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China winning its spurs in international arms trade

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Ismet Yilmaz, Turkey's Minister of National Defense, announced on September 26th that Turkey had chosen the HQ-9 air defense missile system of China as its next generation long-range air defense system.

According to foreign media, although objections from the U.S. and NATO may prevent the transaction from going through, it is undoubtedly a breakthrough for China, which is set upon becoming a supplier of advanced weapons systems. Military expert Li Li told the media in an interview that China would win its spurs in the world arms trade market.

Every year the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute produces a ranking list for the value of military sales of all the arms-producing countries in the world. The list has always been monopolized by the U.S., Europe, and Russia. The top five arms sellers in the ranking list are always the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and Germany, whose military sales amount to 90 percent of the world total.

These countries are suddenly finding that a "dark horse" has emerged to compete for mid/high altitude air defense systems rather than low-end technology. Air defense systems are very much at the high-end of the military product range. The U.S. and Russia attach much importance to military sales. Total military sales for the U.S. in 2012 amounted to USD 69 billion, 60 to 70 percent of the world total. Russian sales amounted to USD 17 billion, which was about 20 percent. Sales to the tune of billions are rare for other countries. If China can win this Turkish contract, it will equate to 20 percent of Russia's total sales for 2012, and will cause a stir in the worldwide arms trade.

According to Li Li, even if this transaction fails, China has already won its spurs, since the order was won in a formal bidding process. In addition, Turkey has also announced that China's technology surpassed its competitors in every aspect, including technology, price, and the key factor of accompanying technological cooperation. This is invaluable promotional material which strongly demonstrates that the defense industry of China has found its position among the great powers in the world.