# US and Russian Defence Chiefs Discuss Rising Tensions, ICC Issues Arrest Warrants, and Prisoner Exchange Between Russia and Ukraine



**US and Russian Defense Chiefs Hold Talks Amid Rising Tensions**

On June 25, 2024, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov engaged in a rare phone conversation. This discussion occurred amid escalating tensions following a Ukrainian attack in Russian-annexed Crimea, for which Moscow held Washington accountable. This was the first direct call between the defense chiefs since March 2023. The details of the dialogue varied significantly according to each country's official reports.

**International Criminal Court Issues Arrest Warrants**

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Russia's former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and top military official Valery Gerasimov on June 25, 2024. They stand accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity for attacks on civilian targets in Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky supported the indictments, emphasizing the accountability of Russian officials for the ongoing conflict. The court's enforcement powers are limited to member states of the Rome Statute.

**Prisoner Exchange Between Russia and Ukraine**

Russia and Ukraine conducted a prisoner exchange on June 25, 2024, with each side returning 90 prisoners of war. This exchange, monitored by the United Arab Emirates, follows an earlier swap on May 31, 2024.

**Hostilities Continue in Ukraine's Donetsk Region**

Ukrainian soldiers continue their battle against Russian forces in the Donetsk region, now less constrained by the ammunition shortages that had previously hampered their efforts. Concurrently, multiple air attacks by Ukraine on Russia's Belgorod region resulted in one fatality, four injuries, and damage to numerous buildings. Russia's defense ministry reported intercepting 29 Ukrainian drones.

**Media Bans in Russia**

In retaliation for an EU ban on several Russian media outlets, Russia announced on June 25, 2024, that it would block broadcasts from 81 European media outlets, including Agence France-Presse and Politico.

**Russia and Iran Set to Sign Cooperation Deal**

Russia is expected to finalize a new comprehensive cooperation agreement with Iran soon, as indicated by Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko on June 25, 2024.

These developments underscore the ongoing complexities and hostilities in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with significant international ramifications.