



General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, Chief of Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces, congratulates servicemen and veterans during a speech 1 October 2016 on Russia's Ground Forces Day, noting their significant contribution to the protection of Russia's national interests. (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation)

Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country

General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General
Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces

Translated by Dr. Harold Orenstein; Foreword by Timothy Thomas

Foreword

In March 2017, Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov spoke on the topic “Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country” at a conference held at the Academy of Military Sciences. This speech is presented here in direct translation (without conversion to vernacular English).¹

Gerasimov discusses several elements that characterize war today and what tasks to tackle. First, he lists the features that characterize contemporary military conflicts. They include noncontact operations, weapon costs, the use of robotics, various forms for employing forces, the use of information-psychological and information-technical effects, and other factors. Second, he discusses hybrid operations and the “flip side,” which he labels as a new perception of peacetime, when security and sovereignty are threatened by means other than violent measures, (i.e., nonmilitary means). Third, he lists tasks for the Academy of Military Science to study, to include the current forms of confrontation and the methods to oppose them, the development of counters to hybrid warfare means used by the West against Russia, the development of forms and methods of operations under various conditions, and the problems associated with organizing force regroupings. Fourth, he notes that Russia’s military capabilities have been improved via the balanced development of all services and branches. Specifically, he highlights five areas: the development of high-tech weapons, new communication means, intelligence, automated command and control, and radio-electronic warfare. Fifth, he underscores one thought on several occasions—that the use of military force is still the best way to describe “war.” Additionally, Gerasimov warns that there has not been enough attention paid by military scholars to certain topics including “combat operations against irregular enemy formations; employment of groupings consisting of regular forces and national militia detachments; combat under urban conditions, including where fighters are holding civilians as ‘human shields’; and post-conflict normalization.”

Finally, it should be noted that Gerasimov’s speech offered a good example of “how to think like a Russian officer,” as he mentions key elements associated with their military science: trends, forecasting, the correlation of types of struggles, and forms and methods. Special attention should also be paid to how Gerasimov characterizes “hybrid operations” as a U.S. and NATO activity and “hybrid warfare” as promoted by mass media and “as an established term is, at present, premature.” It is significant that when he states “the Russian army has shown skill [in Syria] in conducting new-type warfare,” new-type warfare is understood as the emerging depiction for Russian thinking on war.

Timothy Thomas, Foreign Military Studies Office

Remarks by General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, “Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country”

War has always been a constant companion of humanity. It was born before the appearance of the state and is one of the factors of the development of the state.

It is natural that the problem of defining the nature and essence of warfare has always been at the center of attention of domestic and foreign scholars. Clausewitz singled out the political nature of war, treating it as a continuation of politics by other means. He understood “other means” to be violent ones. He compared war to “extended single combat,” defining it as “an act of violence having the goal of forcing the enemy to carry out our will.”

Snesarev and Svechin—eminent Russian and Soviet military theorists at the beginning of the twentieth century—made a significant contribution to the development of “the science of war.” The principal trends of waging war, which are a result of not only political, but also economic and social relations, are an example of their research.

By the beginning of the 1990s, a firm understanding of war as a means of achieving political goals exclusively on the basis of employing means of armed struggle developed.

War as a phenomenon occupies the minds of both domestic and foreign military specialists. At present, the United States has a classification of military conflicts, including traditional and nontraditional warfare. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, American theorists proposed the inclusion of “hybrid warfare” in this classification. This refers to actions that occur in a period that cannot possibly be associated purely with war or with peace.

In domestic science and practice, a more weighty approach to the classification of

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contemporary military conflicts has been determined. It takes into account a greater number of attributes of wars and armed conflicts.

According to the *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, wars, together with armed conflicts, comprise the general content of military conflicts. They are

characteristics and features of contemporary military conflicts and clarifying their genesis and development.

Military conflicts at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century differ from one another with respect to composition of participants, weapons employed, and forms and methods of troop

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“a form of resolving interstate or intrastate conflicts with the employment of armed force.” At the same time, there is no definition of “war” in official international or domestic documents.

The term “war” is used in domestic military science. It is defined in the *Military Encyclopedia*. Today, the military and scientific community is dynamically discussing issues regarding a clarification of the concept of war.

Some scholars and specialists adhere to the classical treatment of the nature and content of war. Here, the objectivity of the evolutionary development of warfare as a phenomenon and the necessity of introducing changes into its theory are not rejected. Others recommend a fundamental reexamination of views on the nature and content of the concept of war, taking into consideration that armed struggle is not an obligatory attribute.

At present, one can encounter in print and in public discussion such phrases as “information warfare,” “economic warfare,” “hybrid war,” and a multitude of other variants of the use of the word “war.” All this must be analyzed and discussed. It is evident that a healthy scholarly discussion can only be something good for domestic military science.

