

# The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War



But what happens when the bear looks like a stray dog, or a cute little kitten?

Call it **non-linear war** (which I prefer), or **hybrid war**, or **special war**, Russia's operations first in Crimea and then eastern Ukraine have demonstrated that Moscow is increasingly focusing on new forms of politically-focused operations in the future. In many ways this is an extension of what elsewhere I've called Russia's '**guerrilla geopolitics**,' an appreciation of the fact that in a world shaped by an international order the Kremlin finds increasingly irksome and facing powers and alliances with **greater raw**

**military, political and economic power**, new tactics are needed which focus on the enemy's weaknesses and avoid direct and overt confrontations. To be blunt, these are tactics that NATO—still, in the final analysis, an alliance designed to deter and resist a mass, tank-led Soviet invasion—finds **hard to know how to handle**. (Indeed, a case could be made that it is not NATO's job, but that's something to consider elsewhere.)

Hindsight, as ever a sneakily snarky knowitall, eagerly points out that we could have expected this in light of an at-the-time unremarked **article by Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov**. In fairness, it was in *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er*, the *Military-Industrial Courier*, which is few people's fun read of choice. Nonetheless, it represents the best and most authoritative statement yet of what we could, at least as a placeholder, call the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' (not that it necessarily was his confection). I and everyone interested in these developments are indebted to **Rob Coalson** of RFE/RL, who noted and circulated this article, and the following translation is his (thanks to Rob for his permission to use it), with my various comments and interpolations.

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*Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013

*(My comments are indented and italicised and in red, and the **bold** emphases are also mine)*

## THE VALUE OF SCIENCE IN PREDICTION

General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation

**In the 21st century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template.**

The experience of military conflicts — including those connected with the so-called coloured revolutions in north Africa and the Middle East — confirm that **a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war.**

*There is an old Soviet-era rhetorical device that a 'warning' or a 'lesson' from some other situation is used to outline intent and plan. The way that what purports to be an after-action take on the Arab Spring so closely maps across to what was done in Ukraine is striking. Presenting the Arab Spring—wrongly—as the results of covert Western operations allows Gerasimov the freedom to talk about what he wants to talk about: how Russia can subvert and destroy states without direct, overt and large-scale military intervention.*

### **The Lessons of the 'Arab Spring'**

Of course, it would be easiest of all to say that the events of the “Arab Spring” are not war and so there are no lessons for us — military men — to learn. But maybe the opposite is true — that precisely **these events are typical of warfare in the 21st century.**

In terms of the scale of the casualties and destruction, the catastrophic social, economic, and political consequences, such new-type conflicts are comparable with the consequences of any real war.

The very “rules of war” have changed. **The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.**

*For me, this is probably the most important line in the whole piece, so allow me to repeat it: The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness. In other words, this is an explicit recognition not only that all conflicts are actually means to political ends—the actual forces used are*

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*irrelevant—but that in the modern realities, Russia must look to non-military instruments increasingly.*

The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures — applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population.

**All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special-operations forces. The open use of forces — often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation — is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict.**

*This is, after all, exactly what happened in Crimea, when the insignia-less “little green men” were duly unmasked as—surprise, surprise—Russian special forces and Naval Infantry only once the annexation was actually done.*

From this proceed logical questions: What is modern war? What should the army be prepared for? How should it be armed? Only after answering these questions can we determine the directions of the construction and development of the armed forces over the long term. To do this, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the forms and methods of the use of the application of force.

*What Gerasimov is signalling here, and it may prove an important point, is that the Russian military needs to be tooled appropriately. This may mean a re-opening of the traditional hostilities with the politically more powerful defence industries (that want to pump out more tanks and the other things they produce) over quite what kind of kit the military gets. When former defence minister Serdyukov announced a moratorium on buying new tanks, Putin slapped him down and restated the order. Shoigu and Gerasimov will have to be more savvy if they want to make progress on this one.*

These days, together with traditional devices, nonstandard ones are being developed. The role of mobile, mixed-type groups of forces, acting in a single intelligence-information space because of the use of the new possibilities of command-and-control systems has been strengthened. Military actions are becoming more dynamic, active, and fruitful. Tactical and operational pauses that the enemy could exploit are disappearing. New information technologies have enabled significant reductions in the spatial, temporal, and info

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gaps between forces and control organs. Frontal engagements of large formations of forces at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past. Long-distance, contactless actions against the enemy are becoming the main means of achieving combat and operational goals. The defeat of the enemy's objects is conducted throughout the entire depth of his territory. The differences between strategic, operational, and tactical levels, as well as between offensive and defensive operations, are being erased. The application of high-precision weaponry is taking on a mass character. Weapons based on new physical principals and automatized systems are being actively incorporated into military activity.

