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Defense Minister Pledges Support for Church

By The Moscow Times

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Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Friday pledged his support for the Russian Orthodox Church, promising to re-establish the close ties that bound religious and military officials before the October Revolution in 1917.

"We will continue to support the Russian Orthodox Church with renewed energy and, most importantly, restore those traditions that existed under the Russian [pre-revolutionary] government," Shoigu said at a meeting with Patriarch Kirill, the country's top Orthodox Church official, RIA-Novosti reported.

Shoigu, who was installed as defense minister in early November after his predecessor was ousted amid a corruption scandal, worked closely with the church in his capacity as emergency situations minister, a post he held for almost two decades.

Russian authorities are often accused of an overly cosy relationship with church officials.

In February, after Patriarch Kirill publicly likened President Vladimir Putin's rule to a "miracle of God," punk band Pussy Riot staged a controversial performance in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral protesting perceived collusion between the Kremlin and the church.

At the meeting with Shoigu on Friday, the patriarch expressed hope that his appointment would lead to a strengthening of Russia's armed forces.

"Understanding the importance of the responsibility placed on your shoulders, we will pray for you. At every service, the church prays for the country's authorities and its army," Patriarch Kirill said.

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