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## **RUSSIA-CHINA ARMS SALES STROKE US AIR SUPERIORITY FEARS**

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Financial Times (21 March 2017)

Renewed Russian arms sales to China are threatening US air superiority, according to a US Congressional research report that highlights the increasing military ties between Moscow and Beijing.

In Chinese hands, Russian weapons such as the S-400 surface-to-air missile system, thought to be among the worlds best, and the fourth generation Su-35 fighter jet could have significant consequences for the United States, said the study by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, which is appointed by Congress.

The report said that these and other Russian weapons systems, which are more advanced than anything China could produce, would allow Beijing greater military capabilities in a confrontation with possible antagonists such as Taiwan or the US.

They would also allow China to accelerate the development of its own advanced weapons, the report said.

Moscow has since last year resumed sales of advanced arms technologies to Beijing as geopolitics and economics trump longstanding concerns about Chinese cloning of Russian weapons.

The sales amount to a lifting of a 2006 moratorium on high-tech weapons exports to Beijing, implemented amid accusations that China had reverse-engineered Russian weapons such as the Su-27 fighter. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian defence enterprises mainly stayed afloat by exporting their wares to India and China, and looking the other way if their technology was stolen.

In virtually all aspects of military-to-military co-operation, according to the report, China and Russia were at their closest point since the two countries normalised relations in 1989.

In April 2015, Russia confirmed the \$3bn sale of up to six S-400 SAM system battalions to China, which could be delivered as soon as 2018.

Meanwhile, the first four of 24 Su-35 jets were delivered in December last year, and Chinese pilots have been training with the aircraft in Russia.

Both countries have been driven closer to each other by global geopolitics.

Beijing is responding to what it perceives as US efforts to contain it in the South China Sea, where Washington does not recognise Chinas maritime claims, and in South Korea, where the US is seeking to base an advanced anti-missile system.

The US wants to maintain its superiority and keep its advantage over others by at least an entire generation of military gear, said Yue Gang, a military affairs analyst and retired colonel in the Peoples Liberation Army. But with the economic progress China has been making, Beijing is now only trying to reduce the gap.

Russia, meanwhile, has grown increasingly isolated politically following its 2014 invasion of Ukraine and is anxious to cultivate China as an ally and counterweight to Nato. The report notes that the countries military-to-military ties are growing, although a Nato-style alliance — compelling either side to respond militarily in support of the other in a conflict — was doubtful.

Policy differences and mutual distrust will probably prevent a more comprehensive alliance-like security relationship from taking shape, the report said.

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