

Russian Defense Minister Visits Troops Fighting in Ukraine

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Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. **Russian Defense Ministry**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited the command headquarters of a group of forces deployed in Ukraine, where he discussed materiel needs and handed out awards, the military [said](#) Tuesday.

Shoigu inspected the Vostok group of forces days after the Defense Ministry claimed the capture of eastern Ukraine's Soledar and army Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov was placed in charge of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Shoigu heard reports on the progress of Moscow's invasion from group commander Lieutenant General Rustam Muradov and other unit leaders.

It did not specify the location of the meeting.

Related article: [As Russia Claims Win, Analysts Say Capture of Soledar Is 'Pyrrhic Victory'](#)

It added that Shoigu highlighted the need to ensure supplies to frontline soldiers, provide them safe housing and focus on the work of medical and logistics units, as well as the need to organize work surrounding fortifications.

Numerous reports since the start of the war last February have documented supply, food and equipment shortages, as well as subpar living conditions, for Russia's invading force.

A nearly three-minute video with most of its sound muted shows Shoigu, dressed in combat uniform, sitting in on a videoconference and handing out medals to several servicemen. It was followed by Shoigu's address and interviews with two awarded soldiers.

"You serve with dignity, defend our homeland, help those who need help and do everything to bring closer the day called Victory Day," Shoigu said.

Following the meeting, Shoigu [announced](#) that Russia would grow the size of its Armed Forces to 1.5 million people from 2023-2026, syncing the increasing troop numbers with new weapons delivery dates.

This is Shoigu's second inspection of the Vostok group since the summer of 2022.

Shoigu previously inspected the Vostok group on July 18, where he [ordered](#) generals to target Ukraine's Western-supplied long-range weapons.

Analysts said the Defense Ministry's appointment of Gerasimov to lead Russia's forces in Ukraine was an attempt to assert authority over the private military group Wagner, whose leader had claimed sole credit for seizing Soledar.

Shoigu also inspected the so-called "special military operation" zone twice in December. Investigative journalists at the time [geolocated](#) the command post visited by Shoigu on Dec. 18 as a village in annexed Crimea, more than 80 kilometers from the frontline.

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