

Russian Weapons for Iraq. How Will US-NATO React?

By [Global Research News](#)

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In an exclusive interview to the [Voice of Russia](#), Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari talks about the upcoming meeting of the bilateral commission on cooperation as well as the large deals regarding arms and oil trade.

Mr. Zebari, the relations between Iraq and Russia are actively developing. That can be proved by the upcoming meeting of the bi-lateral commission on cooperation, which on the Iraqi side is headed by you. There is information that the meeting may take place in March. Can you give details on when and where it will take place?



The upcoming meeting of the Russian-Iraqi commission on cooperation is to take place in Baghdad. It is planned for the first quarter of this year. It was actually planned to take place at the end of last year, but was postponed.

Previous meetings proved the usefulness of that commission. Let me remind you that on the Russian side, the energy minister will head the commission. The meeting will help to expand cooperation between Russia and Iraq. It includes oil, arms, as well as other spheres. At the upcoming meeting we will talk about how we can stimulate the business activities of more Russian companies and the inflow of investment from Russia to Iraq. Prior to this one there have been three meetings in Moscow. We have achieved good results. But time has come to get together in Baghdad as well.

Talking about the results, are you talking about the fact that Russia just forgave Iraq its multi-billion dollar debt?

Not just that. Currently, Russian companies, such as Lukoil, Bashneft and others, are working at the large Iraqi deposits. They work professionally and enthusiastically.

Some Russian companies sign contracts not only with the central government of Iraq, but also with the regional government of Kurdistan (an autonomous region in the North of the country). However, Gazprom Neft Company's desire to work both in the North and in the other parts of the country was met with the resistance from the federal government, which is unhappy with its direct contact with Iraqi Kurdistan. What is the main issue of that problem and how can it be resolved?

We will deal with that issue. In any case, the Iraqi delegation headed by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki discussed the future of our cooperation during their visit to Moscow in the fall of 2012. Other ministers and I were assured by the Russian side that your companies would

work with all Iraqi regions on the basis of the laws and the constitution of our country.

Mr. Zebari, Massoud Barzani, President of Iraqi Kurdistan, has recently visited Moscow. In his interview to the Voice of Russia he mentioned that the anticipated large deal of arms supply from Russia to Iraq had reportedly fallen through. It appears that the Kurds don't like that deal that much. Has it really been cancelled? Are there no more arms supplies from Russia to Iraq planned for the near term?

Naturally, Iraq needs to acquire weapons and modernize its army and military equipment. Such are the main tasks for the country's security – it is our lawful right. It is clear why in pursuing that goal Iraq has turned to Russia among other countries. The Iraqi army has in its arsenal a lot of arms produced in Russia. From that point of view, Russia is closest to us. We have been talking to the Russian side about our needs for a long time. But by the way, during the visit of our Prime Minister to Moscow last fall that I mentioned (I was a part of that delegation), the press gave figures of the volume of the contracts that had little to do with reality. Yes, there was an exchange of opinions. We presented our requirements; the Russian side described its proposals. We discussed the timing. But the press also talked about the contracts, which had not been signed at that point. In many cases it was only our intentions that back then were at the negotiations stage.

As far as the signed contracts go that deal with the acquisition of weapons in Russia, they have not been cancelled. However, we have not started executing them yet.

When will the first supply commence?

As soon as the financial issue is resolved. I believe that the first shipments of weapons from Russia to Iraq will start before the summer, as the latest term.

What kind of equipment will it be? Military aircraft were discussed.

No, we are not talking about aircraft so far. It will be helicopters of a specific kind and missile defense batteries.

And what is the state of your plans to purchase F-16 fighter planes from the USA? There have been talks. Are there any problems with that as well?

No, we have no problems with the Americans on that deal. The supplies are to commence in 2014. Getting back to the topic of cooperation with Russia, it is developing. And evidence of that is the increasing number of official visits – this is an important factor.

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