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No Sun for Putin's Victory Parade

By Howard Amos

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Topol-M strategic ballistic missile carriers rolling through Red Square at a Victory Day parade on Wednesday. **Ivan Sekretarev**

The usual sunny weather was absent and fewer soldiers than last year took part Wednesday in the annual Victory Day parade on Red Square, where President Vladimir Putin spoke about Russia's role in the world.

To ensure a fine day, military aircraft traditionally seed the clouds in advance of the event with silver and liquid nitrogen, but they apparently failed in their task despite early morning promises to clear the leaden skies above Moscow.

About 14,000 servicemen from all branches of the armed forces participated in the meticulously rehearsed parade, a fall from a record 20,000 in 2011.

In his speech to the assembled audience of soldiers, veterans and visiting dignitaries, President Vladimir Putin warned against violations of national sovereignty and spoke of Russia's role on the international stage.

"A strict observation of international norms, a respect for state sovereignty and the independent choice of the people of each nation is one of the absolute guarantees that the tragedy of the last war never repeats itself," Putin said.

"Russia will, therefore, act politically to strengthen security in the world," he said.

Putin stood alongside Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov as goose-stepping soldiers and a 1.5-kilometer train of military vehicles paraded past. Putin and Medvedev were criticized last year for remaining seated during the parade.

This may be Serdyukov's last parade. He is widely expected to be removed from his post in the upcoming Cabinet reshuffle.

The military equipment on show included T-90 tanks, Tigr and Rys armored vehicles, anti-aircraft rockets, artillery pieces and Iskander-M and Topol-M intercontinental ballistic missile launchers. All the machines were fitted with special tracks to minimize damage to Moscow's roads and the stones of Red Square.

Helicopters carrying huge flags took part in a flypast at the end of the ceremony, but, following a precedent set in 2011, there were no jets.

Parades and demonstrations to mark 67 years since the end of World War II also took place in other major cities across Russia.

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