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Putin Sacks Chief of Military's Land Forces

By AFP

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Oleg Salyukov, commander-in-chief of the Russian ground forces, reviews troops during the Victory Day military parade on Red Square on May 9. **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday sacked Russia's chief of land forces, General Oleg Salyukov, the Kremlin said, in the latest removal of a high-profile military establishment figure amid the war in Ukraine.

Salyukov, 70, will become a deputy to ex-Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who was removed last year and made Secretary of the Security Council. The move was announced in a Kremlin decree.

Less than a week ago, Salyukov was running the grand Victory Day military parade in Red Square with current Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, marking the 80th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany.

Russian law enforcement has charged more than a dozen military and defense sector officials since last year, many of whom were accused of siphoning money from major projects for personal gain.

Shoigu, a longtime Putin ally, was downgraded last year after holding various top positions since the early 1990s.

The Kremlin has denied that the arrests and sackings in Russia's top brass were a purge of the military establishment following setbacks in Ukraine.

Salyukov had been in charge of Russia's land forces since 2014, overseeing involvement in the Syrian civil war and the war in Ukraine. He was a deputy head of the General Staff for four years before that.

Russia, which reportedly planned to take Ukraine, a country with a much smaller military, in three days, has been stuck in a bloody and grinding three-year conflict that has left thousands dead.

Ukraine and Russia are to hold their first direct peace talks in more than three years in Istanbul on Thursday or Friday.

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