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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

FSB Launches Sweeping Purge of Military Elites With Kremlin's Approval

The purge of top officers is the result of infighting between the FSB and the military over the failure to capture Kyiv and competition for defense funds.

By Pyotr Kozlov

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Security Council Secretary and former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu before a meeting with military district commanders. **kremlin.ru**

The recent arrests of five top Russian military officers are likely just the first of dozens of military figures who will be jailed in a sweeping purge by the security services, Russian government officials and sources close to the Kremlin and the Defense Ministry told The Moscow Times.

Ostensibly an effort to stamp out military corruption, the Federal Security Service (FSB) is going after high-ranking generals in hopes of pinning the blame for the botched 2022

invasion of Ukraine on the military's top brass and taking control of the distribution of the army's vast budget — all with the Kremlin's tacit approval.

But the arrests risk throwing the army into disorder at a time when Moscow is seeking to capitalize on Kyiv's weapons shortages and press further into Ukrainian territory.

All of The Moscow Times' sources requested anonymity in order to discuss a sensitive matter involving both the military and the FSB.

"There is a fierce cleanup underway. The FSB is mopping up [former Defense Minister Sergei] Shoigu's team. It's to be expected. This kind of operation can only be carried out with approval at the very top [of the country's leadership]," a source close to the Kremlin told The Moscow Times.

The purge appears to be the culmination of wartime infighting and competition for resources between the security services and the Defense Ministry — and marks a victory for the FSB, the successor to the Soviet KGB, in currying ex-KGB agent President Vladimir Putin's favor.

"There is still a long way to go before the purges are finished. More arrests await us," he added.

In the two weeks since longtime defense chief Shoigu's surprise ouster, four high-ranking officers have been arrested on charges ranging from bribery to abuse of power, the latest of which came late Thursday evening.

As these arrests gain momentum, they could widen into the "largest purges" in modern Russian history, an acting Russian government official told The Moscow Times.

"I think by the end of the year, dozens, maybe hundreds of people of different ranks will be arrested in all Defense Ministry units," the Russian government official said.

Security service officers handling corruption investigations had visited the Defense Ministry's headquarters on Frunzenskaya Embankment even before Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov's arrest went public in late April, a source close to the ministry told The Moscow Times.

"There are more Chekists there [in the Defense Ministry building] now than military personnel, it seems to me," the source said with sarcasm, using the Soviet-era term for security officials.

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The Kremlin was quick to assert that the arrests were nothing more than the result of ongoing work to root out corruption at every level of the government.

"This is constant and consistent work to fight corruption, not a campaign," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday.

But even though independent media, the opposition and international observers have

reported on the army's rampant corruption for years — and pro-war bloggers have criticized military graft throughout the war in Ukraine — the arrests of generals only started once it became clear that Shoigu would lose his job.

Following Ivanov's arrest, investigators said the probe into his affairs had been underway for over five years, underscoring the fact that the authorities knew about the military's corruption long before the latest arrests.

"There has been loads of information about corruption schemes in the Defense Ministry, criminal cases have been piled up. But while Shoigu was a minister and had enormous influence, investigators were not allowed to pursue them," a second government official told The Moscow Times.

The FSB's Kremlin-authorized campaign shows that the security services are "triumphing" in the confrontation between the two leading wartime security agencies — the army and the FSB — a source close to the Kremlin told The Moscow Times.

"There must be one single party to blame for the failure of the invasion," the source said.

"It is either the special services, which were engaged in intelligence and analytical preparations for the war and promised Putin a triumphant operation and a quick victory but failed," he said, "or the 'second army of the world' under PR-czar Shoigu which was supposed to ensure Putin's victory — but turned out to be a paper tiger and failed miserably."

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And although last week's post-inauguration reshuffle saw the removal of both Security Council chief Nikolai Patrushev, the coordinator of the security services, and Shoigu, the head of the military, the FSB has nonetheless won in this standoff.

In addition, FSB officials could receive promotions and awards for their "fight against corruption" in the halls of power.

"The FSB's task, at most, is to install its own people and control the tastiest things: those areas where there are big budgets," a second acting government official told The Moscow Times.

When asked whether the purges could hinder the war effort by throwing the military leadership into disarray at a time when Russia is seeking to take advantage of Kyiv's munitions shortages, the source said: "Do you really think that any of them [the FSB] at this moment are worried about the success of the special operation?"

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