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## Ex-U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff: "Zero Chance" of War Between U.S. and Russia

Charles Ganske



Russian army soldiers in winter gear

Courtesy of **Thomas P.M. Barnett's** weblog and *Wired* magazine, comes an interesting story about high level U.S. defense strategy. According to Gen. **Michael Moseley**, who was recently dismissed from his position as U.S. Secretary of the Air Force, "there is almost zero chance we will fight a nation state" in the 21st century. *Wired* implied that Moseley was referring to Russia and China in his remarks. Actually, Moseley didn't mention Russia or any other country by name in the interview with the *Air Force Times* that *Wired* cites. U.S. Defense Secretary **Robert Gates** fired Moseley after a series of embarrassing incidents for the service, including the shipment of advanced weapons parts to Taiwan and the inadvertent placement of a nuclear weapon on a B-52 bomber during a routine transcontinental training mission.

While senior American flag officers acknowledge the increasing unlikelihood of great power war in the 21st century, a handful of U.S. think tank pundits continue to argue seriously that Russia is rearming for a possible confrontation with the West. For example, bestselling author and *Wall Street Journal* contributor **Mark Helprin** recently wrote in the *Clemont Review of Books*:

... as Western Europe dismantles its militaries, Russia builds, encouraged as much by European pacifism as by the Russian view of America's struggle in Iraq as a parallel to the Soviets' fatal involvement in Afghanistan. Like Germany between the wars, Russia is now eager and determined to reconstitute its forces, and with its new-found oil wealth, it is doing so.



# RUSSIA BLOG

### ABOUT RUSSIA BLOG

Russia Blog presents up-to-date news, facts and commentary on the state of events in Russia and the former Soviet Union. The blog is managed by **Yuri Mamchur**, Director of **Discovery Institute's Real Russia Project** and a composer in his spare time. The blog is edited by **Charles Ganske**.

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For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia paraded tanks through Red Square for this year's Victory Day celebrations.

Old Russian bombers are flying again and tanks are parading through Red Square on Victory Day. But is this symbolic sabre rattling for mass consumption or a real sign that Russia is determined to rearm? An article recently published in Germany by *Der Spiegel* magazine (in spite of its scary title) "**Russian Bear Roars: Why is Moscow Risking a New Cold War?**" reveals the reality of Russia's decrepit armed forces.

Moscow's Akademiya Restaurant is on a small side street behind Tver Boulevard, next to a newly built synagogue. It is one of the chic establishments frequented by Russia's new elite. Stanislav Belkovsky, a thick-set man with a three-day growth, glasses and a receding forehead, who likes to have his breakfast here, is the head of the private Moscow Institute for National Strategy.

The notion that Russia is restoring its military might to a level close to that of the Soviet era has "nothing to do with reality," says Belkovsky. "It's part of the propaganda with which the Kremlin seeks to pull the wool over the public's eyes." According to an almost 70-page dossier titled "The Crisis and Decline of the Russian Army" published by his institute, the military leadership should in fact resign en masse. The report suggests that the military's figures and announcements are sheer fantasy.

#### 'Pulling the Wool over the Public's Eyes'

According to the dossier, the army has taken delivery on only 90 outdated tanks in the last seven years, all from the country's only remaining tank factory, in the Ural Mountains region. Experts ridicule the much-touted T-95, which has been talked about for 15 years, as a "fiction." During former President Vladimir Putin's term in office, the Russian Air Force received only two new Su-34 fighter-bombers, and the Su-35 fighter jet, unveiled last year as a new model, is in fact a close cousin of an aircraft that was already airborne during former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's first year in office, 1985. According to the Belkovsky report, Russian designers are "no less than 20 years behind their U.S. counterparts in the development of their fifth-generation fighter jets." Only 50 percent of all aircraft and helicopters nationwide are in operation, and the Russian military will experience a shortfall of 4,500 aircraft next year when outdated equipment is removed from service.

The situation is no less dramatic when it comes to nuclear weapons. Under Putin, 405 missiles and 2,498 nuclear warheads were decommissioned, but only 27 new missiles were produced -- three times less than under the Yeltsin regime, which was disparaged for being too soft on America. And the shelf life of 80 percent of Russia's mobile ICBMs expired long ago.

