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Russia Says Staged Occupying Officials' Assassinations in Ukraine

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TASS

At least two Russian-installed officials who were said to have been assassinated in occupied Ukraine over the summer are in fact alive, authorities and state media said Monday.

Sergei Tomko and Vitally Gura from southern Ukraine's Kherson region, which Russian forces captured in early March, were reported to be among the 20 Moscow-installed officials killed since Russia invaded Ukraine.

But Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said it had staged Tomko and Gura's shooting deaths in July and August as part of a sting operation to detect and arrest Ukrainian intelligence agents.

Gura serves as the Moscow-installed deputy head of southern Ukraine's Kherson region, while Tomko is deputy police chief in the Kherson region city of Nova Kakhovka.

The FSB said "direct perpetrators and their accomplices" have been arrested and a Ukrainian

intelligence officer who oversaw the assassination attempts has been identified.

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Russia's state broadcaster Channel One published interviews with Gura and Tomko later Monday, where they said Russian security officers had approached them with audio recordings of their assassination plans and offered to stage their shooting deaths.

Gura and Tomko, who were provided state protection, told Channel One they both planned to return to occupied Kherson and resume their duties.

Ukraine has not publicly claimed responsibility for the series of assassinations of pro-Russian authorities in captured territories.

Russia faked Gura and Tomko's assassinations more than four years after Ukrainian special forces staged the shooting death of Russian investigative journalist Arkady Babchenko in Kyiv to uncover a genuine plot to kill him in 2018.

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