

Russia's Military 'Reshuffle' Hints at Frustration With Slow Ukraine Advance

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Colonel-General Gennady Zhidko and Russian President Vladimir Putin. [kremlin.ru](https://www.kremlin.ru)

Official statements and [footage](#) released by Russia's Defense Ministry suggests the Kremlin has reshuffled the country's military command structure in recent weeks, according to analysts, as the ongoing Russian offensive in Ukraine yields few territorial gains.

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Gennady Zhidko's appearance alongside Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on a visit to eastern Ukraine over the weekend prompted speculation that Zhidko had been made the new commander of Russia's military campaign.

General Alexander Dvornikov, who was reportedly previously in charge of the Russian offensive, has not been seen in public for [weeks](#).

"It appears to confirm that Colonel-General Gennady Zhidko is the commander of Russian forces in Ukraine," tweeted military analyst Rob Lee of the Defense Ministry footage.

A restructuring of Russia's top command is likely an attempt by Moscow to improve its Armed Forces' performance in Ukraine, which have failed to make rapid progress despite significant superiority in ammunition and equipment.

"Drastic rotations within the Russian military, if true, are not actions taken by a force on the verge of a major success," [said](#) the Institute for the Study of War, a U.S. think tank.

Despite some significant victories in Ukraine's east near the town of Popasna and the strategic city of Sievierodonetsk in recent weeks, Russia's advance has been slow and, according to analysts, likely resulted in high casualty rates.

The Russian command is "experimenting due to issues [on the battlefield] and are trying not to lose this war," independent military analyst Pavel Luzin told The Moscow Times.

Rumors of Zhidko's promotion were first [reported](#) in early June by the Conflict Intelligence Team, an independent investigative outlet.

Prior to being appointed as a deputy defense minister responsible for "military-political" work last year, Zhidko served as the head of the Eastern Military District and was involved in Russia's military intervention in Syria in support of President Bashar al-Assad.

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His rumored appointment could mean Russia was looking to bring the operation in Ukraine fully under the remit of one commander, military analyst Lee said on Twitter. Until now, the Kremlin has preferred to micromanage the campaign rather than give command to one figure, according to Lee.

In addition to Dvornikov, a number of other senior Russian military figures have also apparently been removed and replaced in recent weeks.

General Sergei Surovikin, the commander of Russia's Aerospace Forces, is leading military operations in Ukraine's south, whilst Colonel General Alexander Lapin, the head of Russia's Central Military District, is in charge of Russia's troops in east Ukraine, according to a Friday [statement](#) by the Defense Ministry.

Russian media outlets reported that the current chief of staff of the Central Military District, Colonel-General Mikhail Teplinsky, [replaced](#) the commander of Russia's elite Airborne Forces, Colonel-General Andrei Serdyukov, earlier this month.

As well as pushing forward with Russia's offensive in the east, the new commanders are likely also to be tasked with stemming Russian casualties and consolidating territorial gains made in southern Ukraine, according to analysts.

As many as 33,000 Russian soldiers have been killed, wounded or taken prisoner in the war so far, the British Army's chief of general staff [said](#) at a conference in London on Tuesday.

These losses have come not only to foot soldiers, but also high-ranking [officers](#).

If true, the elevation of Zhidko, 56, comes two months after Dvornikov, notorious for his ruthless tactics in Syria, was widely [reported](#) to have been put in charge of the Russian operation in Ukraine. Russian officials never confirmed his appointment.

In addition to capturing more Ukrainian territory in the Donbas region, the Kremlin looks set on holding occupied territories in the south of Ukraine in the coming months.

But this will likely become increasingly difficult as Ukraine makes use of new deliveries of Western-supplied heavy weaponry.

Some analysts were skeptical that a new command structure would make any difference to the performance of the Russian army, which is approaching exhaustion.

“The problem is Putin does not have a very effective Armed Forces,” said analyst Luzhin. “I don't think Zhidko is going to be capable of performing any miracles.”

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