



General of the Army Valery Gerasimov (*front*), chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces and Russia's first deputy defense minister, and Nikolai Pankov (*left*), Russia's deputy defense minister, attend a reception 9 May 2015 marking the seventieth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 at the Kremlin in Moscow. (Photo by Alexei Nikolsky, Russian presidential press service/ TASS/Alamy Live News)

# Russia's Forms and Methods of Military Operations

## The Implementers of Concepts

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When conducting military operations or employing troops, Russia's military relies on what it calls the *forms* and *methods* of warfare. The same terminology has been used for over forty years and is constantly updated to keep up with advances in military science and technology. For example, the chief of the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate for Operations, Colonel General Sergey Rudskoy, recently stated, "Approaches to the organization and conduct of military operations are changing, and new forms and methods of creating, deploying, and using troops are emerging."<sup>1</sup>

Even though the terms have been around for decades and hold a prominent place in Russian military thought, they have been overlooked by Western analysts. Perhaps they are often ignored in the West because they appear almost neutral or vanilla in character, as if no explanation is needed.

The following analysis will attempt to change that perception through the following method: a demonstration of Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov's interest in the topic; a description of how Russia's forms and methods have been defined as well as the terms' historical pedigrees; evidence of the concepts' repeated use today involving a host of operations; and how they relate to tactics. The word "attempt" was inserted on purpose since, even after examining numerous Russian articles on forms and methods, it is apparent the real essence of the terms remains elusive and evolving. With regard to the latter, artificial intelligence and quantum computing advances will introduce new forms and methods. Continued research and observation thus remain necessary. The intent of the article is simply to shed light on a very important topic for the reader's consideration.

The terms are extremely important, since they are the conceptual implementers of operations. Understanding forms and methods will help analysts better visualize how Russia intends to employ its forces. It is also important to know the meaning of forms and methods so that when Russian and NATO commanders gather to talk and trade concepts, they can better understand one another. This is a better approach for understanding Russian intentions than applying U.S. templates or concepts (e.g., multi-domain battle, hybrid war, gray area issues) to Russian force employments and thinking that one side "gets" the other.

## Russian General Staff Chief Gerasimov on Forms and Methods

The chief of the Russian General Staff is a strong proponent of the concept of forms and methods, further underscoring its importance. In a 2013 speech at the Academy of the General Staff titled "Principal Trends in the Development of the Forms and Methods of Employing Armed Forces and Current Tasks of Military Science Regarding Their Improvement" (and not "The Value of Foresight," as many think), Gerasimov noted that there are asymmetric forms and methods of operations.<sup>2</sup> Asymmetric actions, he stated, make it possible to level an enemy's superiority in an armed struggle, and have been widely proliferated. Special operations forces and internal opposition are among the forces conducting asymmetric actions, which create a constantly moving front of struggle on the entire territory of the opposing state. The forms and methods of information effects are constantly being improved as well.

The Russian General Staff is working on forms and methods for the use of aerospace forces, and Gerasimov invited the academy to actively participate in this work.<sup>3</sup>

A year later at the same venue, Gerasimov outlined the structure of the future military-scientific complex of Russia's armed forces.<sup>4</sup> Forms and methods of armed struggle were being studied at the General Staff's Center for Military and Strategic Studies, he stated, while science and research organizations examined new forms and methods of warfare to fit specific specialties. For example, land forces researched how to field the development of forms and methods of employing conventional

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ground forces, weapons, and military equipment in the interests of ground and airborne forces via three central science and research institutions. The air force research in the field of developing forms and methods included how to employ air and aerospace complexes, weapons, and military equipment at the Science and Research Institution of the Air Force. Finally, the navy was conducting research in the field of developing forms and methods of employing naval military systems, and creating and developing weapons and military equipment in the interests of the navy at its Military Training and Research Center.<sup>5</sup>

In a 2015 speech at the academy, Gerasimov did not mention forms and methods. However, in 2016 and 2017, at the same site, he did. In the 2016 presentation, he stated that today, in an age of globalization, weak state borders, and new information communications, the change of forms of resolving interstate conflicts has become a most important factor and provides an impulse to the development of methods of military operations. In contemporary conflicts, the methods of conflict being used are changing toward the all-inclusive employment of political, economic, information, and other nonmilitary measures implemented with the support of military force. Gerasimov added that when discussing the introduction of new forms and methods of armed struggle, we should not forget the fatherland's experience in the Great Patriotic War, the struggle against the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, peacekeeping activities, and the fight against piracy. Additionally, the Crimean and Syrian experiences should be of particular interest.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in 2017, Gerasimov stated that military conflicts today differ from those of the past with respect to the composition of participants, weapons employed, and forms and methods of troop activities. He added,

