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No Changes Planned for General Staff, Putin Says

May 15, 2024



Putin meets with top defense officials. **kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that he does not plan to make any personnel changes to Russia's General Staff following the ouster of longtime Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu earlier this week.

General Valery Gerasimov will appear to maintain his position as chief of Russia's General Staff, the central organ of command of the country's armed forces, despite the ongoing government shakeup as Putin assumes his fifth presidential term.

Since Gerasimov reports directly to the Russian leader, the move signals that incoming Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, an economist and former first deputy prime minister, will have little influence over day-to-day decisions on the battlefield in Ukraine.

"As for the General Staff and the entire structure that ensures combat operations, there are no changes here and no planned changes," Putin told a meeting of top generals, which included Gerasimov, Belousov, and his predecessor, the new Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu.

“I want this to be clear to everyone,” he added.

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Putin said that a “combat operations unit has been established, is functioning rhythmically and successfully, and no changes are envisioned here,” while also expressing confidence in the Russian forces’ positions in Ukraine.

According to the Kremlin chief, Gerasimov will work with Shoigu, who will also lead the presidential defense industry commission, in order to “ensure our obligations to our partners in arms supplies to foreign markets” while prioritizing “the needs of our armed forces.”

“This combination is very subtle and important,” he said.

Putin also explained that he decided to appoint Belousov as the Defense Minister due to Russia’s ballooning defense and security spending, which the president said will total “a little over 8.7%” in 2024.

“Of course, he [Belousov] understands perfectly well what needs to be done to integrate the economy of the entire security bloc — and the Defense Ministry as its key link — into the overall economy,” Putin said.

“This is extremely important, meaning this involves both the innovative development of industry while taking into account the economic and budgetary capabilities,” he added.

Gerasimov’s future as the General Staff chief has long been in doubt given his unpopularity and handling of the war in Ukraine. While Putin on Wednesday sought to quell suspicions that he may oust the general soon, some analysts have speculated that Beolusov himself could replace Gerasimov once he has settled into his new role as defense minister.

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