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Putin Promotes ‘Cousin’ in Latest Military Shake-Up

By AFP

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Anna Tsivilyova, then chairwoman of the Defenders of the Fatherland Foundation, looks on during a meeting with President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, June 1. **Alexander Kazakov/Russian Presidential Press and Information Office/TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed a woman the West has called his "close relative" to a top Defense Ministry post on Monday as part of an ongoing shake-up of Russia's military leadership.

The appointment comes after Putin removed his longtime defense chief Sergei Shoigu last month, replacing him with economist Andrey Belousov, and following the arrest of several high-ranking military figures on corruption charges.

Analysts said the purge at the top of Russia's defense establishment was a sign Moscow believes it can beat Ukraine on the battlefield by outspending and outlasting Kyiv and its Western backers.

They said the Kremlin also wants to get tighter control of the military's vast spending.

Putin issued decrees on Monday replacing four deputy defense ministers.

He named Anna Tsivilyova, the reported daughter of his cousin, and Pavel Fradkov, the son of his former spy boss and prime minister, among their replacements.

Britain hit Tsivilyova with sanctions in 2022, naming her "Putin's first cousin once removed" and the European Union listed her as a "close relative" of Putin.

She headed a major coal company and a government-backed fund to support the families of soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

At the Defense Ministry she will oversee social welfare and benefits for soldiers.

Fradkov was a senior official inside Putin's presidential administration and is the son of Mikhail Fradkov, who headed Russia's foreign intelligence service for almost a decade and was one of Putin's prime ministers in the 2000s.

A former Finance Ministry official, Leonid Gornin, was also appointed first deputy defense minister.

The changes are part of the largest overhaul of Russia's Defense Ministry since it sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

It comes with Russian forces grinding forward on the battlefield and with Putin demanding Ukraine's full withdrawal from the south and east of the country as a precondition to peace talks.

Those demands were rejected by Kyiv as a territorial "ultimatum" reminiscent of Adolf Hitler.

In a major diplomatic summit in Switzerland over the weekend, Kyiv won support for the principle that its "territorial integrity" should be respected in any peace deal with Russia, though several key countries refused to back that call.

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