The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Replaces Aerospace Commander With EU-Sanctioned General Amid Drone Surge, Reports Say

May 04, 2026



Colonel General Alexander Chaiko. **Russian Defense Ministry**

President Vladimir Putin has reportedly dismissed the head of Russia's Aerospace Forces, the military branch responsible for the country's air defenses, coming after a series of highly destructive Ukrainian drone attacks.

General Viktor Afzalov, who assumed command in 2023, has been replaced by Colonel General Alexander Chaiko, according to a report by the news outlet RBC, which cited two sources familiar with the matter.

The Kremlin has not yet commented on the shakeup, which was first reported by the influential pro-war Telegram channel Fighterbomber.

If confirmed, the leadership change would follow a significant uptick in Ukrainian drone attacks over the past two months that have targeted Russian energy infrastructure.

Chaiko is a veteran commander who led Russian forces in Syria from 2019 to 2021, RBC wrote. In 2020, Putin reportedly awarded him the Hero of Russia medal through a classified decree.

The EU sanctioned Chaiko in March after accusing him of serving as a lead commander during the Russian occupation of Bucha. Ukraine and its Western allies have accused Russian forces of massacring civilians in the Kyiv suburb — an allegation the Kremlin denies.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/05/04/putin-replaces-aerospace-commander-with-eu-sanctioned-general-amid-drone-surge-reports-say-a92675