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Military Research Agency Chief Appointed

By Anatoly Medetsky

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The agency that will do breakthrough research for the defense industry is out of the starting gate with the appointment of retired Lieutenant General Andrei Grigoryev as its chief.

The man now at the head of the Foundation for Advanced Research, Grigoryev, has been described as a ball of fire and a complete unknown. President Vladimir Putin appointed him last week.

"It was the most difficult and comprehensive task to find a suitable person who holds versatile technical knowledge," said Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who is in charge of the defense industry. "On the other hand, he must be ... a fireball who has a sense for the newest, the most interesting, the things that have to be taken on and done."

Grigoryev has "some success to his name in the matter of creating weapons prototypes," Rogozin said last week.

Rogozin last year pushed the idea of creating the foundation, which was nicknamed "the Russian DARPA," a reference to the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

Alexander Golts, a prominent reporter on defense-related issues and a Moscow Times columnist, said Monday that he had heard nothing noteworthy about Grigoryev.

The Foundation for Advanced Research aims to identify, organize and finance research that could lead to the creation of high-tech defense technology. It could hand over some of the new technology for civilian use as well.

Golts painted a gloomy outlook for the endeavor. Russia lacks a community of experts that could help identify promising ideas, he said.

Dual-use technology is unlikely to make its way to the civilian sector because defense research is usually shrouded in secrecy, Golts added. Also, most of the country's plants use equipment that's way too outdated to produce any high-tech novelties, he said.

Rogozin said the foundation will focus on setting up task forces, which will take three to five years seek to research the feasibility of cutting-edge ideas. It will look to universities to staff these task forces, he said.

For the time being, the agency will search for an office and additional staff, having a budget of 150 million rubles for this year.

Rogozin said the budget should grow to at least 3 billion rubles ($100 million) a year as research picks up.

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