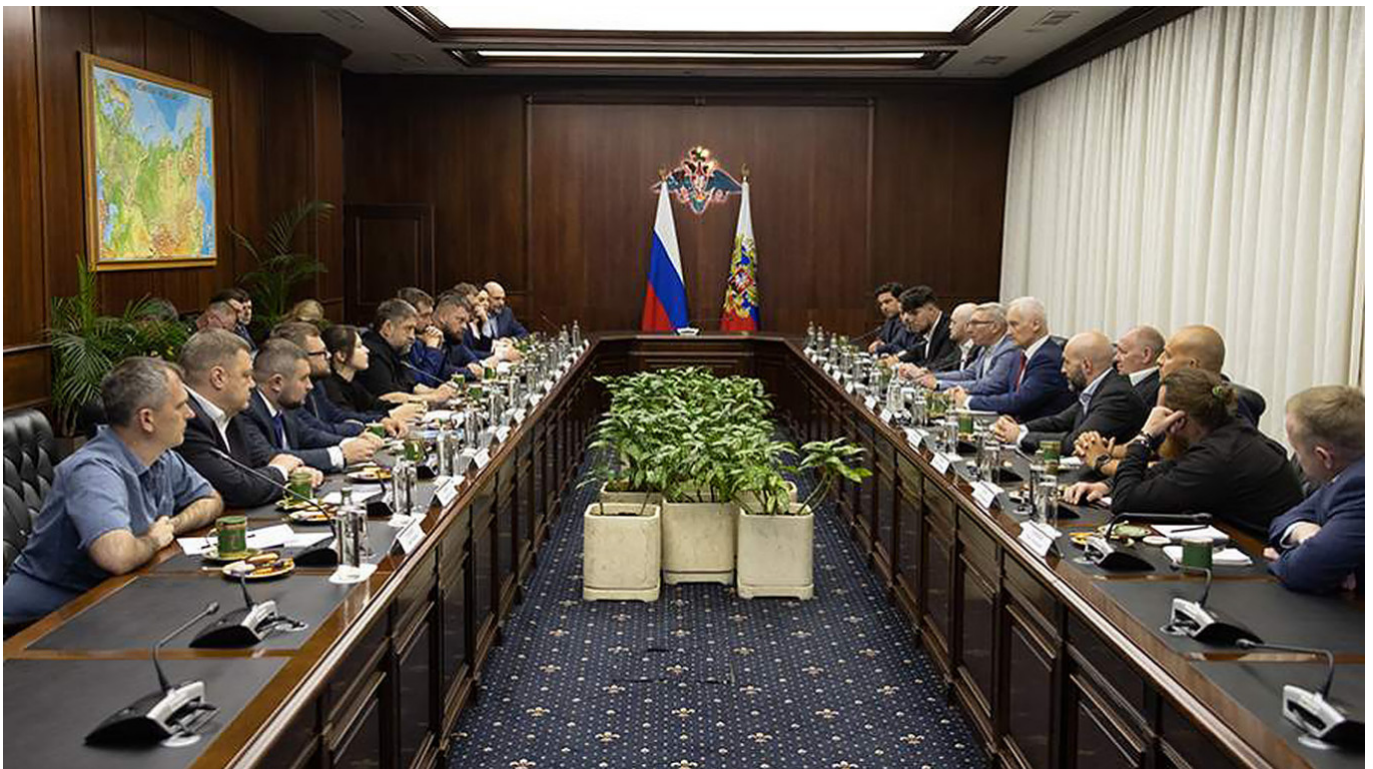


New Russian Defense Minister Meets Pro-War Bloggers

June 11, 2024



Russian Defense Ministry

Russia's newly appointed Defense Minister Andrei Belousov met with a group of military bloggers on Monday, a gesture that observers said showed that the Kremlin seeks to use his appointment to boost support from military commentators.

Belousov, who replaced longtime Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, met with leading correspondents covering the Kremlin's war against Ukraine, including military reporters from state television channels.

"Almost two hours of live communication on all topical issues. No restrictions or prohibitions. We discussed everything," war correspondent Alexander Kots [said](#) of the meeting.

Alexander Sladkov, a reporter from the state-owned Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), [called](#) the conversation "open" and "interesting."

"The impressions are very positive. I noticed that the minister has full information about

what is happening, despite recently taking office,” [said](#) military observer Daniil Bezsonov.

Related article: [Andrei Belousov: The Economist in Charge of Russia’s Army](#)

The U.S. think tank Institute for the Study of War (ISW) [said](#) “The Kremlin likely attempted to falsely portray Belousov as more attentive to milbloggers' criticisms than his predecessor in an effort to co-opt a larger, non-Kremlin-affiliated milblogger community.”

Belousov, 65, an economist and former first deputy prime minister who has no prior military experience, offered a clean slate compared to Shoigu, who faced criticism from pro-war bloggers for a series of failures in the war and was the target of the 2023 Wagner Group mutiny.

Both the Kremlin and the Defense Ministry “have a vested interest in appearing open to dialogue with milbloggers, who represent a major pro-war constituency,” ISW said in its report, adding that Moscow “is likely aiming to portray Belousov as more cognizant of this fact than his predecessor.”

Some war correspondents who attended the meeting also said that the minister would “issue new instructions” and address the demands of the frontline based on the discussion.

However, the ISW report said that “Belousov's milblogger outreach is more likely to be a performative attempt to secure their loyalty than introduce systemic changes” in the Defense Ministry.

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