*All worthy enough, but in fairness nothing we haven't heard before.*

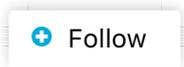
Asymmetrical actions have come into widespread use, enabling the nullification of an enemy's advantages in armed conflict. Among such actions are **the use of special-operations forces and internal opposition to create a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state, as well as informational actions**, devices, and means that are constantly being perfected.

*This, on the other hand, does show something of a different nuance, with the renewed emphasis on "internal opposition", something which harkens back to Soviet-era playbooks rather than post-Soviet military doctrine, which was largely cleared of such language except in some specific contexts such as counter-insurgency.*

These ongoing changes are reflected in the doctrinal views of the world's leading states and are being used in military conflicts.

Already in 1991, during Operation Desert Storm in Iraq, the U.S. military realized the concept of "global sweep, global power" and "air-ground operations." In 2003 during Operation Iraqi Freedom, military operations were conducted in accordance with the so-called Single Perspective 2020.

Now, the concepts of "global strike" and "global missile defense" have been worked out, which foresee the defeat of enemy objects and forces in a matter of hours from almost any point on the globe, while at the same time ensuring the prevention of unacceptable harm from an enemy counterstrike. The United States is also enacting the principles of the doctrine of global integration of operations aimed at creating in a very short time highly mobile, mixed-type groups of forces.

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In recent conflicts, new means of conducting military operations have appeared that cannot be considered purely military. An example of this is the operation in Libya, where **a no-fly zone was created, a sea blockade imposed, private military contractors were widely used in close interaction with armed formations of the opposition.**

*Yes, these were all used in Libya, but whether they were that new is open to question. The key point for Gerasimov, I believe, is that actions such as the no-fly zone that were presented as (and have traditionally been) the preserve of humanitarian interventions were really used to favour one side in the conflict, the rebels. Combined with the use of mercenaries to support them, this makes Libya a convenient synecdoche for the kinds of operations the Russians are really contemplating, in which the mask of humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping can shield aggressive actions.*

We must acknowledge that, while we understand the essence of traditional military actions carried out by regular armed forces, we have only a superficial understanding of asymmetrical forms and means. In this connection, the importance of military science — which must create a comprehensive theory of such actions — is growing. The work and research of the Academy of Military Science can help with this.

### **The Tasks of Military Science**

*In the main, I will comment less on this section, because often it really doesn't connect so clearly with the first half. However, taken together it is worth noting that it presents a pretty scathing picture of modern Russian military thinking. I can't help but wonder whether Colonel General Sergei Makarov, head of the General Staff Academy since only last year, must be feeling a little anxious about his prospects.*

In a discussion of the forms and means of military conflict, we must not forget about our own experience. I mean the use of partisan units during the Great Patriotic War and the fight against irregular formations in Afghanistan and the North Caucasus.

*These are interesting examples, not least because they omit other, equally or even more appropriate examples, such as the Soviet experiences fighting the basmachi rebels in 1920s Central Asia and supporting anti-colonial insurgencies in Africa, Asia and Latin America during the Cold War. In the latter, for instance, the Soviets tended to use military assistance, handfuls of specialists and trainers, third-party agents and extensive propaganda, influence and subversion operations*



*political goals, ideally with as little direct conflict as possible and without letting Moscow's hand be too obvious. Sound familiar?*

I would emphasize that during the Afghanistan War specific forms and means of conducting military operations were worked out. At their heart lay speed, quick movements, the smart use of tactical paratroops and encircling forces which all together enable the interruption of the enemy's plans and brought him significant losses.