The General Staff is focusing the necessary attention on resolving this issue. In 2016, a discussion on the nature of the concept of war under contemporary conditions was organized at the General Staff Military Academy.

A meeting of the military security issues section of the Security Council’s science board also examined this issue. During the discussion, general guidelines were developed regarding the necessity of analyzing the

activities. At the same time, military conflicts have not gone beyond the bounds of the conventional nature of war; their components are types of struggle such as direct armed struggle, political struggle, diplomatic struggle, information struggle, et al. New features have appeared in them such as a change in the correlation of the contribution of one type of struggle over another to the overall political success of a war, the overwhelming superiority of one of the sides in military force and economic might, etc.

There are a number of features that are characteristic for contemporary military conflicts.

The experience of NATO operations in Yugoslavia, which heralded the era of so-called “noncontact” or “remote” warfare, has not received widespread circulation. The reason is an objective one: restrictions of a geographic and economic nature were imposed on the achievement of the goals of the war. The cost factor for weapons and war began to play an important role in the selection of methods for conducting military operations.

A substantive feature of contemporary military conflicts is the increasing employment of the latest robotic complexes and unmanned aerial vehicles with varied designations and actions. New forms of employment of different forces and means have appeared. For example, during the operations in Libya, a no-fly zone was established and a naval blockade was carried out in combination with the joint operations of private military companies from the NATO countries and the opposition’s armed formations.

The leading countries of the world have declared that gaining information superiority is an indispensable condition of combat operations in their concepts

for the employment of armies. To resolve this task, mass information and social network resources are used. At the same time, the forces and means of information-psychological and information-technical effects are involved. Thus, in conflicts in the Middle East, the mobilized capabilities of the social networks Facebook, Twitter, and other information-technical effects were used widely for the first time.

The conflict in Syria was an example of the use of “hybrid” methods of operation. Traditional and nontraditional operations of both a military and nonmilitary nature were used simultaneously in this conflict. In its first stage, Syria’s internal conflicts were transformed into armed assaults by the opposi-

The spectrum of reasons and approaches for the use of military force is broadening. It is being used increasingly more often to support the economic interests of a state under the slogan of protecting democracy or instilling democratic values in some country.

The emphasis in the content of methods of confrontation is shifting in the direction of extensive employment of political, economic, diplomatic, information, and other nonmilitary measures, implemented with the involvement of the protest potential of a population.

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tion. Then, with the support of foreign advisors and dynamic information effects, these actions acquired an organized character. As a result, terrorist organizations, supplied and directed from abroad, joined the opposition to the government.

The United States and NATO countries are actively introducing “hybrid operations” in the international arena. For the most part this was conditioned by the fact that this operational variant does not fall under the definition of aggression.

The mass media are calling these methods “hybrid warfare.” However, using the phrase “hybrid warfare” as an established term is, at present, premature.

An analysis of the conflicts of the beginning of the twenty-first century points to a number of trends with respect to their transformation.

Today the blurring of the line between a state of war and peace is obvious. The flip side of “hybrid operations” is a new perception of peacetime, when military or other overt violent measures are not used against some state, but its national security and sovereignty are threatened and may be violated.

collapse in the energy, banking, economic, information, and other spheres of a state’s daily activities. One can cite as an example the results of the cyberattacks on Iran’s energy infrastructure in 2015.

An analysis of the characteristic features, traits, and trends in the development of contemporary military conflicts indicates that one general feature is inherent to all of them, one way or another: the use of military force. In some conflicts, as in the two U.S. wars against Iraq or in the NATO operation against Yugoslavia, this is almost classical armed struggle. In other conflicts, as, for example, in Syria, armed struggle is conducted by one side in the form of antiterrorist operations, and by the other side in the form of operations by illegal irregular armed formations and terrorist organizations.

Thus, the main content of contemporary warfare and warfare in the foreseeable future remains as before, and its principal indicator will be the presence of armed struggle.

Taking all these factors into consideration, it is still practical to keep the definition of “war” as given by the *Military Encyclopedia*.

In addition, the issue of determining the essence of war is not closed; it is current and requires continuous study and careful consideration. With this goal, a roundtable discussion on the theme, “Contemporary Warfare and Armed Conflicts: Characteristic Features and Traits,” will be held in August of this year [2017] within the framework of the program of the ARMIIA-2017 international military-technological forum. Scholars from the Academy

unparalleled in the world. Strategic aviation aircraft—our legendary TU-160s and TU-95MSs—are being modernized. This will make it possible that, as a whole, 90 percent of the strategic nuclear forces will be outfitted with contemporary equipment by 2020.

The strike potential of high-tech weapons in the armed forces will increase fourfold by 2021. This will make it possible to safeguard Russia’s security along the

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of Military Sciences should most actively participate in the round table and forum. It is necessary to continue work on interdepartmental standardization of military-political and military terms and definitions.

