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Russia's Head of Military Projects in Space to Be Replaced

By Matthew Bodner

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Oleg Ostapenko, head of the Federal Space Agency, or Roscosmos.

Another leadership change at Russia's Federal Space Agency, Roscosmos, is set to take place in September, when the aging head of the agency's military projects will be replaced with a younger, fresher face.

Since 2013, when Oleg Ostapenko took the reins of Roscosmos, the space agency and its supporting contractors in Russia's space industry have been subjected to an ongoing leadership reshuffle as part of a government-backed drive to reinvigorate the space sector — which has been bogged down by aging expertise and industrial decay since the fall of the Soviet Union more than two decades ago.

Roscosmos deputy head Anatoly Shilov, the man responsible for managing some of the agency's most sensitive projects — such as military space launches and the development of military and intelligence satellites — will leave the post he has held since 2009,

Kommersant reported Wednesday, citing senior space officials.

In 2011, then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin reprimanded Shilov after a series of problems plagued several military satellites, among them the crash of a classified Meridian communications satellite used by the Russian military to communicate with naval and air forces operating in the Arctic — the fifth spacecraft loss of that year.

Unidentified space officials told Kommersant that Shilov's contract will expire in September and will not be renewed. At 60 years old, he has reached the maximum age for civil servants. Though the age cap can be waived, the sources said that Roscosmos has opted to tap Mikhail Khailov as his replacement.

As Roscosmos' head of unmanned programs in recent years, Khailov is a natural fit to step into Shilov's shoes. A veteran of the Lavochkin Research and Production Association — one of the most important contractors in the Russian space industry, responsible for the development of many of its military satellites and deep-space scientific probes — he already has access to and experience with working on classified and sensitive projects.

Contractual age caps have been frequently used to introduce fresh faces into space agency and industry management positions since Ostapenko arrived at Roscosmos. Last summer, for example, Roscosmos deputy head Vitaly Davydov's contract was not renewed when he turned 60.

While Roscosmos restructures itself, the Russian space industry is being consolidated under a massive state corporation known as the United Space and Rocket Corporation. Following a series of spectacular Proton rocket launch failures and a slew of spacecraft mishaps, the Russian government late last year decided that consolidation under state control was the only way to save the struggling space industry.

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