Belkovsky and his institute see the new "Topol-M" missile as a weapon "with a deterrent value of zero" -- because the Americans know where the missiles are stationed and are capable of striking the 100-ton projectile, along with its transporter, "with an accuracy of one centimeter" even as it is being driven out of its bunker. And the "Cudgel," the new "Bulava" ICBM, with which the military leadership plans to upgrade its nuclear fleet? Almost every test run so far has proven to be a failure. The SS-X-29, a top-secret weapon that features multiple warheads and, according to the Russians, is "invisible" because it can supposedly elude all missile defense systems, appears to have performed equally poorly to date. Only 12 vessels in the naval fleet, the core of Russia's nuclear shield, are currently equipped with ballistic missiles.

"In the 1990s, we managed to more or less maintain the strategic potential we inherited from the Soviet Union at the same level," says Belkovsky, smiling maliciously, "but since 2000, its reduction has progressed with the force of a landslide. We will lose our ability to contain our enemies at the nuclear level." Unless something changes under the new president, says Belkovsky, even Russia's conventional armed forces "will decline to the level of a medium-sized European nation in eight to 10 years, and we will not be able to keep up with countries like Turkey or Japan."

#### Better Big than Effective

Moscow political insiders consider Belkovsky's assumptions all too provocative, while some believe that he is hedging his bets and is in bed with Western intelligence agencies. But many other Russian military experts reach similar conclusions.

It is no coincidence that former President Putin was constantly pointing out that the US's military expenditures are 25 times greater than Russia's, says Alexei Arbatov, director of the Moscow Center for International Security. This, according to Arbatov, is why the

the Russian Center for International Security. This, according to Arbatov, is why the Americans have 1.5 million men under arms and "a military of a quality that we must strive to emulate. However, we are only capable of funding a military with no more than 600,000 troops." According to Arbatov, the Russian military bureaucracy stands in the way of transforming the military into a smaller but more effective force. The military leadership's motto, says Arbatov, can be summed up this way: better to be big than effective.

The fact that Putin, throughout his eight years in office, never tired of celebrating the resurgence of the Russian army improved the Kremlin's standing among Russians (and brought the corrupt Russian weapons industry new orders). But Putin's propaganda backfired abroad, because it benefited Russia's rival, the United States.

Citing Moscow's efforts to modernize, President George W. Bush has asked the U.S. Congress to approve \$69.6 billion (€44.5 billion) in military spending for the next fiscal year. But the problem with his reasoning is that "the Russian threat" is nothing but a cheap excuse.

For years, the US Navy has been modernizing the Trident II ICBMs stationed on its submarines. The US military also plans to replace all 5,045 of its still-active nuclear warheads by 2012 – an unbelievably costly program. It would be the first of its kind in 20 years, and critics question the need for such a program. And Washington's use of a missile to bring down a supposedly out-of-control spy satellite in February fueled suspicions, not just in Moscow, that the Americans have never truly abandoned their "Star Wars" program.

When a country sees itself as the sole remaining superpower, it expects to be able to act as it pleases. The United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which limited the installation of missile defense systems. The START-1 Treaty, which reduces the number of long-range nuclear weapons, expires next year, and another Russian-American treaty to reduce strategic offensive potential will expire in 2012. Moscow's proposal to replace START-1 with a new treaty has been met with no response from Washington so far. By the time these treaties have all expired, there will no longer be any means of monitoring the enemy's military activities, including joint inspections, which have helped reduce mutual distrust in the past.

But the Russians are stuck in a vicious circle. To force Washington to agree to new disarmament programs, the Russians must first convince the Americans to take them seriously. The problem is that Washington is no longer impressed by Moscow's deterrent potential. By the end of 2012, both powers will have between 1,700 and 2,200 nuclear warheads left in their arsenals. But the Russians know that by then no more than 1,000 of their warheads will be serviceable anymore.