Another factor influencing the essence of modern means of armed conflict is the use of modern automated complexes of military equipment and research in the area of artificial intelligence. While today we have flying drones, tomorrow's battlefields will be filled with walking, crawling, jumping, and flying robots. In the near future it is possible a fully robotized unit will be created, capable of independently conducting military operations.

How shall we fight under such conditions? What forms and means should be used against a robotized enemy? What sort of robots do we need and how can they be developed? Already today our military minds must be thinking about these questions.

The most important set of problems, requiring intense attention, is connected with perfecting the forms and means of applying groups of forces. It is necessary to rethink the content of the strategic activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Already now questions are arising: Is such a number of strategic operations necessary? Which ones and how many of them will we need in the future? So far, there are no answers.

There are also other problems that we are encountering in our daily activities.

We are currently in the final phase of the formation of a system of air-space defense (VKO). Because of this, the question of the development of forms and means of action using VKO forces and tools has become actual. The General Staff is already working on this. I propose that the Academy of Military Science also take active part.

**The information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy. In north Africa, we witnessed the use of technologies for influencing state structures and the population with the help of information networks.** It is necessary to perfect activities in the information space, including the defense of our own objects.

The operation to force Georgia to peace exposed the absence of unified approaches to the use of formations of the Armed Forces outside of the Russian Federation. The Senten



attack on the U.S. consulate in the Libyan city of Benghazi , the activization of piracy activities, the recent hostage taking in Algeria all confirm the importance of creating a system of armed defense of the interests of the state outside the borders of its territory.

Although the additions to the federal law "On Defense" adopted in 2009 allow the operational use of the Armed Forces of Russia outside of its borders, the forms and means of their activity are not defined. In addition, matters of facilitating their operational use have not been settled on the interministerial level. This includes simplifying the procedure for crossing state borders, the use of the airspace and territorial waters of foreign states, the procedures for interacting with the authorities of the state of destination, and so on.

It is necessary to convene the joint work of the research organizations of the pertinent ministries and agencies on such matters.

One of the forms of the use of military force outside the country is peacekeeping. In addition to traditional tasks, their activity could include more specific tasks such as specialized, humanitarian, rescue, evacuation, sanitation, and other tasks. At present, their classification, essence, and content have not been defined.

Moreover, the complex and multifarious tasks of peacekeeping which, possibly, regular troops will have to carry out, presume the creation of a fundamentally new system for preparing them. After all, the task of a peacekeeping force is to disengage conflicting sides, protect and save the civilian population, cooperate in reducing potential violence and reestablish peaceful life. All this demands academic preparation.

### **Controlling Territory**

It is becoming increasingly important in modern conflicts to be capable of defending one's population, objects, and communications from the activity of special-operations forces, in view of their increasing use. Resolving this problem envisions the organization and introduction of territorial defense.

Before 2008, when the army at war time numbered more than 4.5 million men, these tasks were handled exclusively by the armed forces. But conditions have changed. Now, countering diversionary-reconnaissance and terroristic forces can only be organized by the complex involvement of all the security and law-enforcement forces of the country.

The General Staff has begun this work. It is based on defining the approaches to the organization of territorial defense that were reflected in the changes to the federa



Defense.” Since the adoption of that law, it is necessary to define the system of managing territorial defense and to legally enforce the role and location in it of other forces, military formations, and the organs of other state structures.

We need well-grounded recommendations on the use of interagency forces and means for the fulfillment of territorial defense, methods for combatting the terrorist and diversionary forces of the enemy under modern conditions.

*Again, here defence is used in Aesopian terms to address issues of offence. I don't dispute there is a genuine need for this kind of coordination, and it may reflect the confidence of a **recently re-empowered General Staff** in trying to reassert some kind of supreme authority over national defence after years in which the security agencies have been dominant. But primarily I read into this a recognition of the importance for the close coordination of military, intelligence and information operations in this new way of war. If we take Ukraine as the example, the GRU (military intelligence) took point over Crimea, supported by regular military units. In eastern Ukraine, the Federal Security Service (FSB), which had thoroughly penetrated the Ukrainian security apparatus, has encouraged defections and monitored Kyiv's plans, the Interior Ministry (MVD) has used its contacts with its Ukrainian counterparts to identify potential agents and sources, the military has been used to rattle sabres loudly on the border—and may be used more aggressively yet—while the GRU not only handled the flow of volunteers and materiel into the east but probably marshalled the **Vostok Battalion**, arguably the toughest unit in the Donbas. Meanwhile, Russian media and diplomatic sources have kept up an incessant campaign to characterise the 'Banderite' government in Kyiv as illegitimate and brutal, while even cyberspace is not immune, as 'patriotic hackers' attack **Ukrainian banks** and **government websites**. The essence of this non-linear war is, as Gerasimov says, that the war is everywhere.*

