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Introduction

There are many issues that have motivated the development of this report. However, two primary ones are a need to inform Western analysts of Russia's military thought process, which differs from that in the West; and the need to demonstrate that Western mirror-imaging of its concepts onto Russian thinking doesn't always work, whether it be hybrid warfare concepts, anti-access area denial (A2AD) thinking, or grey zone concepts.

Russia doesn't utilize many of the concepts that the West does, and those that it does use may be interpreted in different ways or have other issues attached to them. There are also many assumptions about Russian military thought that are based on false premises.

Initially, the report examines several specific thought processes of the Russian military, to include some that are seldom if ever discussed in the West. These concepts include disorganizing an opposing force, reflexively controlling them, examining numerous forms and methods of applying force by branch of service, and finding innovative ways to employ military art, among other issues.

There are other concepts, such as indirect and asymmetric operations, that numerous countries examine but implement them in various ways according to national values and traditions. Russia is no exception to this process, as several authors have written on indirect and asymmetric operations.

Even the definition and concept of "war" is being reconsidered by Russia. In 2017, there was a long discussion among military specialists in Russia about the topic of war. These articles examined whether nonmilitary issues, to include the civilian use of cyber capabilities, had changed war's character.

Once it became apparent that cyber weaponry potentially could take out a nation's power or state control mechanisms with special operations to destroy critical

infrastructure targets (SODCIT), the definition of war apparently warranted reconsideration.

Over the course of the past two decades, Russian military thought also has benefited from the conduct of serious “lessons learned” analyses from their forces’ combat operations in Chechnya, Ukraine, and now Syria.

Russia’s Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, underscored the need to learn not only from the conflicts that involved Russian operations but also those that the West undertook, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, and they have done so.

Recent developments initiate new forms and methods of warfare and require new forecasts of the evolving nature of future war. For example, Russia’s military-industrial complex has developed new electronic warfare capabilities that offer additional protections for domestic command and control functions, while finding ways to debilitate foreign ones.

In turn these developments have enabled new applications of military art, which is defined as the use of knowledge in innovative ways. Gerasimov noted that advanced weaponry imparts a new impetus to ways of thinking about military art and stressed that warfare cannot be stereotyped, since each conflict has a logic all its own.

Cyber and digital issues have been introduced into underwater cables and satellites, creating an invisible digital environment with which to contend. These science and technology issues affect warfare, military art, and other issues such that it is fair to say that technology now determines strategy, since with such assets it is now possible to reach the other side of the globe in milliseconds.

On a geopolitical scale, Russia concentrates attention on trends in warfare that are developing and that affect how future war might unfold. It remains equally important for the nation to ensure its “equal security” when nuclear weaponry and other non-nuclear but strategic operations are involved.

Meanwhile, in the West, the focus has centered on several specific topics: hybrid or grey zone operations, multi-domain operations, A2AD, and C4ISR issues.

Each of these concepts is valuable, but they sometimes are mistakenly transferred onto Russian thought. Such stereotyping of Western concepts onto Russian actions causes analysts to miss some of the key directions in which Russian thought is taking the Defense Ministry.

This report attempts to offer some of these concepts and elements of contemporary Russian military thought for the consideration of Western analysts. It is composed of this chapter and eleven others. Chapters Two through Five discuss the basic building blocks of military thought and apply them to some contemporary examples.

Chapters Six through Eleven discuss how these elements are either applied or updated to fit some specific information-age advances in more detail. Some new concepts have emerged as well.

Chapter Two, “Russian Military Thought: Building on the Past to Win Future Hi-Tech Conflicts,” discusses the need to not only uncover the nature of future struggles but how to contend with them.

Similarities between Soviet and Russian thought are examined as well as the need to avoid stereotyping and to develop creative thought in Russian officers. It is the latter who must demonstrate initiative, boldness, decisiveness, and risk in their decision-making in a hi-tech environment, according to Gerasimov.

