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Russian Museum Closes Amid Scandal Over U.S. and British WWII Photos

By Peter Spinella

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The Metenkov House Museum of Photography in Yekaterinburg

A major museum in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg has closed for an "undetermined period" amid a scandal over an exhibition of World War II photos co-organized by the U.S. and British consulates.

The Metenkov House Museum of Photography in Russia's fourth-largest city was scheduled on Friday to open an exhibition of 150 wartime images by British and American photographers as the countries mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

The exhibition, titled "Triumph and Tragedy: The Allies During World War II," was meant to "recount events that are little-known in Russia," the British Embassy in Moscow said earlier this month in a Facebook post.

But a day before the scheduled opening, the museum said it was shutting its doors for an

unknown period of time because of "technical reasons," according to a post on its page on the VKontakte social network.

A subsequent report by the regional government-controlled newspaper, Oblastnaya Gazeta, said the museum had been closed by the Federal Security Service, or FSB, a successor agency of the Soviet KGB.

On Friday the newspaper apologized for the report in an online statement, and said that the information about the FSB order had come from an unidentified source and was unconfirmed. The original article was unavailable on the newspaper's website on Sunday.

The regional branch of the FSB denied that it had anything to do with the museum's closure, the state news agency TASS reported Friday.

On Saturday, Oblastnaya Gazeta's culture editor, Yana Belotserkovskaya, wrote that the exhibition, which did not contain any photos of Soviet soldiers, was designed to fit into a political narrative formulated by the West that they had won the war without help from the Soviet Union.

"The exhibition fits very well, simply wonderfully, into the idea that many Western and American news outlets today are trying to impose: that the war was won without us," Belotserkovskaya wrote.

Museum director Raisa Zorina declined to comment about why the museum was closed when contacted by The Moscow Times on Sunday, saying only: "If you're an intelligent person, then you can understand why."

The museum's PR manager, Artyom Berkovich, said Sunday that he could not confirm or deny whether Russian authorities had forced the closure. He also said he didn't know when the museum would reopen.

Russia's relations with the West have deteriorated to their worst point since the Cold War over the ongoing crisis in eastern Ukraine.

Numerous Western leaders have snubbed Russia's invitation to a large-scale ceremony marking the end of World War II in Moscow on May 9, citing Russia's involvement in the Ukraine crisis as their reason for not going.

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