

Air Force Head Booted

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Chinese missile destroyer DDG-112 Harbin firing a shell during war games with Russia in the Yellow Sea. Seven Russian ships joined forces with 16 Chinese ships and two submarines for six days of exercises that ended Friday. **Wu Dengfeng**

Air Force head Alexander Zelin was dismissed from his post Friday, according to a decree by President Dmitry Medvedev published on the Kremlin's website.

The brief announcement gave no indication as to the reason for Zelin's removal, although an unidentified source in the Air Force expressed surprise that Zelin had not been given the boot earlier.

"The firing of Zelin was so expected that it's even surprising that he remained in his post so long. The pilots didn't like him, and he completely delegated reforming the Air Force to Ostapenko [the commander in charge of the Space Forces]," the source said.

In January 2011, a source within the Russian military told Interfax that Zelin "will be discharged to the reserves because he has served out his time in the military."

Again, in the beginning of October 2011, experts believed that Zelin would be removed

from his post, the Lenta.ru online news site reported.

The last set of rumors came after the Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper reported the pending cessation of the Air Force's activities as an independent entity from the military.

Zelin has held the position for almost five years. He will turn 59 in May, just one year short of the armed forces retirement age of 60.

Media reports speculated that he may now head one of the holding companies within the military-industrial complex, an unidentified source told Interfax.

As part of a broader reshuffle, Medvedev simultaneously transferred three other military officials to higher posts.

Valery Gerasimov was placed in command of the Central Military District from his previous post as deputy chief of the General Staff of the armed forces. Central Military District commander Vladimir Chirkin took over as chief of the Ground Forces, while the previous Ground Forces head, Alexander Postnikov-Streltsov, was appointed deputy chief of the general staff of the armed forces.

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