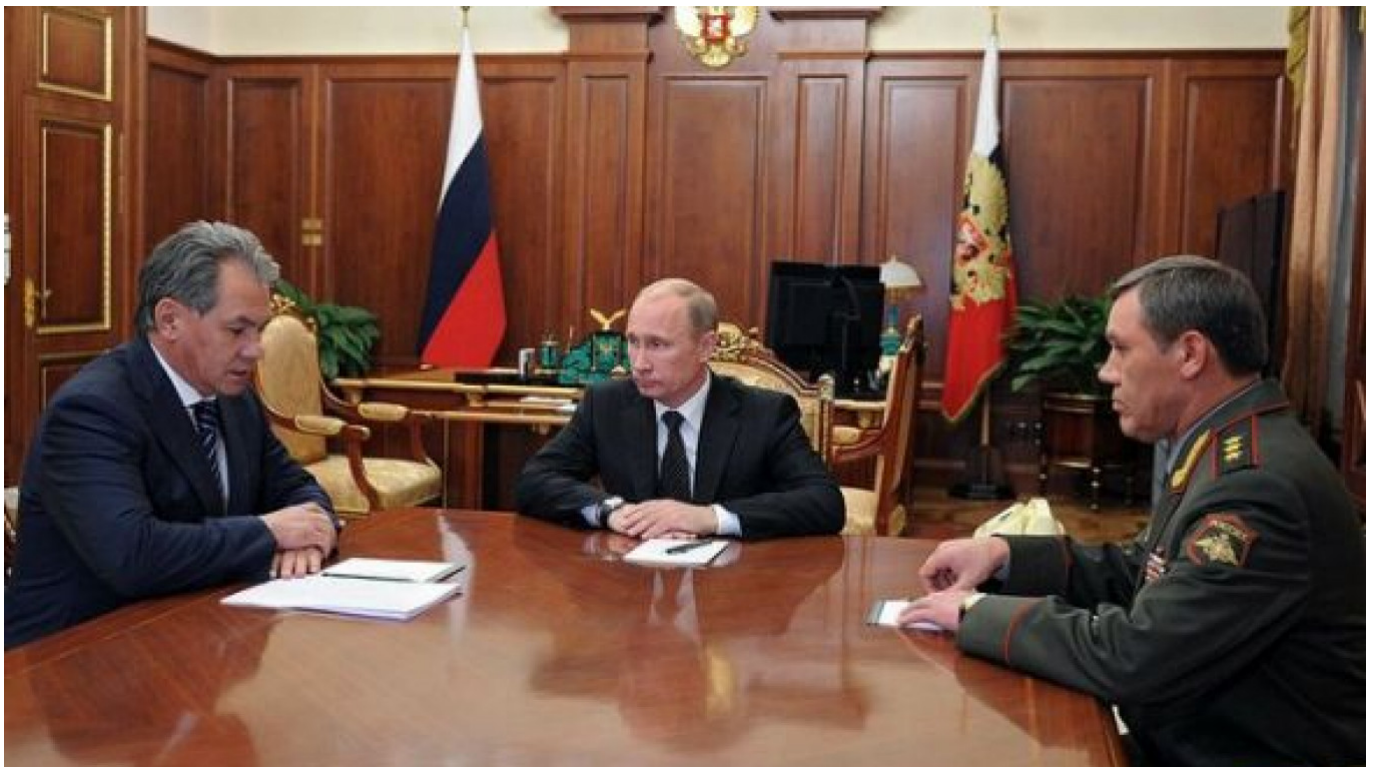


Shoigu Replaces General Staff Head Makarov

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Gerasimov, right, meeting with Putin and Shoigu in the Kremlin on Friday.

Newly appointed Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Friday chose a new head of the General Staff, selecting colonel general Valery Gerasimov to replace Nikolai Makarov to lead the government organ that wields operational control of the armed forces.

Shoigu announced the decision at a meeting in the Kremlin with Gerasimov and President Vladimir Putin, who officially removed Makarov from his post and appointed Gerasimov in his stead.

"You're an experienced person," Putin told Gerasimov, according to a transcript of the conversation on the Kremlin website. "I think the minister has chosen a suitable candidate, and I hope that you will work effectively and efficiently."

Gerasimov said he would do his best to achieve all the goals set for the military, which Putin said included rearmament of the Army and Navy and completing the restructuring of the armed forces.

Media reports had predicted that Gerasimov would replace Makarov, citing the latter's closeness to former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, who was fired by Putin on Tuesday amid a corruption investigation into illegal sales of ministry property.

Gerasimov, 57, served as first deputy head of the General Staff from 2010 until April of this year, when he was removed from the post by Makarov. Since then he served as commander of the Central Military District, one of the country's four regional command posts.

The new General Staff head has combat experience, having served as a commander in the North Caucasus during the second Chechen war.

Also on Friday, Putin fired First Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Sukhorukov as part of an anticipated shakeup in the ministry following Serdyukov's ouster.

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