

Saudi Arabia Turns to China for Low-Altitude Air Defense

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OE Watch Commentary

Chinese weapons manufacturers were among the key winners at the World Defense Show 2022 (WDS 2022), Saudi Arabia’s new and much-vaunted annual international weapons fair. The Saudi government meant for the show to serve as a catalyst for its Vision 2030 development plan, which aims to localize half of all defense spending by 2030. Riyadh also meant for the show to help fulfill Saudi Arabia’s immediate military needs, which are currently dictated by the war in Yemen and are primarily focused on low-altitude air defense. In that regard, the Saudi Arabian government inked a deal with China’s Poly Technologies to procure a laser air defense system, known as the “Silent Hunter.” As described in the accompanying excerpt from the Arabic-language military news site and chat forum *defense-arabic.com*, the system uses lasers to target low-altitude UAVs of the type used by the Houthi-controlled military in Yemen. The report notes that China has now succeeded in penetrating the Saudi air defense market, something that Russian companies have unsuccessfully tried to do since 2007. Russian air defense offerings at WDS 2022 included the Tor-M2KM, a self-contained module version of the Tor short-range air defense platform. In a further sign that Chinese companies are making inroads where their Russian counterparts have failed, the other accompanying excerpt from *defense-arabic.com* highlights Saudi interest in obtaining the Chinese HQ-17AE system, which is based on the Russian Tor platform.



Автономный боевой модуль 9А331МК-1 3РК
9К331МКМ Top-M2KM (9А331МК-1 Tor-M2KM).
Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2021-Static-part-1/i-4ZccFz9/A>, Attribution: CC 4.0

“...With its technological development, China has been able to surpass Russia, which has unsuccessfully tried to market its equipment to Saudi Arabia since 2007...”

Source:

(Saudi Arabia signs contract to acquire Chinese air defense systems),” *defense-arabic.com* (Arabic-language military news site and chat forum), 10 March 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/yc77ktna>

The Saudi version of the Silent Hunter system is different from other versions offered by Poly Technologies. The kingdom has been using Chinese weapons for a long time, so the purchase itself is not novel. What is novel is to include them in one of the Kingdom’s most sensitive sectors, which is air defense. With its technological development, China has been able to surpass Russia, which has unsuccessfully tried to market its equipment to Saudi Arabia since 2007. Silent Hunter is an anti-drone laser weapon developed in China by Poly Technologies. It is an improved version of the 30 kW low-altitude defensive laser system, and is available in both fixed and mobile versions.

Source:

(Saudi Arabia seeks to obtain Chinese HQ-17AE air defense system),” *defense-arabic.com* (Arabic-language military news site and chat forum), 16 January 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/mrxrec6c>

After acquiring the Chinese 3D TWA radar system, the Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces are seeking to acquire HQ-17AE air defense systems, according to press sources. China had announced that the HQ-17AE air defense missile system, dubbed the “Low-Altitude Aircraft Hunter,” is available for export.