



Lt. Gen. Alexander Lapin, commander of Russia's Central Military District (*left*), Valery Gerasimov, Russia's first deputy defense minister and chief of the general staff of the Russian armed forces (*second from left*), and other Shanghai Cooperation Organization leaders observe training during Peace Mission 2018 at Chebarkulsky Training Ground, Chelyabinsk Region, Russia. The 3,000 troop joint counterterrorism command post exercise took place 22–29 August 2018 and included command and control units, and ground and air forces of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, India, and Pakistan. Uzbekistan was represented by observers at the drills. (Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation)

Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov's 2018 Presentation to the General Staff Academy

Thoughts on Future Military Conflict—March 2018

Valery Gerasimov

Translated by Dr. Harold Orenstein

Foreword

Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov's March 2018 address to the Academy of Military Sciences was titled "The Influence of the Contemporary Nature of Armed Struggle on the Focus of the Construction and Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Priority Tasks of Military Science in Safeguarding the Country's Defense." It contained several new or contentious issues, while adhering to the five basic elements that help describe how a Russian general staff officer frames his thought (trends, forecasting, strategy, forms [organizations], and methods [weapons and military art]), exceeding their use by twice as many from his 2017 presentation.

Regarding new and contentious issues, Gerasimov discussed his view of the probable forms of future war, which included subjecting economic targets and state control systems to priority destruction. Countering reconnaissance and navigation systems will play a special role as well. Air assault forces are being developed as the foundation for rapid reaction forces in Russia, he noted, and an automated interservice recce-strike system is being created. It will reduce the temporal parameters of a fire task decision cycle by two to two and a half times, while the precision of destruction capabilities will increase by one and a half to two times. Command and control organs, mentioned fourteen times in the speech, are being prepared to operate as "part of interservice groupings that are being created on strategic axes." The use of precision destruction means, such as hypersonic missiles, will shift strategic deterrence tasks from the nuclear to the non-nuclear force. Gerasimov uses the term "new-generation" warfare for the first time, although it is hard to confirm whether he is referring to foreign or domestic forces. Also, of special interest was the fact that he used the term "comprehensive destruction," a phrase not used in past addresses to the academy, four times.

Regarding thinking like a general staff officer, trends were used to describe changes in the content of military operations. Specifically noted were changes in the scale, intensity, and dynamism of operations using robots, precision-guided munitions, simultaneous and dispersed operations, and other factors. Forecasting, he noted, helps predict potential military-political situations that will decide what kind of armed forces Russia needs to develop. Strategy and strategic issues were mentioned often, to include the point (first noted in Gerasimov's 2013 speech)

that each military conflict has distinguishing features and thus a logic all its own. Other strategic topics included strategic resources, axes, and nuclear forces. Regarding forms and methods, priority tasks for military science include studying the forms of employing the armed forces (organizations were mentioned four times) and methods of conducting operations and combat in future conflicts (military art was mentioned four times). The contribution of weapons (mentioned seventeen times) needs to be reexamined because existing calculation methods do not fully consider the capabilities of precision weaponry or results of the effects of new destruction factors. Finally, Gerasimov stated near his conclusion that "the development of theoretical foundations for the comprehensive destruction of the enemy has advanced to the foreground."

Future discussions of world leaders with President Vladimir Putin should include asking just what his general staff chief meant by that statement.¹

—Dr. Harold Orenstein

General of the Army

Valery Gerasimov is the chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces and first deputy defense minister. He is a graduate of the Kazan Higher Tank Command School, the Malinovsky Military Academy of Armored Forces, and the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia. He served in a wide variety of command and staff positions before his current assignment, including commanding the 58th Army during combat operations in Chechnya.

Dr. Harold Orenstein,

taught at the U.S. Army Russian Institute in Garmisch, West Germany. During his career, he was a translator/editor/analyst with the Soviet Army Studies Office (now the Foreign Military Studies Office); a military-political affairs advisor for Central Europe at SHAPE; and a joint and multinational doctrine writer for the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate at Fort Leavenworth. He is the documents editor and has translated numerous articles for the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, and he has translated a two-volume collection on the history of Soviet operational art and several Soviet General Staff studies of Eastern Front operations. Orenstein is currently retired after serving thirty-one years as a Department of the Army civilian.

