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International Criminal Court Issues Arrest Warrants for Shoigu, Gerasimov

By AFP

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Alexei Nikolsky/TASS

Updated with Kremlin's response.

The International Criminal Court said Tuesday it had issued arrest warrants for Russia's chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, and former defence minister Sergei Shoigu.

The warrants, issued Monday but announced on Tuesday, were in response to the alleged war crimes of directing attacks at civilian structures and causing excessive incidental harm to civilians, as well as the crime against humanity of "inhumane acts" in Ukraine, the ICC said in a statement.

ICC judges said there were "reasonable grounds to believe that the two suspects bear responsibility for missile strikes carried out by the Russian armed forces against the Ukrainian electric infrastructure from at least 10 October 2022 until at least 9 March 2023."

The court said these strikes were "directed against civilian objects" and even when targets could be considered military, civilian damage "would have been clearly excessive to the anticipated military advantage."

Ukraine hailed the decision as "important," with President Volomymyr Zelensky's Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak saying that "everyone will be held accountable for evil."

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Later on Tuesday, Russia's Security Council, which Shoigu now heads, dismissed the arrest warrant against him as "insignificant."

"It's all hot air since the ICC's jurisdiction does not cover Russia" and the decision was made "as part of the West's hybrid war against our country," the council's press service was quoted as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

Last March, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin over the alleged abduction of children from Ukraine, a ruling that Moscow called "void." Russia levelled its own warrant against the ICC's president in response.

The court, based in The Hague, does not have its own police for enforcing the arrest warrants. It relies on the justice system of its 124 members to carry them out. In theory, anyone under a warrant is prevented from travelling to an ICC member state for fear of arrest.

Putin has travelled abroad over the past year, including to countries like China, Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, none of whom are ICC members.

However, the Kremlin leader last summer did skip a BRICS summit in South Africa last, which would have been expected to carry out the warrant.

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