides are now in talks to co-produce the necessary composite materials and telecommunications technology for the jet fighter, according to reports. If they come to terms, the deal would be [economically beneficial for the UAE](#), providing a significant boost to the country's defense industry as it attempts to diversify its oil-dependent economy.

The UAE's decision to enter Su-75 co-production talks with Russia comes after it [decided to suspend talks](#) with the US over a F-35 fighter purchase. The UAE cited US pressure to drop Huawei from its telecommunications network and disputes on [how much F-35 technology would be transferred](#) as reasons for suspending talks.

It wouldn't be Russia and the UAE's first strategic embrace. In 2017, [Russia and the UAE](#) announced the launch of a next-generation fighter program, which aims to put such aircraft into service by 2025.

The apparent shift in the UAE's preferred source of fighters shows Russia's increasing influence in the Middle East and could set a procurement precedent for other oil-rich countries in the region.

The Su-75 is a fifth-generation stealth fighter jet that aims to [re-enter a segment of the fighter market](#) once served by light fighters like the MiG 21. It is designed with customers such as Vietnam, India and African countries in mind.

The main sales pitch of the Su-75 is that it provides fifth-generation capabilities at a fraction of the F-35's price. The fifth-generation fighter's [characteristics](#) include low observability, networking capability and data fusion technologies. These technologies give them a significant edge over the current fourth-generation fighters.



The Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II fighter jet. Photo: AFP / Yorick Jansens / Belga Mag

However, the question is whether Russia's defense industry [can meet expectations](#). Since 2017, the Russian defense industry has suffered contractions in capacity and size.

The Su-75 relies heavily on composite materials and Russia's industry is nowhere near as advanced as those in the US and Europe. The Su-75's Izdeliye-30 engine is still undergoing testing and Russia has not yet been able to manufacture a cost-effective AESA radar, with reports indicating it faces difficulties developing the radar's transit/receive modules.

Russia's defense industry is also [struggling with challenges](#) such as corruption, aging talent and Western sanctions. More importantly, Russia's state-owned defense industries operate in an [administrative market](#), which redistributes government resources among players important to the political system and its sustainability.

Decisions concerning Russia's defense industry are thus often determined by political rationale rather than commercial needs. Russia's defense industry is strongly tied to maintaining regime legitimacy

through sustaining perceptions of military might, providing funds for regime beneficiaries and creating jobs for ordinary Russians.

As a result, it constantly overpromises to provide advanced weapons, yet continuously under-delivers. While Russia is capable of producing “[superweapons](#)” such as the Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile and Poseidon nuclear-armed underwater drone, it faces difficulties in manufacturing more conventional items.

For example, most of Russia’s fighter jet exports are [modernized variants](#) of the Soviet-era fourth-generation Su-27 and MiG-29 fighters, whose base designs are approaching obsolescence in the 2020s.



The aging MiG-29. Photo: WikiCommons

As such, Russia must move away from these dated Soviet-era designs and produce new designs if it is to recapture its share of the light fighter market in the foreseeable future.

That said, the Su-75 is a new design driven by Russia’s need to update its fighter export portfolio and attract new customers. But it may take many more years before the Su-75 is available for prospective buyers.

Aftermarket support is also a weak spot in Russia’s defense industry, a fact that will continue to

hamper sales unless Russia increases funding and undertakes significant reforms in the sector.

by Gabriel Honrada

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Date Created

01/21/2022