*Remarks by General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, "The Influence of the Contemporary Nature of Armed Struggle on the Focus of the Construction and Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Priority Tasks of Military Science in Safeguarding the Country's Defense"*²

The aim of our meeting is not only to sum up the results of the Academy's work over the past year, but also to discuss a number of current issues of the country's military security and the state of military and scientific work.

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The annual meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences is a platform on which there is an informal exchange of opinions among the representatives of organs of military command and control and military science, and specialists whose activities are associated with defense problems. In addition, interaction and continuity are provided among the various generations of military scholars and among generations of the defenders of the Fatherland.

For the most part, this is fostered by the scientific prestige of General of the Army Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareev, president of the Academy of Military Sciences, veteran of the Great Patriotic War, and author of valuable works on military history, problems of strategy, and problems of operational art.

A most important question to which military science should provide an answer is: What kind of Armed Forces are necessary so as to guarantee the safeguarding of Russia's military security and protect its national interests? The answer to this depends on the quality of forecasting possible variants in the development of the military-political situation in the world and of analyzing domestic and foreign experience of the employment of armed forces in military conflicts in recent years.

Today, a determining influence on the development of the military-political situation in the world is the United States' striving to prevent losing its “global leadership” and to maintain a unipolar world by any means, including military. This conflicts with the views of many states, including Russia, which does not accept dictatorship and is in favor of a just world order.

Because of this, interstate confrontation has intensified. As before, its basis is nonmilitary measures—political, economic, and information. Moreover, in addition to these spheres, it is gradually being disseminated in all aspects of activity of contemporary

society—diplomatic, scientific, sports, and cultural; in fact, it has become total. It cannot be said that armed struggle has receded into the background.

Activities demonstrate that economic, political, diplomatic, and other nonmilitary measures on the part of the West, with respect to undesirable states, are intensified by the threat of employment of military force or its direct use. Here, the military force of the United States and its allies is often employed in contravention of generally accepted standards of international law or on the basis of distorted treatments of these standards for their own advantage, under the slogan of defending democracy. All this is inarguably influencing the nature of armed struggle.

First and foremost, one can see a trend of the disappearance of the line between states at peace and their shifting to a state of war. Let us take Syria. Before Russia entered the conflict on the government's side, for four years this country had, in fact, been conducting an undeclared war for the right to exist. When did this struggle turn from internal disorder into a military conflict? No state openly declared war against Syria, but all illegal military formations are being armed, financed, and controlled from abroad.

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In addition, the make-up of participants in military conflicts is broadening. Together with regular forces, the internal protest potential of the population is being used, as are terrorist and extremist formations.

The content itself of military operations is changing. Their spatial scale is expanding, and the intensity and dynamism are increasing. The temporal parameters for preparing for and conducting operations are



Russian Chief of the General Staff Gen. of the Army Valery Gerasimov speaks at Russia's Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces 24 March 2018 in Moscow. (Photo by RIA Federal News Agency)

decreasing. There has been a shift from sequential and concentrated operations to continuous and dispersed operations conducted simultaneously in all spheres of confrontation and in remote theaters of military operations. The requirements for mobile forces have become tougher.

A shift is taking place toward the comprehensive destruction of the enemy based on integrating the efforts of all strike and fire resources into a uniform system. The role of radio-electronic warfare, information-technical effects, and information-psychological effects is expanding. The increase in the ratio of precision weapons

ensures the precise and selective destruction of targets, including critically important ones, in real time.

In connection with the increase of effects capabilities against the enemy, the borders of theaters of military operations are substantially expanding. They encompass regions with targets of military and economic potential located at a significant distance from zones where military operations are being directly conducted.

The scope of the employment of robotic strike resources with remote control has grown.

In the complex, rapidly changing situation, the ability to effectively command and control troops and forces is acquiring special importance. Combat command and control systems ensure the maximum automation of support and decision-making processes, weapons control, communication of orders and delivery of information about their implementation.

Achievement of success in contemporary military operations is impossible without gaining superiority in the command and control of troops and forces.

