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Black Sea Fleet Commander Sacked Over Warship's Sinking, Russian Pro-War Bloggers Say

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Admiral Viktor Sokolov. **Russian Defense Ministry**

The commander of Russia's Black Sea Fleet has been sacked after Ukraine said it had destroyed another Russian warship, according to unconfirmed reports by pro-war bloggers.

Ukrainian military intelligence said Wednesday its naval drones attacked and sank the Caesar Kunikov landing ship off the coast of the Moscow-annexed Crimean peninsula.

Rybar, an influential Telegram channel with 1.2 million subscribers, reported that Viktor Sokolov has been removed as Black Sea Fleet commander and replaced by an unidentified chief of staff.

Sergei Pinchuk, the Black Sea Fleet's first deputy commander, is listed as the fleet's chief of staff in New Zealand's 2023 sanctions designations against Russian figures.

Osvedomitel and Dva Mayora, two other Telegram channels that provide running

commentary on Russia's war in Ukraine, said the destruction of the Caesar Kunikov appeared to have been the "last straw" for Sokolov's superiors.

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A fourth blogger, Roman Saponkov, blamed Sokolov for a series of orders that undermined security and led to the loss of 20% of the Black Sea Fleet.

The bloggers typically do not cite their sources of information.

There was no official confirmation of either Sokolov's removal or his successor's appointment.

Sokolov was himself appointed as Black Sea Fleet commander after a series of Ukrainian attacks in the strategic body of water in mid-2022, replacing predecessor Igor Osipov.

Ukrainian drones and missiles have extensively targeted Crimea since Russia launched its full-scale invasion nearly two years ago.

Kyiv, which seeks to protect its shipping routes and prevent naval attacks, claims to have put one-third of Russia's Black Sea warships out of action since the invasion.

Sokolov has held several senior positions in the Russian Navy and has been in charge of a naval academy in St. Petersburg since 2020.

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