The growth of conflict potential in the world emphasizes the urgency of a number of tasks in the field of the country’s defense. The principal one remains as before—the guaranteed repulsion of possible aggression from any direction in the relationship of the Russian Federation and its allies. In peacetime, when carrying out measures for strategic deterrence, it is necessary to ensure the neutralization of threats to the country’s security by relying on available forces and means.

In this regard, the role and importance of forecasting and assessing military dangers and threats is growing. It is advantageous to implement them together with an assessment of economic, information, and other threats to the Russian Federation.

The capabilities of the armed forces are being improved by means of a balanced development of all services and branches and the development of high-tech weapons, contemporary means of communication, intelligence, automated command and control, and radio-electronic warfare.

At present, large-scale outfitting of the Strategic Rocket Forces with contemporary missile complexes is underway. The Navy is acquiring new atomic submarines with ballistic and cruise missiles that are

entire border perimeter. The percentage of contemporary weapons and military equipment in the Ground Forces will reach no less than 70 percent by 2021. The Aerospace Forces will acquire new-generation aircraft, which will increase the combat capabilities of aviation 1.5 times. The Navy will be supplied with contemporary ships equipped with high-tech, long-range rockets.

Robotics is playing a substantial role in increasing combat capabilities. The large-scale, but reasonable employment of various types of robotic complexes will increase the effectiveness of troop operations and ensure a substantial reduction in personnel losses.

Today, the armed forces have acquired a unique opportunity to verify and test new models of weapons and military equipment under complex climatic conditions.

It is necessary to continue to generalize the experience of the employment of the means of armed struggle in the Syrian events and to extract lessons to fine-tune and modernize them.

Victory in any war is achieved not only by the material, but also by the spiritual resources of the nation, its cohesion, and the attempts by all forces to oppose aggression. Therefore, the Russian Federation’s military-political leadership is exerting considerable efforts to restore the people’s faith in the army. Today the armed forces are arriving at a fundamentally new level of combat readiness, and this is finding full support in Russian society.

In the interests of further increasing the prestige of the armed forces, it is important to develop ties between the army and society. For this, it is necessary to improve systems for training servicemen and for the military-patriotic education of young people.

The resolution of current tasks for safeguarding the country's military security is impossible without their careful and advanced study.

At the same time, as the experience in Syria has shown, today we are resolving many tasks through practical experience, without having the opportunity to draw upon the recommendations of military science.

Thus, military scholars have not given the necessary attention to the problems of conducting combat operations against irregular enemy formations; the employment of groupings consisting of regular forces and national militia detachments; combat under urban conditions, including where fighters are holding civilians as "human shields"; and post-conflict normalization.

During the operation for stabilizing the situation in Syria, missions that were new for the troops were often resolved on the spot, taking into account the experience that had been acquired and expedience. Here, the Russian army has shown skill in conducting new-type warfare, organizing coalitions, and working with allies.

Russia's growing combat might and the capabilities of the armed forces to resolve strategic missions on a remote theater of military operations was demonstrated to the world community.

Practical experience has been acquired in planning and conducting air operations, delivering massive rocket and air strikes, and employing air-, sea-, and land-based high-tech weapons.

Deck aviation of the heavy aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* took part for the first time in combat operations, completing more than sixty sorties.

Under the guidance of Russian military advisors and with the continuous support of Russia's Aerospace Forces' aviation, large gangs were crushed in the provinces of Latakia, Aleppo, and Damascus. Control was reestablished over Palmyra.

It is extremely important that the combat experience that was gained be maximally used in the combat development and preparation of command-and-control organs and of the troops.

On the whole, the role of military science remains, as ever, fundamentally important, and its results should be drawn on in practice. In this regard, I would like to linger on the priority tasks of the Academy of Military Sciences and of military science on the whole.

First and foremost is the study of new forms of interstate confrontation and the development of effective methods for countering them.

It is necessary to focus special attention on determining preventive measures to counter the unleashing of "hybrid warfare" against Russia and its allies.

It is necessary to effectively study the features of contemporary military conflicts and, on the basis of this, develop effective forms and methods of troop and force operations under various conditions.

The problems of organizing and implementing force regroupings on remote theaters of military operations require separate research.

Nor have the general tasks of military science lost their urgency. They also require further work, development of new ideas, and acquisition of new knowledge.

I am sure that the scholars of the Academy of Military Sciences, together with representatives from Russia's military-science complexes, are making an important contribution to the resolution of these and other problems, which will make it possible to increase the defensive capabilities and security of our country. ■

Note

1. "Sovremennaiia voiny i aktual'nye voprosy oborony strany" [Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country], *Journal of the Academy of Military Sciences* 2, no. 59

(2017). Translated by Dr. Harold Orenstein. The article appears under the general heading of "Military-Scientific Conference at the Academy of Military Sciences."