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Putin Gives GRU Boosted Role in Ukraine – Report

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin (C) attends a Victory Day military parade marking the 77th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, in Moscow's Red Square. **Mikhail Metzel/POOL/TASS**

President Vladimir Putin has given Russia's military intelligence agency (GRU) a more prominent role in Ukraine, Russian security analysts said as the U.S. assessed that Putin is "behind schedule" in the invasion of Ukraine.

GRU deputy head Vladimir Alexeyev, 61, has been placed in charge of intelligence operations in Ukraine, according to security experts Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan. Alexeyev was reportedly responsible for coordinating military campaigns in Syria and eastern Ukraine's Donbas region after being appointed to his current position in 2011.

"Alexeyev is a tough and self-assured general," Borogan and Soldatov said in a report published Monday, noting that he had previously served in Russia's special forces.

Special forces "are tough and loyal officers not shy in their methods, but by no means refined spies," Borogan and Soldatov said.

Lieutenant general Alexeyev's name appeared in a report last week on the pro-Kremlin Tsargrad television channel about senior officers in charge of Russia's war in Ukraine.

The alleged appointment follows a reported purge of about 150 officers of GRU's rival agency FSB last month and the apparent arrest of the head of its Fifth Service, a unit that was responsible for providing intelligence about the political situation in Ukraine and cultivating support for the Kremlin there.

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Borogan and Soldatov reported that Sergei Beseda, head of the FSB's Fifth Service, has recently returned to work.

They indicated, however, that Alexeyev's appointment signals Putin's distrust of the FSB in the Ukrainian campaign.

Alexeyev was sanctioned by the United States for cyber operations targeting the 2016 election and the European Union for the 2018 poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Britain.

Borogan and Soldatov's report came as the Pentagon assessed that Russian forces are "easily two weeks or even more behind" schedule in the Ukrainian campaign.

Putin "has not achieved any of the success that we believe he wanted to achieve, certainly not on a timeline," an unnamed senior U.S. defense official told reporters Tuesday.

"We would not assess that the Russians have made any appreciable or significant progress."

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