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.<sup>7</sup>

## Definitions

According to the 1983 Russian *Military Encyclopedic Dictionary*, forms of military operations are employed in conformity with the scope or scale of combat. They include operations, engagements, combat, and strikes. They also include combat arms capabilities, the objectives of military operations, and the nature of assigned missions.<sup>8</sup> A *Military Thought* journal article twenty-five years later demonstrated the further development of the concept. In 2008, authors O. V. Korol and N. L. Romas stated that the meaning of the term "form" describes the organization of the substance of the modes of combat actions. It represents the goal-oriented, organizational (to include command-and-control aspects), spatial, temporal, and quantitative constraints of the armed forces' employment. It is the organizational side of troop actions.<sup>9</sup> Electronic warfare units fit these criteria, as do combat units of all sorts, to include joint and cross-service organizations. (I thus understand forms to be the organization of operations, engagements, combat, and strikes.)

Methods, the 1983 *Encyclopedic Dictionary* states, include the aggregate of forms, modern techniques, and procedures employed in a specific logical sequence to achieve effective solutions to problems of military science. This is an applied area of the methodology of military theory and practice. It can be general and thus used for research of any type, or it can be more specific, such as determining the procedure of solving a specific problem.<sup>10</sup> Nearly twenty-seven years later, this concept was also



updated. A 2010 *Military Thought* article described a 1997 *Military Thought* definition of methods (ways) as a sequence and technique for employing forces and means to fulfill tasks in an operation. Authors M. G. Valeyev and N. L. Romas, not totally pleased with this definition, defined a method of warfare as a specific way that troops accomplish their mission by employing actions characteristic of a method's essence, combination of processes, techniques, and rules of their use.<sup>11</sup> For example, a technique might be to take an opponent by surprise. Their analysis suggested that troop armaments (i.e., weaponry's development) and the principles of military art (which could be simultaneous or consecutive actions involving strategy, operational art, or tactics) have the greatest impact on methods.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, to me, *forms appear to be organizations, while methods refer to weapons and military art*. Western analysts should continue to follow these two terms and watch for updates or clarifications. That is to say, there remains some skepticism as to the exact meaning of the terms, although their continued use is without question.

## Historical Pedigree

As noted above, there is a long chain of evidence of Russia's use of forms and methods. For example, in 1971, General Major Aleksandr A. Stokov wrote in the book *Military History*, "Changes in the Methods and Form of Conducting Military Operations." He wrote that war's fierce character will predetermine its goals and the methods and forms of waging it.<sup>13</sup> In 1984, from an article in *Military Thought*, author N. N. Kuznetsov noted that "the laws of armed struggle include the dependence of the course and outcome of an armed struggle on the correlation of combat power of the forces of the opposing sides ... the dependence of forms and methods of operations on weapons, equipment, and personnel, and the interdependence of the forms and methods of operations being conducted at different levels."<sup>14</sup> In 1991, Colonel General I. N. Rodionov wrote that the successful conduct of strategic operations is "impossible without a knowledge of the objective laws of warfare, correct foresight of the development of operations, and choice of the most effective forms and methods of military operations."<sup>15</sup> In 1997, S. A. Komov composed "On the Methods and Forms for the Conduct of Information War." He stated that the forms and methods of attaining information superiority over an enemy are key elements

of the information warfare discipline.<sup>16</sup> In 2002, Colonel General V. V. Bulgakov wrote "Armed Conflict: Forms and Methods of Troop Operations." He stated that the forms and methods for employing various forces and assets are diverse, from "classic" operations to nonstandard actions that differ in operations (in terms of scale, objectives, missions, and the forces and assets used).