The change in the nature of armed struggle is a continuous process. Its results, as a specific aspect of the development of military art, are distinctly reflected in the content of recent warfare. They are all substantively different from one another. And each time the last war was presented as a new-generation conflict.

Thus, from the point of view of military art, the war between the international coalition and Iraq in 1991, characterized by a sharp increase in the Air Force's contribution to the defeat of the Iraqi army, deep envelopments of defensive positions, and delivery of the main strike bypassing defensive lines, is of paramount importance. It included a prolonged non-contact phase and a powerful, short-duration phase of ground contact operations.

The war between NATO and Yugoslavia was proclaimed as a new-generation conflict, in which the goals were achieved without the active involvement of ground forces.

Today, individual military specialists are treating the military conflict in Syria as a prototype of “new-generation warfare.” Its main feature is that the state enemies of Syria are conducting covert, insubstantial operations without being drawn into direct military conflict.

Inarguably, each military conflict has its own distinguishing features. The principal features of future conflicts will be the extensive employment of precision weapons and other types of new weapons, including ro-

The reinforcement of force groupings on strategic axes is envisioned by using reserves and air assault forces. Taking this into account, the air assault forces are being developed as the foundation of the rapid reaction forces. Tank subunits have been formed to increase their combat capabilities and ensure independence of operation in air assault formations. Radio-electronic warfare subunits and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) subunits are being created as part of all formations.



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bot technology. Economic targets and the enemy’s system of state control will be subjected to priority destruction. In addition to traditional spheres of armed struggle, the information sphere and space will be dynamically involved. Countering communications, reconnaissance, and navigation systems will play a special role.

These are only the outlines of probable future warfare. At the same time, the spectrum of possible conflicts is extremely broad, and the Armed Forces must be ready for any of them. Therefore, the statement by prominent Soviet military theorist Aleksandr Svechin is relevant: “It is unusually difficult to foresee ... the situation of war. For each war it is necessary to develop a special line of strategic behavior; each war presents a particular case that requires the establishment of its own special logic, and not the application of some template.”

Taking into account the above-mentioned trends in the change in the nature of armed struggle, the development and training of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation are being carried out.

The possibility of the emergence of armed conflicts simultaneously on various strategic axes has predetermined the creation of interservice force groupings in the make-up of military districts to ensure the effective conduct of military operations in times of both peace and war. They are being improved by means of the balanced development of the Armed Forces’ services and branches and by an increase in the level of their outfitting with contemporary weapons and military equipment.

The geography of basing air and naval forces is also broadening. Here, special attention is being focused on the development of military infrastructure in the Arctic.

The experience of recent local wars, in particular, the operations on Syrian territory, has given a new impulse for improving the system of the comprehensive destruction of the enemy. To increase its effectiveness, special attention is being focused on the development of precision weapons. Groupings of long-range air-, sea-, and land-based cruise missile carriers have been created on each strategic axis, capable of providing deterrence in strategically important regions. The improvement of the structure of command and control organs, creation of special information support subunits, and introduction of software complexes have made it possible to reduce the preparation time for the combat employment of long-range precision weapons by one and a half times.

Recce-strike and recce-fire profiles are being created with the aim of ensuring the efficiency and continuity of fire effects against the enemy. Reconnaissance-information and information-control systems are being integrated with weapons systems of services and branches. Work is being done on the creation of an automated interservice recce-strike system. The result of this should be a reduction of the temporal parameters of the decision cycle for a fire task—from reconnaissance to target destruction—by two to two and a half times. That said, the precision of destruction will increase by one and a half

to two times, and the capabilities for guiding precision weapons will broaden.

The development of a system for employing UAVs is contributing to an increase in the effectiveness of fire destruction. At present, the development of future multipurpose complexes is being completed. Their introduction will make it possible to accomplish not only reconnaissance, but also strike tasks where the employment of other resources would be difficult or less effective.

Taking into account the steady broadening of the scope of employment of different types of radio-electronic means, forces and means of struggle against them are being developed. Forces are being outfitted with equipment for radio-electronic warfare against aerospace resources, navigation systems, and digital radio communications systems. Resources for countering precision weapons are being improved. Ground, air, and naval components of radio-electronic warfare systems are being developed in a balanced way.