#### The Russians Feel Duped

Naturally, a power that sees itself as increasingly vulnerable will interpret its rival's advances as a provocation. America's plans to install missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, both countries near Russia's western border, were met with consternation in Moscow, as were the NATO alliance's advances in Russia's direction. All across Europe, from the Black Sea to the Baltic, Moscow is now strategically cut off and marginalized.

Military experts in Moscow know full well that American missiles in Poland will be incapable of intercepting Russian ICBMs, in terms of both range and trajectory. The system presents "no direct threat whatsoever," says Arbatov, adding that claims to the contrary by Russian military leaders are blatant propaganda. But they are more than that. The Kremlin has been able to use the tiff over the US missile shield as welcome leverage to bolster its position in future arms control negotiations.

But why then is it withdrawing from an agreement like the CFE Treaty, which is designed to create more confidence in Europe, especially since Moscow is already "chronically incapable" of even exhausting the quotas for tanks and artillery "to which it is entitled under this treaty," as the Moscow Institute for National Strategy writes?

Because the Russians feel duped. And because NATO refuses to ratify the "modified" CFE Treaty because Moscow has not yet emptied a storage facility of obsolete weapons in the small Republic of Moldova. Almost 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, weapons in the new NATO member states are still counted toward the upper limits the CFE Treaty imposed on the now outdated "Eastern group of countries." Meanwhile, the Western alliance possesses a real advantage in terms of conventional armed forces.

The Russians call the situation "absurd," and even Western political scientists agree that it is time for NATO to change its position. Instead of seeking a negotiated solution, instead of reassuring the Kremlin that it is not out to contain or discriminate against Russia, critics say NATO has maneuvered itself into a corner. Moscow has not allowed any foreign military inspectors into the country since last December, and it has stopped notifying the

rest of Europe about troop movements and military exercises.

#### 'Our Leadership Has Ignored the Chinese Threat'

Spring came very late this year to Chebarkul, a small city on the southern edge of the Ural Mountains. In May, when the ice had barely thawed in the area's many lakes, local farmers, following old custom, set fire to the grass in and along the margins of their fields. Thick clouds of smoke soon settled over the gray birch forests, which had not even leafed out yet, traveling as far as the provincial capital Chelyabinsk, 80 kilometers (50 miles) away.

Andrei Chabola also had the fields burned, if only for the sake of his tank -- to ensure that he would have a clear field of vision for target practice and would not set the grass on fire with his ammunition.

Chabola is 37, a colonel and already the deputy commander of the 34th Russian Motorized Rifle Division. He is a Russian through and through, tall, with a heavy, slightly ambling gait and a strong nose in a red-cheeked face. He is standing in the crow's nest of the control tower facing a tank training ground, the Chebarkul barracks behind him. A number of T-72 tanks are in the process of attempting to cross ditches and bridges at 45 kilometers per hour (28 mph).

"Comrade Colonel, tank obstacle overcome, no incidents, oil temperature normal," reports one of the drivers, stuttering in excitement. "Splendid," the commander graciously replies. The 295th Cossack Guards Regiment is in training.

The men driving these tanks are no longer conscripts. The Russian army has already begun training professional soldiers in Chebarkul, part of a growing career military that already numbers 100,000 nationwide. This number is the result of a compromise between the army leadership and the Kremlin, which has been calling for more effective armed forces since the bitter lessons of the war in Chechnya.

No one at this base makes a secret of his conviction that the decision made at the top is a big mistake. "Contract soldiers are in it for the money, not the fatherland," a colonel mumbles. He prefers not to be identified by name. "Their only motivation is their lack of prospects. They come from the worst of families."

With two men from division headquarters in Yekaterinburg visiting the base, hardly anyone is willing to voice such criticism out loud. The military and the political establishment are already at odds. In Moscow, the general chief of staff was dismissed in early June because he considered the red-line policies of the civilian defense minister, a former furniture dealer, to be insane and dangerous. A tank training school has also been closed in Chelyabinsk, and the profession of officer "is worth nothing these days," says the colonel. But the Russian army's age-old problems still haven't been resolved. According to the colonel, the families of 122,000 officers have no fixed place of residence, and a lieutenant would "go to the dogs in Moscow" with the 12,000 rubles, or about €322 (\$500), he is paid.