Forms of operations include offensive actions where methods include maneuver, frontal attacks, strikes, encirclement; column escorts where methods included march security, search and destruction, facility security; special tactical actions where methods include ambush, terrain sweeps, sealing off areas; and state border protection where methods include search, sweeps, sealing off, holding positions, etc. Forms of combat operations include those in zones of responsibility where methods are sealing off areas and destroying the enemy; raid operations where methods include maneuver, capturing installations, destruction of enemy forces; taking built-up areas where methods include assault operations, sweeps, criminal manhunts, sealing off areas; stopping mass disorders and maintaining martial law where methods include enforcing curfews, area patrols, tactical barriers; and tactical barrier services where methods include sentry, patrolling, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Forms and methods are often introduced as a way to discuss topics covering various branches of service. In 2006, V. N. Zaritsky offered his opinion on operations in an article titled "Forms and Methods of Deploying Missile Troops and Artillery in Combined-Arms Operations."<sup>18</sup> In 2011, A. V. Dolgoplov and S. A. Bogdanov penned "The Evolution of the Forms and Methods for Waging Armed Struggle under Network-Centric Conditions."<sup>19</sup> In 2016, A. P. Korabelnikov composed "Promising Trends in the Development of Aerospace Defense Forms and Methods in the Russian Federation."<sup>20</sup>

This short summary only represents a small sampling of the number of articles and presentations that include the concept of forms and methods. It is obviously a standard approach to implementing strategy and operational art in both Soviet as well as contemporary times.

## Evidence of the Concepts' Continued Use and Importance

Russia's recent *National Security Strategy* states that goals are achieved by implementing military policy



through strategic deterrence, preventing armed conflict, improving military organizations and forms and methods for armed force deployments, and increasing mobilization readiness. The new *Information Security Doctrine* of Russia notes that state organization tasks include improving the forms and methods of interaction among forces ready to ensure information security. Even Russia's National Guard's intelligence services have "inherited the best traditions and adopted modern forms and methods of operations."<sup>21</sup> Thus, the term is utilized under a host of circumstances when referring to the state's security and military means.

Russian military commanders and ministers often use the concepts. For example, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, speaking at an education conference in November 2016, noted that training assumes special importance "under conditions of large-scale Army and Navy rearmament and development of new forms and methods of combat operations."<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, Western Military District commanders reported studying the organization of military activities for the development of new forms and methods of conducting combat operations.<sup>23</sup>

Russian president Vladimir Putin is shown a combat robot 20 January 2015 during his visit to the Central Scientific Research Institute of Precise Mechanical Engineering in the Klimovsk, Moscow region. (Photo courtesy of the President of Russia official website)

The views of two prominent Russian theorists add additional focus to the topic. From 2010 to 2017, S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov wrote articles on asymmetric warfare, new-generation war, futurology, the art of warfare, and forecasting future war. In each article, they emphasized the forms and methods of fighting. For example, they noted in their article on asymmetric war that asymmetric operations are characterized by qualitative differences in employing new (nontraditional) means of armed struggle and forms and methods of waging it, yet are close in content to the strategy of indirect operations.<sup>24</sup> Asymmetric measures include implementing measures to induce apprehension in an opponent's most vulnerable military assets and other strategically important facilities (command-and-control agencies, major industrial enterprises, hazards [dams, water, nuclear power

stations], and critically important communications facilities).<sup>25</sup> The strategy of indirect operations is characterized by the multiplicity of forms and methods of operations, including the conduct of information and remote (noncontact) confrontations, the segmented use of fires and strikes (land, air, sea), and, in the not too distant future, antisatellite operations.<sup>26</sup>

In a 2012 article, they stated that new technologies and concepts such as network-centric operations play a significant role in the forms and methods of future conflict.<sup>27</sup> In their 2013 article on new-generation war, they asserted that new forms and methods of employing joint forces in operations and engagements will evolve.<sup>28</sup> When discussing futurology, they stated that innovations must be taken into consideration, along with changes in the forms and methods of fighting.<sup>29</sup> In an article on the art of war, they opined that twenty-first century military art will have different forms and methods of struggle, where nonmilitary and indirect actions will dominate with stratagems and surprise helping in their application.<sup>30</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov assert forms and methods are the most important tasks of military art.<sup>31</sup> Finally, they stated that forecasts of future wars require a skillful combination of military, nonmilitary, and special nonviolent measures using a variety of forms and methods and a blend of political, economic, information, technological, and environmental measures, primarily by taking advantage of information superiority.<sup>32</sup>

Naturally, many other Russian leaders and authors discuss the forms and methods to implement concepts. For example, in a 2015 article, General A. V. Kartapolov noted that nonstandard forms and methods are being developed. Russia's new-type warfare includes "asymmetric" methods for confronting an enemy.<sup>33</sup> Finally, it was noted that the Russian General Staff Academy and the Advanced Research Foundation (much like the United States' Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) organized a competition, which resulted in 351 submissions; one of the winning essay entries was "Wars of the Future: Forms and Methods."<sup>34</sup>