Chapter Three, “Russian Military Art and the Creative Employment of Knowledge,” focuses on Gerasimov’s desire to improve the application of military art, which he noted is due to new developments in weaponry. Technological advances are providing the impetus for such thinking.

The use of electronic warfare or cyber capabilities, for example, can debilitate adversary systems and thus alter the correlation of forces of the sides. The future promises to provide opportunities in artificial intelligence and quantum computing, so creativity has few boundaries at the moment.

Chapter Four, “Russia’s Reflexive Control Theory: Manipulating an Opponent to One’s Advantage,” discusses numerous uses of the concept over the years, from manipulating an adversary’s view of Russian military doctrine to altering an opponent’s understanding of information space.

Reflexive control theory is used in cyber and information capabilities as well as on the battlefield, according to Russian documents. It is a method of deception.

Chapter Five, “Russia’s Asymmetric Concept: Based on Military Art, Geopolitics, and Risk,” is based on a force’s intellectual-technical superiority over an opponent and focuses on uncovering a weak spot in an adversary’s systems that might have tactical or even strategic consequences.

It is an important theory, such that Gerasimov requested that the Academy of Military Science develop a holistic approach to the theory of asymmetric operations. He has not requested that in regard to any other issue.

Chapter Six, “Connecting GPS Interference with Russia’s A2AD Concept,” discusses Russia’s focus on disorganizing an opponent’s command and control capabilities. It appears that even at the brigade level, Russia has called for the development of a disorganization plan to be implemented against an opponent in time of conflict. From a Russian perspective it appears that the disorganization of command and control (C2D) is as important as A2AD.

Chapter Seven, “Russia’s Context for Cyber and Information Issues: Nine Thoughts for Consideration,” discusses the importance of the initial period of war, the worries of Russian cyber planners, and Russia’s view of the information-technical and information-psychological confrontation between or among adversaries. A short discussion of a cyber “dead-hand” and cyber’s use to conduct reflexive control operations is included.

Chapter Eight, “Electrons, Underwater Cables, Satellites, and Creative Thought: The Russian Military’s Invisible Information Environment,” examines specific elements of the information domain that are often invisible and thus extremely hard to predict with confidence.

No one really knows the intent of an electron except the executor of the action which may be an adversary or a surrogate; it is hard to know if satellites and underwater cables are being monitored and in what ways; and it is of course impossible to know what military thought is driving decision-makers in Russia in peacetime and wartime in an age of hypersonic speeds.

Chapter Nine, “Russia’s Military Discusses the Definition of War,” looks at several discussions that took place in 2017 and two follow-on discussions, one in 2018 and one in 2019. The focus was on the impact of nonmilitary capabilities and whether they might be considered as an act of war;

or whether only military actions can result in war. The 2017 discussion lasted from January through the summer. In August, there was to have been a summation of the results of the discussion, but this summary has never been published. The Defense Ministry is thus playing this one close to the chest.

Chapter Ten, “Russian Forecasts of Future War,” demonstrates how Russia will continue to periodically (one recommendation was every three to five months) update its forecasts of the potential for a war to occur.

The changing nature of war, due to technological achievements in weaponry, new trends in warfare (artificial intelligence, quantum computing, etc.), and new ways that the initial period of war might unfold, is the motivator for these periodic updates.

Chapter Eleven, “Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov: Shaping Russia’s Armed Forces and Military Thought,” begins with a brief description of Gerasimov’s military career and qualifications to be the Chief of the General Staff. It then focuses on two separate areas: interviews with him that appeared in the Russian press; and a focus on the seven detailed presentations he has made at the Academy of Military Science from 2013-2019.

Chapter Twelve, “Conclusions,” wraps up the discussion with a list of thought priorities and vectors used in Russia’s military establishment. The analysis ends with a short comparison of Russian military thought juxtaposed against that used by the Kremlin leadership.