But when the talk turns to the West and greasy Ukrainian vodka begins flowing in the officers' mess, the men at the Chebarkul base express their opinions loudly and with one voice. "The Americans are building up their arsenals, they're surrounding us in Georgia and Ukraine," shouts Chabola, the deputy division commander. "They want to destroy us." And doesn't it sound "like a declaration of war," another officer asks, when Madeleine Albright, the former US secretary of state, says publicly that the fact that Siberia, with its immense natural resources, belongs exclusively to Russia is one of the world's greatest injustices?

Although Albright repudiated the supposed quote long ago, the deeply humiliated Russian soul is unlikely to acknowledge her denials. But even the Russians know that the world, 20 years after the end of the Cold War, has become a different place. They know that the number of nuclear warheads a country possesses is no longer the deciding factor, that a surprise attack by NATO or a war between countries in Europe has become highly unlikely and that, for these reasons, simply counting tanks and howitzers hardly makes much sense anymore.

But what is the Russian military's mission, and for which potential conflicts must Russia be prepared? Even Colonel Chabola no longer believes that NATO is still the country's potential main adversary. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Chabola served for two years in the eastern German town of Neustrelitz.

#### Moscow 'Obsessed with Its Arch-Rival'

But then he was transferred to Blagoveshchensk, a city in the Amur region in the Russian Far East, directly on the Chinese border. "That's where more and more Chinese are buying their way into our territory," he says. "Siberia is big, and there are very few people who still live there today." To be exact, the population density on the Russian side of the

and still live there today. To be exact, the population density on the Russian side of the border is two inhabitants per square kilometer, compared with 103 in the neighboring Chinese provinces.

**The Chinese also came to Chabarkul last year**, to take part in a maneuver called "Peace Mission 2007". In all, 1,400 soldiers and officers in the People's Army, as well as 300 airmen, had traveled 10,000 kilometers (6,211 miles) to this small Russian city in the Ural Mountains to spend nine days, together with Chabola's division, simulating the taking of a city occupied by "terrorists." The exercise was sponsored by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was founded in 1996 to limit the American influence in Asia.

"The Chinese brought along their own combat technology, set up their own, separate tent city and videotaped everything, from every Russian tank to the soup pots in our canteen," says the colonel. "But whenever one of our men wanted to take a picture of them, their security people would step in right away."

This doesn't exactly sound like the friendship between the Soviet and Chinese people that both sides have insisted on in the past. Since border clashes erupted between China and the Soviet Union on the Ussuri River in 1969, Russian suspicions of Beijing have run deep. Chabola's officers are open about who they think Russia should truly fear: "the Chinese." One of the officers says that he read somewhere that Beijing has agreed not to pursue its territorial claims against Russia until 2015, "but what happens after that?"

These fears, as plainly as they are expressed by soldiers at this base, are merely worded somewhat more politely in the analyses of Moscow's political scientists. They write that the Kremlin and the military leadership still see the world through the prism of relations with the United States, and that Moscow is obsessed with a pathological desire for equality with its arch-rival and has no realistic understanding of future military dangers. According to the experts at the Institute for National Strategy, "the assumption that NATO is our main potential adversary seems rather doubtful today."

Russia should keep its eye on Beijing, says Stanislav Belkovsky, as he sits in the Akademiya Restaurant and broodingly stirs his cappuccino. According to Belkovsky, both China's propaganda and its military developments indicate that the country will expand primarily in the direction of Russia.

"What amazes us," says Belkovsky, the strategist who is so unpopular at home, "is that our leadership has simply ignored the Chinese threat until now."

*Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan*

Posted by Charles Ganske on June 28, 2008 8:00 AM | [Permalink](#)

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I can't believe a General could say something like that. I see why he was dismissed, we are headed for war against Russia soon. The war with Iran and Syria will be any day now. The war is found in Isaiah 17:1-4. This war will take place before September 29, 2008.

Posted by melvin johns | June 29, 2008 6:45 PM

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