The experience of conducting military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq has shown the necessity of working out — together with the research bodies of other ministries and agencies of the Russian Federation — the role and extent of participation of the armed forces in postconflict regulation, working out the priority of tasks, the methods for activation of forces, and establishing the limits of the use of armed force.

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**You Can't Generate Ideas On Command**

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The state of Russian military science today cannot be compared with the flowering of military-theoretical thought in our country on the eve of World War II.

Of course, there are objective and subjective reasons for this and it is not possible to blame anyone in particular for it. I am not the one who said it is not possible to generate ideas on command.

I agree with that, but I also must acknowledge something else: at that time, there were no people with higher degrees and there were no academic schools or departments. There were extraordinary personalities with brilliant ideas. I would call them fanatics in the best sense of the word. Maybe we just don't have enough people like that today.

### **Ouch. Who is he slapping here?**

People like, for instance, Georgy Isserson, who, despite the views he formed in the prewar years, published the book "New Forms Of Combat." In it, this Soviet military theoretician predicted: **"War in general is not declared. It simply begins with already developed military forces. Mobilization and concentration is not part of the period after the onset of the state of war as was the case in 1914 but rather, unnoticed, proceeds long before that."** The fate of this "prophet of the Fatherland" unfolded tragically. Our country paid in great quantities of blood for not listening to the conclusions of this professor of the General Staff Academy.

What can we conclude from this? A scornful attitude toward new ideas, to nonstandard approaches, to other points of view is unacceptable in military science. And it is even more unacceptable for practitioners to have this attitude toward science.

In conclusion, I would like to say that **no matter what forces the enemy has, no matter how well-developed his forces and means of armed conflict may be, forms and methods for overcoming them can be found. He will always have vulnerabilities and that means that adequate means of opposing him exist.**

*This is an obvious, if necessarily veiled allusion to Russia's relative weakness compared with the West today and, probably, China tomorrow. The answer is not to not have conflicts, but rather to ensure they are fought in the ways that best suit your needs.*

We must not copy foreign experience and chase after leading countries, but we must outstrip them and occupy leading positions ourselves. This is where military science takes



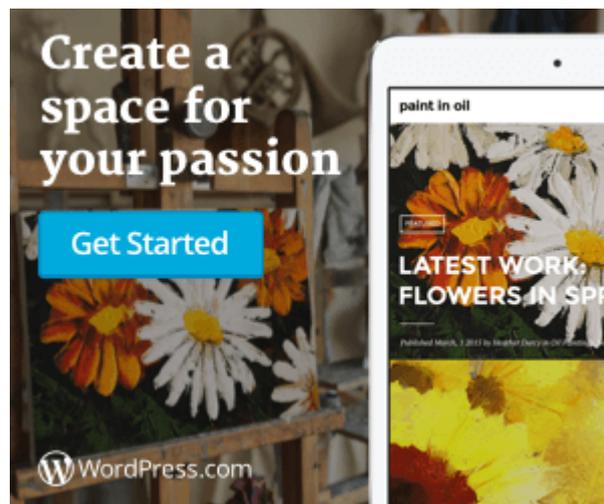
role.

The outstanding Soviet military scholar Aleksandr Svechin wrote: "It is extraordinarily hard to predict the conditions of war. For each war it is necessary to work out a particular line for its strategic conduct. Each war is a unique case, demanding the establishment of a particular logic and not the application of some template."

This approach continues to be correct. Each war does present itself as a unique case, demanding the comprehension of its particular logic, its uniqueness. That is why the character of a war that Russia or its allies might be drawn into is very hard to predict. Nonetheless, we must. Any academic pronouncements in military science are worthless if military theory is not backed by the function of prediction.

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