

Russian Advanced Fighter Jets for Iran Amid a Massive Increase in U.S. Military Presence in Israel and the Broader Middle East

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After months of speculation whether Iran would acquire Russian weapons, particularly advanced fighter jets, on November 28, Deputy Defense Minister of Iran Mehdi Farahi dispelled [previous rumors about the deal supposedly falling through and confirmed that Tehran had finally inked the contract](#) to procure Su-35 air superiority/multirole fighters, Yak-130 light fighter/advanced trainer jets and Mi-28 attack helicopters from Russia.

The announcement comes amid an enormous increase in the already massive American military presence in the Middle East, which includes [everything from carrier strike groups \(CSGs\) to fighter jets and even strategic bombers](#). The tensions have escalated significantly in the context of the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict, prompting Iran to urgently modernize its aging fighter jet fleet.

Speculation about the acquisition has been ongoing since last year, [specifically after Egypt withdrew from the deal to buy Russian jets](#). Cairo's fear of getting on America's bad side pushed it to stifle its sovereignty (and security), an opportunity that Tehran took to make a deal that would otherwise take years to finalize. Western sources have been speculating about the Su-35 deal with Iran even before the special military operation (SMO). Rumors about the acquisition continued throughout 2022, followed by [speculation about the deal allegedly not going through](#). However, [by September](#), it became clear that the military cooperation between Moscow and Tehran would include even more than Su-35 fighter jets, particularly after [the Yak-130 light fighters/advanced trainers were spotted in Iran](#).

The Yak-130 can double as both attack jets and advanced trainer aircraft, but their primary role is the latter, meaning they were especially indicative of the deal going through. Namely,

the Yak-130 is used as the stepping stone in flight training for pilots preparing to fly the Su-35. [Getting advanced fighter jets for the Iranian Air Force \(IRIAF\)](#) has been a point of contention for decades as the country was under a strict Western arms embargo that prevented any advanced weapons acquisitions. This had its perks, as it forced Tehran to develop a plethora of indigenous industries, including a very robust and highly cost-effective drone production, and now it's clear that Tehran's advanced military industry is perfectly capable of going toe to toe with the world's most powerful countries in terms of developing and deploying unmanned systems.

However, despite these advances that also include a plethora of other weapons, such as surface combatants, transport aircraft and long-range SAM systems (mostly based on Russian designs), Iran is sorely lacking in the manned combat aviation compartment. This is hardly surprising, given that only a handful of countries in the world have fully indigenous aerospace industries. Even Asian giants such as China and India [still rely heavily on Russia to acquire top-of-the-line aircraft](#), although their respective advances in this regard are certainly commendable. By getting the Su-35, Tehran is [pushing the capabilities of the IRIAF](#) well into the 21st century. [Various reports](#) indicate that at least 24 fighter jets have been ordered to replace the aging F-14 "Tomcats", while there's speculation that it would acquire over 60 in follow-up orders.

Almost the same could be said for the Mi-28 attack helicopter. The advanced Russian rotorcraft has very few equivalents abroad and would certainly revolutionize Iranian capabilities. Namely, Tehran currently relies on its ancient Vietnam War-era AH-1 "Super Cobra" attack helicopters which are decades behind technologically, even with the incremental upgrades and overhauls that the Iranian military has been applying. Reports indicate that Iranian forces operating in Syria were impressed by the performance of Iraqi and Russian Mi-28s in both Iraq and Syria, which was a major contributing factor to the decision to acquire them. The superb flight characteristics and armament of this Russian helicopter are rivaled only by the [less conventional coaxial rotors-equipped Ka-52 "Alligator"](#).

It's important to note that the ongoing procurement is of the utmost importance to the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and BRICS+ frameworks. Namely, [Iran is already a member of the former](#), while it's poised to join the latter in just over a month. With the US escalating tensions in the region, [the primary target of which is precisely Tehran](#), the belligerent thalassocracy is looking to disrupt multiple peace processes in the region. [Attacking Iran](#) seems to be a very tempting prospect for Washington DC, as it would effectively "[kill two birds with one stone](#)" by making both SCO and BRICS+ look "weak" and unable (or even unwilling) to defend their new members. The US very likely believes this could be a deadly blow to [the rapidly emerging multipolar](#) world that will inevitably dismantle the existing "[rules-based world order](#)". By arming Iran, Russia is making sure that any such attack would be not only a costly endeavor, but also a failed one.

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