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# Who are "all the president's men" now?



It has been a while since Vladimir Putin himself led the military campaign in Ukraine, calling shots and giving orders through the head of the military, General Valery Gerasimov.

Wartime did, however, make some adjustments to the long-established Russian domestic palette in government.

However, not all changes in the Russian government were sensational. Even though personnel changes in some of the most influential positions might appear to be significant disruptions in the establishment, there will essentially be no major changes in Moscow's governance model.

As always, Vladimir Putin has slightly rotated the same people, showing whose performance he likes or dislikes more.

Once again, Russia has proven that it is a super-centralised country where one person makes the majority of political decisions.

## The most significant change in the Ministry of Defence

The change at the top of the Ministry of Defence has **attracted** the most attention. Based on the well-established algorithm, the Russian Ministry of Defence prioritised providing support to Putin's loyalists over other ministries and government departments.

However, all that changed with the prolonged war in Ukraine and the enormous increase in military expenditures to 6.7% of national GDP.

The change at the top of the Ministry of Defence is due to Russia's preparation for a decades-long standoff with the West. As long as Vladimir Putin is around, it will not be over.

For this reason, Putin has decided to entrust the military budget to an experienced economist, Andrey Belousov, who is far less corrupt than most people in Putin's circle.

## Putin simply does not care how corrupt his people are. He wants maximum effectiveness of the military budget

The fact that Belousov, an economist and former first vice president of the government, is moderately corrupt was certainly not the decisive reason for his appointment as head of the Ministry of Defence.

Putin simply does not care how corrupt his people are. He wants maximum effectiveness of the military budget, and that is the principal reason for Belousov's new appointment.

In times of war, Putin wants a government that is as effective and qualified as possible, but one that also includes people whom he trusts and knows. This applies, in particular, to military expenditures.

However, Vladimir Putin's desperation prompts him to appoint not just another civilian as Russia's defence minister, but a civilian who worked with and received grants from USAID in the early 2000s.

## Why was Shoigu deposed?

Sergei Shoigu's departure after 12 years as defence minister could have seemed like a sensation. But that is not the case.

His fate was decided during the rebellion of the Wagner paramilitary group and its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who had confronted Shoigu last year.

Since then, it was only a matter of time before Putin saw a favourable moment to dismiss Sergei Shoigu. However, Putin did not present Shoigu's dismissal as a demonstration of weakness or even as a desire to humiliate Shoigu.

Sergei Shoigu has been loyal throughout his long career as one of Putin's closest associates. That is what Putin cares about most.

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Nikolai Patrushev, who has the power in the country despite his position, previously held it. Vladimir Putin's close relationship with Nikolai Patrushev determines his power and influence.

This new appointment means that Sergei Shoigu will remain in Putin's pack, while Nikolai Patrushev will remain in the game despite his age and illness.

The only difference is that Putin has delegated military spending management to someone who has proven to be an experienced and efficient economist.

## Power lies not only with the government

The complicated Russian power structure resembles a monarchy, with several boyars who have influence in the country due to their close relationship with the monarch.

Some of these most powerful Russian boyars, such as the Kovalchuk brothers, Yury and Mikhail, may not hold a single government post, but they have a great deal of influence over the decisions made by the government.

The same applies to Nikolai Patrushev. Regardless of whether he gets a high state office or not, he will remain at a very high level of influence.

Others, without any state function but with full influence on state institutions' decision-making, will likewise remain at the top of the establishment.

Sergey Chemezov, the head of Rostec, is another heavyweight Russian boyar who has no government function. Chemezov's influence stems from his cooperation with Vladimir Putin in East Germany.

## Putin decided to strengthen Mishustin's cabinet with a good economist, Andrey Belousov, who will manage the military budget

He is one of the country's most powerful people, with protégés and confidants in Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's cabinet: Denis Manturov is the first deputy prime minister, and Anton Alikhanov is the trade minister.

Mikhail Mishustin, the new and former Russian prime minister, is an efficient manager who has done a good job during the COVID pandemic.

He is a well-known geodesist in Rublevka, the prestigious Russian neighbourhood outside Moscow, and his love of the finer things in life is also known to the other residents of Rublevka.

Vladimir Putin loves his performance, but he has nevertheless decided to strengthen his cabinet with a good economist, Andrey Belousov, who will manage the military budget.

## Medvedev's fate

There have long been quiet rumours that Sergei Lavrov wants to retire. However, he will remain a member of the new cabinet, and he is not allowed to leave. This means that Putin does not want any new people at the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry at this time.

Dmitry Medvedev is one of the few establishment members whose political fate is uncertain following personnel changes in the government. His former position as deputy to Nikolai Patrushev in the Security Council has now been added to the responsibilities of the new head, Sergei Shoigu.



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Since the start of the invasion of Ukraine, the former Russian president has tried hard to appear as a hawk among Russian hawks, but so far it is unclear whether or not he will be given a new role.

Most likely, Vladimir Putin appreciates the submissive loyalty of Dmitry Medvedev, and therefore we can expect him to be assigned a new role, although not more serious than the one he has had so far.

The Kremlin establishment appears to be using the personnel carousel to secure funds and ensure the military complex operates efficiently in the long run.

The appointment of the experienced and competent economist Belousov to head the Ministry of Defence is therefore the biggest change in the new Russian government. This change clearly shows that Putin is convinced that his future depends on his ability to maintain the Russian economy and sustain the Russian military budget.