The results are surprising and imply several cultural biases that exist in Russia that negotiators will need to take into consideration when dealing with either the President of Russia or the members of the Defense Ministry.

To summarize, the analysis that follows will demonstrate that the Russian thought process is a complex mixture of vision, deception, deterrence, outright power, innovative thought, preparation, and the development of alternate realities. Vision and foresight heavily influence Russia's focus on ensuring superiority in the initial period of war.

Deception includes reflexive control operations and deterrence measures accomplished through legal, information, demonstration, or other means to contain or scare opponents. Power is found in Russia's military-industrial complex, which produces nuclear and nonstrategic nuclear forces, weapons based on new physical principles, and the capabilities to strike deep into the heart of another nation with cyber capabilities. Innovation is most apparent in new applications of military art and the use of disorganization of an opponent's information and C2 capabilities.

Preparation is influenced by the Soviet past and Russian presence, from methods passed down through the years such as the importance of the initial period of war to today's lessons learned from observing foreign armies in action or from their own experiences.

Alternate realities and the rewriting of history provide certain rationales for specific situations.

Russian Military Thought: Building on the Past to Win Future Hi-Tech Conflicts

Knowing the adversary to perfection, assessing his action plan correctly, estimating precisely his forces, assets, and potential are among the major conditions that influence the success of an engagement, operation, or battle.

Introduction

مقدمه

Military thought in Russia and elsewhere is changing and advancing rapidly due to numerous technological achievements.

This has resulted in older concepts being reorganized, updated, or even discarded.

Cyber issues have increased strategy's reach to attain a global scale.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and a satellite's reconnaissance capabilities have affected the speed and influence of operational decisions.

Disorganizing an opponent's command and control facilities is now possible with advancements in electronic warfare.

Tactical actions now can have strategic impact in the age of instant media relations. Technology no longer just influences tactics, as Engels proposed. It now influences strategy.

One of the ways to know an adversary better is to study both how he thinks and how he includes technological changes into his military art and decision-making processes.

Several aspects of Russia's military thought process are discussed below, resulting in the sharpening of one's view on the topic.

Soviet and Russian military theoreticians have a reputation for creative thought, having developed numerous innovative concepts over the years.

Several commanders' concepts that come immediately to mind are the deliberations of Aleksandr Svechin on strategy, Georgii Isserson on operational art, and Makhmut Gareyev on the operational maneuver group, among many others.

New concepts are under study today.

As the character of conflict and potential for war has changed, educational and professional instruction in Russia has followed suit.

Commanders and professors teach subordinates how to operate independently, take the initiative in combat, and develop new and creative applications of military art.

Due to high-tech developments in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and other areas, Russian leaders are continually updating their views on emerging trends in warfare.

Now they make new forecasts of future war every four to six months due to the introduction of new technologies.

Trends and forecasting, along with contemporary requests for the development of new forms and methods of conflict for many branches of service, indicate that the basic concepts of past thought remain relevant today, since they are repeatedly revisited.

It is important to tap into Russia's rich historical and contemporary thought processes to better understand Russia's military developments—and improve our own.

First, Soviet and Russian military thought are compared in this chapter, and the similarities are intriguing.

Second, two Soviet books are examined.

One is on Soviet military thought from 1914-1941, written in 1980 and the other is on the culture of Soviet military thought, written in 1991.

Several of these concepts still affect thought today.

Third, a synopsis of military thought from 2007 to the present is offered, with a key warning from several prominent commanders to avoid stereotyping.

These perspectives include lessons learned from Chechnya, Ukraine, and Syria as well as the lessons commanders have learned from watching foreign armies.

Basic elements of historical military thought are now mixed with and updated by technology's new developments.

Past concepts such as annihilation, attrition, and maneuver are all dramatically affected today by the power and speed that technology has brought to the table.

Innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and other parameters of thought are vastly different in scope and scale due to their immediate consequences when affected by technology.