The broadening of the scale of use of UAVs and the difficulties in destroying them using existing air defense resources require the creation of an effective counteraction system. Future systems for countering the employment of UAVs, including those based on new physical principles, are being developed and have begun to appear in the forces. Some of the work is being conducted proactively by industrial enterprises, which has resulted in the need for scientific and research organizations to verify it in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Defense. This also applies to other models of weapons and military equipment that are being developed independently by defense-industrial complex enterprises.

Priority attention is being focused on the development of an Armed Forces command and control system. Contemporary resources are being developed for combat command, control, and communications integrated into a uniform information domain.

The system for modeling the Armed Forces has received new development. Structural subunits to support an increase in the efficiency of decision-making are being created from the district level to the regimental level.

The level of automation of the processes of collecting and analyzing information about the situation and for planning combat operations is increasing because of the introduction of a uniform system of command and control of troops and weapons at the tactical level, the development of which was completed in 2017. This year

begins the delivery of complete sets of it to motorized rifle and tank formations and military units.

Outfitting mobile field command posts with new mobile automated systems increases mobility and the efficiency and stability of troop command and control when conducting combat operations.

A software and hardware array of the National Defense Management Center is being created to support the activities of command and control organs and federal organs of executive authority.

Requirements for troop training in the conduct of contemporary military operations are increasing.

In the training of command and control organs, special attention is being focused on the development of skills in commanders for rapid and completely justified actions. Skills for making nonstandard decisions are being developed.

Abilities to forecast the situation, decisively act, and preparedly take a justified risk are developing. The increase in the requirements for training commanders is conditioned by combat experience acquired in Syria. All troop commanders of military districts, combined arms armies, and Air Force and Air Defense armies, almost all division commanders and more than half of the combined arms brigade and regimental commanders, together with their staffs, have acquired combat experience there.

During operations meetings with Armed Forces leadership personnel, new approaches to training troops and conducting combat operations are being shared, problem issues of military art are being discussed, and ways of solving them are being worked out.

New forms of instruction are being introduced to increase the quality of training. For example, comprehensive tactical fire exercises and firing exercises have been introduced, where the mandatory element is working out problems of employing recce-fire and recce-strike profiles.

The readiness of command and control organs and troops to operate as part of interservice groupings that are being created on strategic axes is being reviewed at annual strategic exercises. Strategic force regroupings are being worked on during them, taking into account the enlargement of the spatial scope of military operations. In addition, troop readiness for rapid employment is being assessed by conducting surprise reviews, which, in their content, correspond to full-fledged exercises. Their

mandatory elements are operations (combat) planning, bringing troops and forces to a higher level of combat readiness, their operational deployment, and accomplishment of combat training tasks.

A priority trend in the development of the army and navy is to ensure a high level of troop and force readiness to accomplish tasks as intended. Therefore, military for-

In the future, an increase in the capabilities of precision means of destruction, including hypersonic, will make it possible to shift the principal portion of strategic deterrence tasks from the nuclear to the nonnuclear forces.

Taking into account the improvement of resources for aerospace attack and the continuing dissemination of

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mations characterized by a high level of training of personnel, with reliance on professionals (contract workers), are the basis of force groupings on strategic axes.

The increase in demand for personnel has led to a refinement of approaches to manning forces. At present, Ground Forces formations and military units, naval infantry, and Air Assault Forces are being manned according to the principle of two battalions—contract workers, one battalion—conscripts. This made it possible to have not only battalion tactical groups, but also, on the whole, formations and military units prepared for rapid employment.

Together with the development of general designation forces, the leading role of strategic nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence has been maintained. Today, the potential of strategic nuclear forces is maintained at a level that guarantees, under any conditions of the situation, that unacceptable damage will be done to an aggressor.

The strategic nuclear forces are developing through the establishment of modern strategic missile systems with increased ability to overcome the enemy’s missile defense and the creation of fundamentally new combat equipment, including hypersonic, highly mobile underwater resources for the delivery of nuclear weapons, and other strategic resources for armed struggle that have no equivalent abroad.

