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Dear America, Russia Wants You to Know Its Bombs Are Bigger

The mother of all bombs goes head to head against the father.

By Matthew Bodner

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Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS

Since Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, its media has enjoyed an unchallenged monopoly in fawning over new, untested weapons systems.

That all changed yesterday when President Donald Trump ordered the first-ever battlefield use of America's largest non-nuclear bomb — the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), also known as the "mother of all bombs."

Russia didn't appreciate the U.S. press encroaching on its territory and was quick to point out that Russia has an even bigger bomb. This bomb, the Russian edition of Popular Mechanics wrote in 2013, is so big that it deserves the moniker: "father of all bombs" (FOAB).

Who said an arms race had to be original?

On its Russian-language Twitter account, RT claimed that "the mother of all bombs doesn't scare Russians, we have a bigger one," and "they [the U.S.] will be more scared of our 'father.'"

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Measuring Bomb Sizes

Both the Russian and American weapons are the latest products of the on-and-off U.S.-Russia arms race. Fifty years ago, the sides played the game with nuclear bombs. Russia won that one with the so-called Tsar Bomba, which was tested just once.

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In 2003, the United States tested the MOAB. It is a huge weapon and doesn't fit into the bays of any American aircraft typically used for bombing. Weighing over 22,000 lbs (10 tons) and measuring some 10 meters in length, the MOAB has to be dropped out the back of a large transport plane. Its primary purpose is to clear large surface areas.

This is not how Trump used the bomb. He used it to try to destroy tunnels, which is one practical use for the weapon, which creates a pressure effect deep within a tunnel network that kills everyone inside.

Russia's FOAB, like the American MOAB, is a type of thermobaric weapon — a weapon that sets the air on fire and packs a huge explosive punch. The MOAB's power is said to be equal to about 11 tons of TNT. Russia's FOAB is reportedly much bigger, clocking in at about the power of 44 tons of TNT.

Not only is Russia's bomb more powerful, the Russian press claimed, but it has a wider blast radius too. It is also newer (first tested in 2007) and lighter than its apparently weaker American counterpart. But unlike the MOAB, Russia's FOAB has never been used in combat, and no one really knows what it is capable of.

Related article: Why Russia Tore Up the Syria Airspace Safety Agreement

Turning on Trump

The Russian media reaction to Trump's dropping of the MOAB amounted to something more than weapons envy — it was indicative of a nation betrayed by Trump turning on the U.S. president.

Once enthusiastic Russian supporters of Trump, such as television host Vladimir Soloviev, now presented themselves as his staunchest critics. "The Americans dropped the mother of

all bombs on Afghanistan," Soloviev wrote on Twitter. "It was crazy expensive. Eliminated 36 terrorists, took out tunnels. And [the U.S.] are so full of themselves."

One pro-Kremlin blogger and member of the Antimaidan nationalist movement, Ilias Merkuri, wrote: "The father of all idiots dropped the mother of all bombs." The Antimaidan Twitter account was softer, quoting Viktor Litovkin as saying that the mother of all bombs was just a stunt by Trump to prove that "the U.S. is the coolest country."

The Russian Defense Ministry's media outlet, Zvezda, was one step ahead of the game by running a political cartoon criticizing Trump's posturing on North Korea. The U.S. president has deployed a U.S. aircraft carrier battlegroup to the Korean Peninsula. The cartoon depicted Trump "surprising" Kim Jung Un with an axe, but falling into a trap under a North Korean brick.

Think about it.

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> Трамп готовит КНДР «сюрприз» с топором, но его ждет кирпич
>
> Подробности: https://t.co/S6pMuiIPFA pic.twitter.com/BegYMM4T9u
>
> — Телеканал ЗВЕЗДА (@zvezdanews) 14 апреля 2017 г.

Lazy Propagandists

As the MOAB saga drives headlines, there is evidence that the Russian media was sleeping on the job. Many of the stories about the FOAB had to actually cite U.S. publication The National Interest in asserting their mega-bomb dominance. "The U.S. media reminds Washington about the father of all bombs," several outlets reported, all linking to The National Interest.

It is worth pointing out that it is not the first time the National Interest has been a crutch for Russian propaganda outlets. Indeed, the U.S. publication seems to run a story every week about some Russian superweapon that America must fear. The latest came just four days ago, and claimed a developmental weapons system, the S-500, will kill all U.S. fighter jets.

Almost all of these stories get regurgitated in the Russian press, and presented to the Russian people as conclusive evidence that Russia is the great military power the Kremlin claims to be.

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> США сбросили на позиции ИГ самую большую неядерную бомбу в мире – "мать всех бомб"https://t.co/ASkX8JS11b pic.twitter.com/I7wZ0BPYBJ

— Лентач (@oldLentach) April 13, 2017

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