

RUSSIAN MILITARY THINKING – A NEW GENERATION OF WARFARE¹

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This article deals with how Russian warfighting is described and discussed in contemporary Russian military theory. The approach has been studies, analyses and interpretations of primarily Russian sources as prominent Russian journals, but also Western analyses and interpretations of contemporary Russian warfighting discussions. Theoretical considerations are limited to the period from the 1980s to the present day – 2014. Mainly Russian experts on military theory (Bogdanov, Chekinov, Gareev, Kiselyov, Kuralenko, Morozov, Slipchenko, Vinogradov, Vladimirov, Vorobyov) have been studied, but also sources from some prominent Western experts on Russian warfare (FitzGerald, Gileotti, Kipp, McDermott).

The driving force in the Russian development of her warfighting capability is based on how the national threat perception directly or indirectly influences the conditions for political affairs and conducting of military operations and activities. Soviet and Russian military theorists have a common tradition of belief in depth operations where science and technology have an influence on the success of a war (Ogarkov 1995, Savkin 2002). Technology and science generate products and systems that directly affect and change threats, military capabilities and abilities. Technological and scientific developments are important factors for military concepts, long-term defence planning, and the development of military doctrine and capabilities. New Russian weapons and weapon systems are based on the application of ‘new physical principles’ (Zakharov 1995). The coordination of Russian national/regional /international resources provides synergistic effects. Furthermore, the coordination of Russian civil resources with Russian military capabilities

¹ Based on Mattsson, P, A. 2014. *Russian Military Thinking – A New Generation of Warfare*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence University.

is an example of how surprising changes influence Russian military goals, means, methods and risks. This Russian dialectical development occurs sequentially and in parallel at the political, strategic, operational and tactical levels (Blank 2014).

The Russian military theorist Sliptjenko's theory of sixth generation warfare (Slipchenko 1999) deals with long-range, high-precision weapons that can be launched from various weapon platforms on land, sea, in the air and in space. New technology is crucial to this type of warfare, particularly electronics, and information and communications technology. Sometimes this type of warfare is called 'contactless war' and has its conceptual basis in modern missile wars: the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Falklands War in 1982 and the First Gulf War in 1991. Sixth generation warfare has three main objectives: 1) Defeating an opponent's armed forces (in his own territory), 2) Destroying an opponent's economic activity and potential – and 3) Subverting or changing an opponent's political system. Russian criticism of this theory initially took the form of emphasis on and expressions of technical and scientific determinism (read also the prioritisation of space, air and naval forces over ground forces). War can be waged against all enemy territory and even beyond the boundaries of the operational area. The goal is to attack the political and military leadership in order to quickly achieve the stated political and military strategic objectives (Slipchenko 2004).

The use of various capabilities is optimised to create effects at as high a level as possible. Indirect and asymmetric means and methods are used in advance of the operation, in order to identify and effectively influence the opponent's weaknesses during the preparation for and conduct of operations. In this new form of warfare, war does not stop; it occurs continuously as preparation for war with varying intensity and centres of gravity (Vinogradov 2013). Appropriate military strategic means are used to create a favourable strategic position and operational environment. Society will be weakened, destabilised and isolated (Vorobyov & Kiselyov).

Firstly, it is attacked from within with psychological warfare, information warfare and agents of influence. When the situation is favourable there

are coordinated strikes using Special Forces, remote and specialist weapons, volunteers and armed civilians deep into enemy territory. Remote weapons come from all dimensions. The fight against an opponent is launched from space, air, land, sea and from under the sea, preferably coordinated in time and space. Key political leadership, vital societal infrastructure, regional leadership functions and military infrastructure are neutralised, or destroyed if possible, across the operational area. In the recent debate about new generation warfare, cultural and existential war has emerged as an important complement to the kinetic, contactless and remote war. In sixth generation warfare the various phases are conducted both sequentially and in parallel. This 'spear point' warfare is but a part of the total warfare capability and is one of several military and civilian instruments available to Russia during conflicts and war (Chekinov & Bogdanov 2013).