On 1 March, the president of the Russian Federation reported measures being undertaken in this direction in a message to the Federal Assembly.

missile technologies in the world, the country’s aerospace defense is developing. The capabilities of the system for warning about a missile attack are increasing. A radar field has been created along the country’s perimeter, which ensures the reliable detection of ballistic missiles at all types of flight trajectories. Echeloned air defense and an increase in the range of detection and destruction of air targets has been provided in the system of destruction because it has been reequipped with new, highly effective antiaircraft missile systems.

The system of mobilization deployment and mobilization training is improving. Decisions have been made on the creation of a state mobilization reserve, territorial forces, and an organization for preparing organs of authority at all levels to function in wartime. This approach makes it possible to use available state resources in the interests of the defense of the Russian Federation.

Under conditions of major transformations occurring in the Armed Forces, requirements are increasing for quality in the justification of decisions being made concerning their development, training, and employment. In this respect, the role of command and control organs in guiding scientific activities is increasing. First and foremost, this involves posing problem issues and current and future scientific tasks to science. And further—the organization and control of the course of research. And ultimately—the introduction of results that have been obtained.

To give relevance to research that is being conducted, professors and instructors of military education

institutions and specialists from the Ministry of Defense's scientific research organizations are undergoing a mandatory internship in the command and control organs on Syrian territory, as well as in the leading central command and control organs. The role of the Armed Forces Military-Scientific Committee is increasing as the principal coordinator of research being conducted.

Today, scientifically justified recommendations on current issues of the employment and development of the Armed Forces are required of the General Staff. First and foremost, this involves increasing the authenticity of scenarios being developed and of long-range forecasts of the development of the military-political and strategic situation. Priority tasks for military science must be studying future trends of interstate confrontation, the forms of employment of the Armed Forces, and the methods of conducting operations and combat in future military conflicts. Elaboration of the issue of the content of combat operations at the operational and tactical levels is important.

An urgent task is searching for balance between military and nonmilitary defense measures and safeguarding the country's security.

Taking into account approaches that have been worked out, recommendations should be prepared for the building and development of the Armed Forces as a whole, as well as their functional and support components. Here, proposed measures must be justified from a position of both military and economic expediency.

It is necessary to stimulate the development of priority trends of weapons and military equipment development. Requirements presented for future weapons systems should be formed based on the necessity of the most effective counter to forecasted military threats. In addition, they should correspond to developing military-economic conditions and to the level of development of the domestic defense-industrial complex.

The entry into the forces of fundamentally new means of armed struggle, such as hypersonic, lasers, and a number of others, requires the conduct of systemic research on refining their role and place in the system of armed struggle and on developing the foundations of their tactical employment.

It has become necessary to reexamine the contribution of various types of weapons to the destruction of the enemy. Existing calculation methods do not fully take into account the increasing precision capabilities of contemporary resources for armed struggle or results of the effects of new destructive factors. The development of theoretical foundations for the comprehensive destruction of the enemy has advanced to the foreground.

Existing training methods and educational literature should be reworked and updated, taking into consideration obtained experience and the contemporary level of development of military art.

One of the tasks of scientific organs is to analyze and generalize recent military conflicts, including Syria, and to develop practical recommendations based on this.

On the whole, for the successful accomplishment of tasks that have been set before the military-scientific community, military educational institutions must be able not only to simply generalize and analyze received information, but also to forecast events and variations of the development of a situation and to work on overcoming them.

To paraphrase well-known philosopher Immanuel Kant, one can say that military science must become like a servant who goes in front of her mistress with a torch and lights the way for her, and not one who walks behind her and carries the train of her dress.

In conclusion, I would like to wish everyone present here creative success and a fruitful and constructive collaboration. ■

Notes

1. The author would like to thank Timothy Thomas for his assistance in pointing out some of the similarities and differences between Valery Gerasimov's 2017 and 2018 presentations.

2. "Vlianie sovremenogo kharaktera vooruzhennoi bor'by na napravlenost' stroitel'stva i razvitiia Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Prioritetnye zadachi voennoi nauki v obespechenii

oborony strany" [The Influence of the Contemporary Nature of Armed Struggle on the Focus on the Construction and Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Priority Tasks of Military Science in Safeguarding the Country's Defense], *Vestnik Akademii voennykh nauk* [Bulletin of the Academy of Military Sciences], 62, no. 2 (2018): 16–22.