

Medvedev Completes Military Shake-Up

May 09, 2012



Navy soldiers sing during a parade on Red Square **Denis Grishkin**

On his last full day as president, Dmitry Medvedev dismissed the head of the accident-prone Navy and named a new Air Force chief, completing a shake-up of three branches of the armed forces within two weeks.

Medvedev replaced Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky with a vice admiral, Viktor Chirkov in a decree announced by the Kremlin on Sunday.

Vysotsky's nearly five-year stint as Navy commander included a fire aboard an atomic-powered submarine in December and a deadly accident on another submarine in 2008.

Authorities initially said all nuclear arms aboard the Yekaterinburg had been unloaded long before a fire broke out aboard the docked vessel on Dec. 29, but a senior official later suggested it might still have been carrying the weapons.

The official spoke after Vlast magazine quoted Navy sources as saying the submarine was carrying 16 intercontinental ballistic missiles, each armed with four nuclear warheads, during the fire set off by welding sparks.

"After something like that, the head of the Navy in any functioning state would have been sacked," said Ruslan Pukhov, director of Moscow-based defense think tank CAST.

He said the decision was probably made by Vladimir Putin, who became commander-in-chief of the armed forces when he was sworn in as president Monday.

In another decree, Medvedev named General Viktor Bondarev to replace former Air Force chief Alexander Zelin, who had grumbled about military restructuring and was dismissed on April 27. He also named Zelin as an aide to Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov.

Medvedev also dismissed the commander of the army in late April but appointed him to a high-level post as deputy head of the military general staff.

Medvedev's main aim of the last minute announcement may have been to show "that he must be taken seriously" after stepping aside to become prime minister, said independent military analyst Alexander Golts.

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