The Moscow Times
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ICC Issues Warrants Over Russian Strikes on Ukraine

By Charlotte Van Ouwerkerk for AFP

March 05, 2024



The International Criminal Court. **icc-cpi.int**

The International Criminal Court said Tuesday that it has issued arrest warrants for two senior Russian officers over the Ukraine war, including strikes targeting Ukrainian power infrastructure.

The move comes after the court targeted Russian President Vladimir Putin in March last year with an international arrest warrant on war crime accusations over the deportation of Ukrainian children since launching the war in February 2022.

It named the two new warrant targets as Sergei Ivanovich Kobylash and Viktor Nikolayevich Sokolov, an army lieutenant general and a Navy admiral, and said the suspected crimes were committed between October 2022 and March 2023.

The two men "are each allegedly responsible for the war crime of directing attacks at civilian"

targets and are also accused of the "crime against humanity of inhumane acts," the court said.

The court said there were grounds to believe that the two suspects were responsible for missile strikes against Ukrainian electric infrastructure from at least Oct. 10, 2022, until at least March 9, 2023.

Over this time, there was an alleged campaign of strikes against electric power plants and substations that were carried out by the Russian Armed Forces in multiple locations in Ukraine, the court said.

"There are reasonable grounds to believe they bear individual criminal responsibility for the aforementioned crimes," the Hague-based court said in a statement.

The two men either carried out the attacks directly or ordered them, or failed "to exercise proper control over the forces under their command," it said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed the court's action, saying it sent a message to Russian commanders that "justice will be served" over strikes against civilians and critical infrastructure.

"Every perpetrator of such crimes must know that they will be held accountable," he said.

'Another milestone'

The ICC, created in 2002 to investigate war crimes around the world, in September opened a field office in Kyiv as part of efforts to hold Russian forces accountable for potential war crimes.

That move came after an international office to probe Russia for the war crime of aggression opened in The Hague in March 2023 in what Kyiv called a "historic" first step toward a tribunal for Moscow's leadership.

Along with Putin, the ICC has also issued a warrant against Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's presidential commissioner for children's rights, on similar charges of unlawful child deportations during the Ukraine war.

Russian officials responded furiously to the court's arrest warrants for Putin, with Moscow issuing a retaliatory arrest warrant on ICC prosecutor Karim Khan of Britain and other court officials.

The court's move appears to have limited Putin's foreign movements, with the Russian president skipping a BRICS summit last year in South Africa.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine are official members of the ICC, though Kyiv has been working with the court to furnish what it considers evidence of Russian crimes.

"It took us many months of dedicated work of prosecutors, investigators of Ukraine, different Ukrainian agencies, who supplied the office of the prosecutor of the ICC with thousands of evidences and information," Ukraine's prosecutor general Andriy Kostin said Tuesday.

"Today, we reached another milestone in ensuring justice for all victims and survivors of this war. I'm really grateful for prosecutor of the ICC Karim Khan and his team," Kostin said in Brussels, where he was attending a meeting of European justice ministers.

The ICC does not have its own police force for enforcing arrest warrants, and relies on its 123 member states to do so if the individuals targeted travel to their territory.

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