

The Last Laugh Is on Rogozin

By [Alexander Golts](#)

May 19, 2014



Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin posted a message on Twitter not long ago in which he said he would trade his high-ranking post for a chance to serve in the trenches near Slovyansk. If I were President Vladimir Putin, I would grant his wish in a heartbeat.

Putin was compelled to hold three closed-door meetings on the subject in the past week alone. The extent to which Putin has become involved and the lack of any real achievements in Rogozin's areas of responsibility — the defense and space sectors — indicate that Rogozin is performing far below par. But Putin should fire Rogozin not because he is unfit for the job, but because he has jinxed Russia's military-industrial complex.

Amid all of Rogozin's jabs at the U.S., he received a sharp jab of his own on Friday: Russia's Proton rocket crashed on Friday — the second time that has happened on his

watch.

Rogozin, who is on the European Union's list of sanctioned individuals, has repeatedly threatened neighboring states with Russia's nuclear arsenal in recent weeks. When Ukraine and Romania had denied his airplane the right to fly over their territories earlier this month, Rogozin threatened that next time he would visit the region in a Tu-160 strategic bomber, which carries nuclear weapons, essentially threatening a nuclear attack. He next warned that he would refuse U.S. astronauts access to the International Space Station, suggesting they try using a giant trampoline instead.

But amid all of these jabs, he received a sharp jab of his own: A Proton rocket crashed on Friday — the second time that has happened on his watch. The Proton was created in the early 1960s and flew successfully hundreds of times — that is, until Rogozin took charge of Russia's defense and space sectors.

As a result of Rogozin's serious problems, his seemingly bold threats look absurd. At the same time, however, it has been common over the past few years for officials and opinion-makers close to the Kremlin to try to frighten the world with threats of starting a nuclear war. For example, a correspondent for state-controlled television reporting from a rehearsal of the Victory Day military parade in Moscow pointed out that the Topol-M missile launched from Russia could easily reach Washington.

In addition, pro-Kremlin television anchor Dmitry Kiselyov said last month on his weekly television show that the Perimeter system, which was created during the Soviet era to automatically launch a nuclear counter-attack after a U.S. first strike, could turn the U.S. into radioactive dust. Even during the Soviet era, this kind of flippancy regarding such a serious subject as nuclear war was prohibited. That is why they were deeply shocked, for example, when former U.S. President Ronald Reagan joked during a microphone check that "we begin bombing [Russia] in five minutes."

Nuclear jokesters Rogozin and Kiselyov were actually following the example set by their leaders. No sooner had the events in Ukraine sown confusion among Russia's dwindling number of allies — for example, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev refusing to attend a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization — than Putin invited the few leaders who did come to Moscow to observe some "training maneuvers" of Russia's Armed Forces.

But the exercises resembled a rehearsal for the next world war. According to the wargame scenario, the enemy launched a massive nuclear strike against Russia, prompting a launch-on-warning strike by Moscow while the incoming missiles are still airborne. At the moment Russia's missile defense system intercepted incoming ballistic missiles, Moscow sets in motion three simultaneous nuclear launches — Topol missiles from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in the Arkhangelsk region, missiles from submarines in the Barents and Okhotsk seas and six cruise missiles targeting enemy command centers from a Tu-95 strategic bomber.

After such a massive attack, the entire planet would become a nuclear wasteland. But Kiselyov and Rogozin alone are convinced that they could obliterate the U.S., while Russia would presumably remain the Garden of Eden.

In his meeting with fellow Collective Security Treaty Organization presidents, Putin drew a curious conclusion. "You all had the opportunity to witness the high level of readiness and action cohesion of the country's strategic offensive and defensive forces," he told them. "I would like to stress that our Army is a reliable guarantor of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and plays a significant role in maintaining global and regional security.

"There are still many threats and challenges in the world today. As you may know, in Europe militant nationalism is raising its head here and there. ... The situation in our neighboring brotherly Ukraine is an example of the disaster and loss such an irresponsible policy can bring about. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost the possibility of living in peace and prosperity," Putin said.

That suggests that the Kremlin might want to counter the threat posed by "militant nationalism" with nuclear missiles. And simulations of a nuclear counter-attack, the Kremlin would want us to believe, are the best means for ensuring peace and prosperity.

Unable to clearly explain Russia's position on Ukraine or to convince the world that he is right, Putin's only response is: "Russia can destroy you all." Rogozin, by promising to return to Romania in a strategic bomber, is merely taking his cue from Putin.

It is too bad that the Proton rockets with their nasty habit of crashing tend to raise doubts about the reality of those threats. This is why Rogozin should be sent to the trenches of Slovyansk.

Alexander Golts is deputy editor of the online newspaper Yezhednevny Zhurnal.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/05/19/the-last-laugh-is-on-rogozin-a35566>