In conclusion, the new generation of warfare is said to have had an evolutionary development and to be based on Soviet military theoretical thinking between the 1920s and the late 1980s. Discussions about revolutions in military affairs (RMAs) in the 1980s and 1990s in the Soviet Union/Russia should also not be forgotten (FitzGerald 1997). Hybrid concepts have emerged during the last ten years and were initially limited to a tactical perspective on irregular warfare. However, concepts have gradually broadened and taken on a more strategic nature, which has led to some including economic and political factors, and the media. Hybrid warfare has also been ascribed existential and ideological characteristics, increasing its complexity (McCulloh & Johnson 2013). Sixth generation warfare has evolved in the period 1995-2005 and consideration has been given to the experience of globalisation, the New World Order,² new scientific achievements and applications, not least in the fields of science and technology. The increased importance of 'soft power' and psychological operations also shows that behavioural sciences and other 'soft' sciences will have increased significance (Belsky & Klimenko 2014). The strength of sixth generation warfare is its

² See for example, Kissinger, H. *World Order. Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, London, UK, Penguin Books, 2014 & Huntington, S, P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, NY, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1996/2011.

synthesis of thinking about how goals, means, methods and risks should be managed in an era of radicalised world order and major scientific advances. The goals are political, the means are national syntheses, the methods are combinations of tradition and innovation, and the risks lie in how surprise and initial force can be balanced (Morozov 2014).

In Sweden, hybrid warfare has primarily been linked to a method of warfare that combines various strategies, tactics and combat techniques in the same area of conflict. Actors have access to both regular and irregular military capabilities. Particular emphasis is put on how actors make use of communications, the mass media, command and control, support and access to sophisticated weapons systems, which means that those actors pose a hybrid threat – and are difficult opponents.³ The traditional British view has been to associate hybrid warfare with asymmetric warfare and indirect methods. In US descriptions many have tried to use the terms hybrid threat and hybrid warfare to cover almost every complexity of war and its grey areas from civil conflict to full-scale war. A combination of ‘regulated’ regular warfare with forms of terrorism and criminality creates an opponent that allows the ends to justify the means. Criticisms of the concept are its universal use, its limitation to specific operational areas, its primarily tactical leaning (combat techniques at the tactical level) with defensive methods, although sometimes with the use of offensive weapons, and its lack of linkage to overall objectives and strategic means, such as mass media, politics and economics – despite the fact that the media and political elements have often been a strength for hybrid actors (Liegis, Bērziņ, Šešelgytė & Hurt 2014).

The direction of Russian strategic thinking is based on the country's socio-economic development, national security strategy, foreign policy concepts and strategies for the development of the Russian Arctic zone, and security policy up to 2020. Russia advocates a multipolar world with several regional centres of power, instead of the unipolar world of today with strong American military, economic and political dominance. The major external threats to Russia are NATO and the USA. NATO's

³ Militärstrategisk doktrin 2011 (Military-Strategic Doctrine 2011), Stockholm, Försvarsmakten (Swedish Armed Forces), p. 29.

military expansion in areas neighbouring Russia, the US conventional 'Prompt Global Strike' programme and strategic missile defence are seen as the most dangerous threats. The destabilisation of countries neighbouring Russia and internal unrest and fragile stabilisation in Russia [by other countries] are perceived as serious threats. Information and communication technology is said to constitute a threat to world peace. The doctrine describes the characteristics of current military conflicts (The Military Doctrine of the Federation of Russia 2014). They are conclusions drawn from previous Russian studies of contemporary wars and there may be links to the 2013 Defence Plan. These characteristics describe the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and they have a solid basis in sixth generation warfare, and a clear adaptation to the current era (Gerasimov, 2013).

In his book 'General Theory of War', Major General Alexander Vladimirov describes Russian military thinking through the ages, where war is seen as a social phenomenon and military power as an important part of a nation's power. Vladimirov's interpretation of Sliptjenko's theory of the 'generations of war' is rooted in a dialectical development of objectives, means and methods. In his book there are ideas about war and warfare, beyond sixth generation warfare, which involve means such as missiles in all dimensions, non-lethal weapons, and new weapons derived from scientific advances, based on nanotechnology and genetic engineering. He states that the length of the armed phase decreases because it represents the completion of attack operations, which are preceded by diversionary operations against a nation's civil society, political leadership and the population, and reinforced by information warfare and psychological warfare. Precision weapons, with greater precision, countermeasures and increased kinetic effect, along with a greater ability, in near real time, to identify and analyse political and military strategic goals are swiftly, and not unexpectedly, of decisive significance at the beginning of the military phase of a war. This also requires Special Forces and agents deep in an opponent's territory. Various military functions are digitised and can thus allow a greater ability to wage war in real time and – with powerful intelligence, platforms, strike systems and logistics systems – the continuous monitoring of both friendly and enemy forces' operations. This means