## Tactics

In the June 2016 issue of *Armeyskiy Sbornik* (*Army Journal*), authors V. Kuznetsov and V. Verem'ev discussed the forms and methods of tactical actions in peacetime, in a period of a direct threat of aggression, and in wartime. The authors' conceptual approach to

tactical actions was presented to the journal's readership as a discussion tribunal for further examination. Listed here are the elements of the authors' outline for the three periods in question according to type, form, and method of tactical employment:

### **Title: The Theory and Practice of Preparing for and Conducting Tactical Operations in Various Periods**

**Tactical actions:** types, forms, methods

**In peacetime:** Types are rescue, liquidation, reconstruction, region, deployment, evacuation, supporting, support, march, and counterterrorism; forms are special, strike, maneuver, combat, and nontraditional; and methods are liquidation, evacuation, deliveries, accompaniment, attack, isolation, ambush, blockade, and transport.

#### **In a period of direct threat of aggression:**

Types are security, regional deployment, supporting, mobilization, march, and counterterrorism; forms are special, strike, combat, maneuver, and deployment; and methods are isolation, ambush, accompaniment, attack, blockade, deliveries, and transport.

**In wartime:** Types are offense, defense, meeting battle, withdrawal, regional deployment, actions in an encirclement, and march; forms are special, strike, combat, and maneuver; and methods are attack, penetration, raid, assault, ambush, and envelopment.<sup>35</sup>

Weapons did not appear to be covered in the author's discussion.

## Conclusions

Thus, the somewhat benign-sounding terms "forms and methods" of actions are actually very important, for they relate to the manner that Russia will use to implement concepts in search of future war victories. Specific issues, such as the manner in which disinformation, the principles of war, the use of cunning, and other military actions, can be found therein. Forms and methods also include nonmilitary, indirect, and asymmetric methods.

General of the Army Makhmut Gareev stated that covert cyberattacks, which can cause serious complications in the energy, banking, and financial systems of opposing countries, make it unclear in the minds of enemies against whom to declare war.<sup>36</sup>



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Further, forces can include the use of special operations forces and internal oppositions for the creation of a “continually operating front over the entire territory of the opposing state, and also information influence, the forms and methods of which are continually being improved.”<sup>37</sup>

At this point it should be clearer why the word “attempt” was used to describe the Russian military’s meaning of the concept “forms and methods” at the beginning of this article; and how important this concept appears to be to Russia’s military. There are many contradictory meanings that appear to move back and forth between the two. The easiest to understand, from this author’s point of view, remains Korol and Romas’s definition of forms (organization) and Valeyev and Romas’s definition of methods (weapons and military art).

As a result, when I testified before the House Armed Services Committee in March 2017 on Russian information operations, I used forms and methods to explain Russian actions in the information environment, offering the following explanation to congressional participants:

A “form” is an organization, which in regard to information warfare could include international media elements such as *Russia Today* or *Sputnik* or military developments, such as the creation of cyber and electronic warfare “science companies,” a cyber corps, which was announced in 2013 but for which no further information has been provided; information operation forces, announced in 2017; and the Advanced Research Foundation, Russia’s equivalent to the U.S.’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. These forms or organizations implement methods.

“Methods” are broken into two parts, weaponry and military art.

Weaponry includes hackers, reflexive control techniques, trolls, disinformation, deterrence capabilities, killer satellites, and other agents of destruction or influence. Military art includes the use of indirect and asymmetric capabilities to achieve specific goals, such as the exploitation of the West’s free press or an indirect attack on the cyber infrastructure of another nation. Russia’s excellent contingent of algorithm writers ensures that the nation will be strong for years to come in writing software as weapons that can eavesdrop, persuade, or destroy.<sup>38</sup>

Whether my understanding of the concept is correct or not, the definitions from Korol, Valeyev, and Romas do offer a way to think about Russian operations. Thinking about how a force would be organized, what types of weaponry (traditional, nontraditional, cognitive, etc.), and which elements of military art (deception, maneuver types, etc.) might be utilized helps to establish in staff thinking how a force could be arrayed against you.

Clearly, Russia has used and is continuing to develop, from the requests of Gerasimov, forms and methods of warfare that adapt to current situational and technical developments. They are key indicators as to how future war will be organized and perhaps even conducted. Western analysts would do well to study further the definitions of these two words. To do otherwise would be as delinquent as Russians not seeking to understand U.S. terms such as hybrid, gray area, and multi-domain battle. ■

## Notes

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