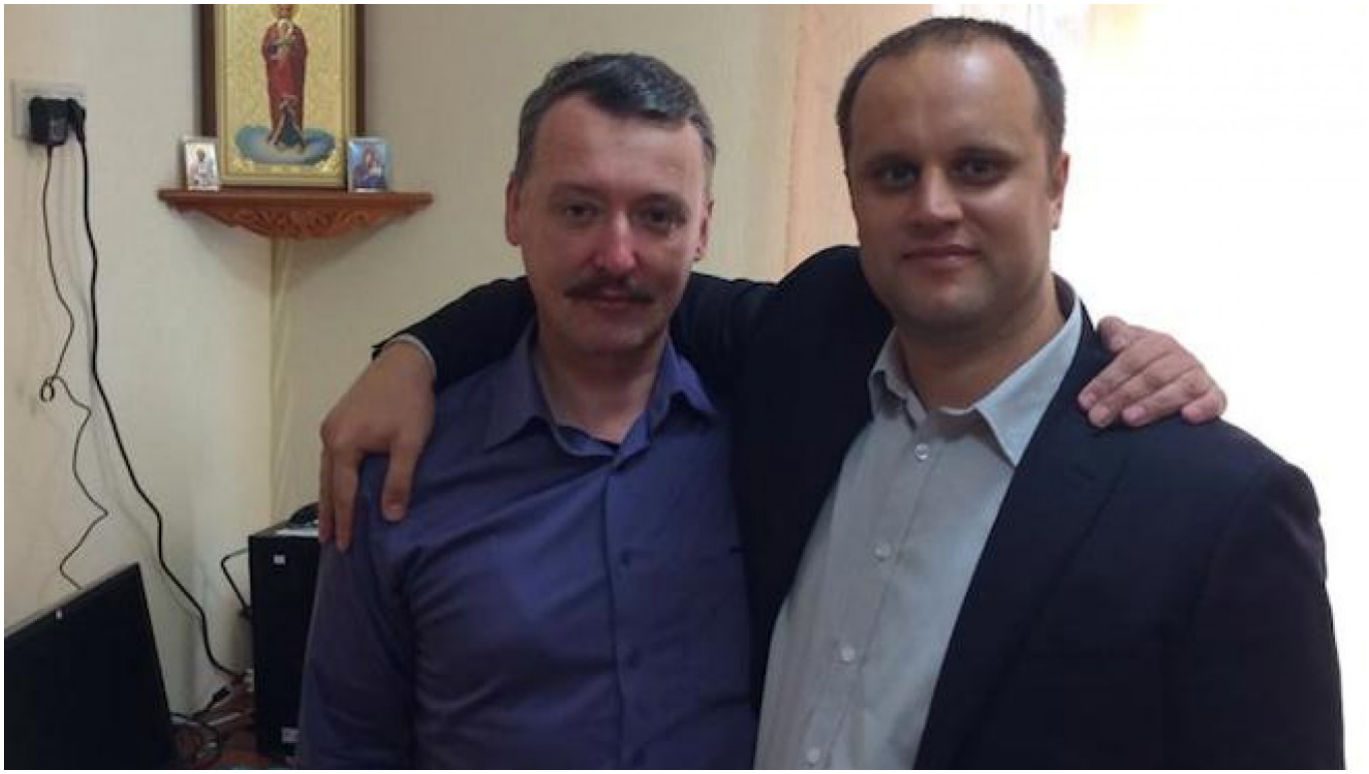
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Italian 'Fascist' Fights for Ukrainian Separatists — Rebel Ex-Leader

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Gubarev, right, pictured here with fellow former rebel commander Igor Strelkov, confirmed an Italian fascist was fighting with the pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine.

Though the Ukrainian separatists bill themselves as "anti-fascists," they accepted a self-proclaimed fascist from Italy into their army, a retired rebel leader confirmed Thursday.

"He says, 'they're the wrong American kind of fascists, and I'm the right, anti-American kind," Pavel Gubarev, a former self-proclaimed "people's governor" of the Donbass territory in eastern Ukraine, cited the unnamed Italian as saying, Slon.ru reported.

The man represents a "normal, non-fringe ... fascist party," said Gubarev, without elaborating.

"In Europe ... fascism has no negative connotations, only Nazism does," Gubarev, who was reportedly a member of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity movement, went on to claim.

The pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine have built their cause for a five-month war

around anti-fascist slogans and rhetoric.

The insurgents have called the government in Kiev a "fascist junta" and even paraded Ukrainian army captives in the streets of the city of Donetsk in August in a march imitating the 1944 parade of captured Wehrmacht soldiers across Moscow, complete with roadsweepers following the columns to "cleanse" the streets.

A number of volunteer units on the Ukrainian government side are composed of local ultranationalists joined by a handful of European neo-Nazis, including from Italy.

The rebels, meanwhile, comprise many Russian traditionalists dreaming of restoring Russia to a superpower, on either Soviet or pre-revolutionary templates.

Gubarev, 31, was a rare Ukrainian national in the rebel leadership.

He unexpectedly stepped down in September along with many other rebel leaders, a move many analysts attributed to pressure from Moscow, which allegedly wanted control of the insurgency as it increased its supply of troops and military equipment to them, a charge that Russian officials have repeatedly denied.

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