that warfare may be conducted at various degrees of depth and can quickly be redirected in terms of geographical direction and distance. A greater capability for diversionary operations is also needed. Vladimirov predicts a sharp increase in precision weapons, an increase in non-lethal means and unmanned military craft that can be autonomous and armed. Operational and strategic mobility is increased through improvements in the performance of weapon systems and platforms (Vladimirov 2013).

The character of the new war is developed by Major General Alexander Vladimirov from a clear distinction between peace and war between nations, to a permanent war as a natural part of a nation's existence. The previously clear boundary between war and peace blurs into a transitional state of insecurity and fear of war. These new wars are no longer 'surgical' wars involving 'pure' military units against each other, but have become total wars between nations and civilisations, where the nation's entire capacity is exposed to the impact of war, which generates national synergy and strategic force. Vladimirov sees three aspects of this 'eternal' total war. The first change is a shift from war about territory to war of an existential nature. The second change is a transition from war to destroy and annihilate to the exertion of political, economic and cultural influence. The third change is the transition from a war of direct military engagements to a contactless war. The 'existential war' means that the objectives of war no longer involve physically conquering a territory or specific place. As the strategy is no longer destruction, intimidation and annihilation, so the direct use of military means is not the most important method used against other military means. Instead the strategy becomes the use of means for indirect action where the goal is to create organised chaos. Methods can include several variants of the generations of warfare. 'Cultural war' involves creating political, economic and cultural influence. These objectives require means that provide direct influence over an opponent (politicians, the military and the population), internal collapse (to influence the opponent's national elite), a proactive cultural war through various mass media and agents of influence, a war in depth using special forces and commercial irregular forces, and the pursuit of a war about the understanding of war and psychological warfare. The 'contactless war' is seen as a war using remote means of warfare that reduce direct engagement, although Special Forces and

subversive units operate in depth in enemy territory. War against an opponent must, therefore, be understood as a total war continuing with varying degrees of intensity and on several concurrent lines of operation. War is waged within an opponent's territory using subversive and diversionary operations, which are then complemented with remote attacks – from land, the air, the seas and from space – when the strategic and operational conditions are favourable (Vladimirov 2013).

This article has described how the Russian military thinking and development of warfare has evolved from Soviet and Russian war experiences from the 1910s to the 21st Century combined with some brilliant ideas of military theorists. The Russians present a different – and for westerners – a challenging way of military thinking and perception of war. War is based on Russian national interests; its historical, cultural and geopolitical position. Warfare involves both civilian and military resources, and the first phases of the modern war are directed at vulnerable civilian soft and hard targets of the adversary's societies. In the revised Russian military doctrine (December 25, 2014) information and psychological warfare are described as both military threat and danger. Especially, patriotic upbringing of youth in Russia is one of the mechanisms to protect the population against western information war. Another mechanism is to work with historical education and present Russian history in positive view. A specific focus should be upon the positive portrayal of Soviet history. The Modern Russian warfare is a synthesis of all national assets and it is led from the new National Command Centre in Moscow, where all important civilian authorities and institutions are subordinated to the General of the Army Valerij Gerasimov, chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, in crises and war.

The Russian build-up of military capabilities and aggressive military interventions in Ukraine has shown a new threat for the western countries. Many have misunderstood and underestimated the Russian military thought, capabilities, and intentions. The threat is a combination of an indirect and direct approach, a combination of asymmetric and symmetric means, as well as a combination of soft and hard methods. Vulnerabilities of the adversaries is analysed and exploited by necessary

available (civilian and military) means as deep operations inside the adversaries territories, as well as a remote contactless warfare by kinetically, informational, psychological and cyber warfare. Western countries must meet these Russian threats by a national coordination by civilian and military defence, as well as a broad international political and military cooperation.

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