

Serdyukov to Kick Off U.S. Trip

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Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov will visit the United States this week to discuss issues such as anti-missile defense, disarmament and global stability with Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Serdyukov will meet with Gates in Washington, visit the U.S. Naval Academy and tour an infantry base from Tuesday to Thursday, the minister's spokeswoman, Irina Kovalchuk, said in an e-mailed statement.

The talks with Gates are part of the "continuing consultations on disarmament programs, anti-missile defense, military cooperation and common responsibility for preserving strategic stability," Sergei Prikhodko, President Dmitry Medvedev's foreign policy aide, said in an interview.

Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama in April signed a treaty to cut their nuclear arsenals, saying the agreement marked a new era of cooperation between the two countries. The two presidents met again on June 24 in Washington.

This visit is "a step to develop agreements on cooperation between the two countries that

President Medvedev achieved during the Russian-American summit in June,” Kovalchuk said.

Serdyukov, who became defense minister in 2007, is overseeing an overhaul of the military initiated after Russia’s five-day war with Georgia in 2008.

He plans to change the command structure, cut personnel by

23 percent to 1 million, and increase arms imports to boost competition for Russian producers.

The main goal is to create a “mobile, compact and well-equipped army,” he says.

The U.S. Navy has announced plans to buy 21 Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters, made by Russia’s state-owned Kazan Helicopters. Hartford, Connecticut-based United Technologies Corp.’s Sikorsky unit, maker of Black Hawk helicopters, filed a protest, saying U.S. manufacturers weren’t allowed to compete for the contract.

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