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Russian Spy Chief Alleges UN-Ukraine Plot to Loot Famed Kyiv Monastery

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The Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. **Falin (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

Russia's spy chief claimed Monday that Ukraine and the United Nations have agreed to remove holy relics from a revered Kyiv monastery to Europe to protect them from alleged Russian attacks.

Kyiv however denied that any relics would leave Ukrainian territory.

In his statement Monday, Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), said the alleged deal only strengthened Moscow's resolve to continue its military campaign in Ukraine.

"According to the SVR, the Kyiv authorities and representatives of [the UN's cultural cooperation body] UNESCO reached an agreement on the removal of Christian valuables, including holy relics, from the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra," Naryshkin said.

Ukraine this spring ordered to evict monks from the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, a golden-domed

11th-century UNESCO World Heritage Site, on suspicion of its remaining ties to the Russian Orthodox Church after the Ukrainian church broke with the Moscow Patriarchate over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Naryshkin claimed that funds have been allocated to transport the Lavra's relics to museums in Italy, France, Germany and the Vatican "under the pretext of 'saving them from Russian missile attacks'."

"There's no doubt that the return of the relics is not part of the West's plans," the Russian spy chief was quoted as saying.

Naryshkin highlighted a "profound spiritual dimension" for Moscow to "defend" the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra.

"This means our determination to bring the special military operation to an end is only getting stronger," he said, using the Kremlin-preferred term for the war in Ukraine.

The Russian Orthodox Church expressed concern over the alleged plot, the state-run news agency RIA Novosti reported, citing an anonymous church source.

Ukraine's Culture Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko maintained that "not a single sacred relic will leave the territory of Ukraine."

"The only task we have now regarding the Lavra is to protect it from the Russian world and finally verify that all our Ukrainian sacred relics are in place," he wrote.

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