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Russian Defense Minister, U.S. Counterpart Discuss Ukraine in Rare Phone Call

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Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. **Grigory Sysoyev / POOL / TASS**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu spoke by phone to U.S. counterpart Lloyd Austin about topics including the war in Ukraine, Moscow's Defense Ministry said on its official Telegram channel Friday.

"Current international security matters were discussed, including the situation in Ukraine," the ministry said, without providing further details.

The phone call marks the first confirmed contact between the two top defense officials since May and the second since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

A spokesman for the Pentagon said Austin urged Shoigu to keep "lines of communication" open on the war in Ukraine.

"Secretary Austin emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication amid

the ongoing war against Ukraine," Brigadier General Pat Ryder said in a statement following their phone call.

Relations between Moscow and Washington have sunk to new lows since the start of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

Russia has accused the U.S. of seeking to prolong the conflict by providing financial and military aid to pro-Western Ukraine.

Ahead of a G20 summit hosted by Indonesia in November, Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that he saw "no need" for an in-person meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden.

Earlier this month, Biden said he had "no intention" of meeting with Putin but did not rule out potential talks.

AFP contributed reporting.

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