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

Author: Timothy Thomas

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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.¹

Introduction

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 article, 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.

¹ A. M. Goncharov, V. N. Dybov, and Yu. D. Podgornykh, "Actual Aspects of Situational Assessment," *Voennaya Mysl' (Military Thought)*, No. 2 2017, p. 34.

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. These traits were present in Soviet times but were not a focal point for Western analysts. For example, one Soviet-era author noted regarding risk-taking that it "could be said that this is the highest manifestation of a commander's military skill, experience, endurance, and ability to anticipate."² Western analysts at the time did not appear to center attention on this Soviet concept. Today, how Russia is accommodating such traits with technological changes is where the important forecasts of military actions lie.

The Soviet Past Influences the Present

Before examining two books on Soviet military thought, it is worth noting that there are trends that have carried over from the Soviet to the Russian way of configuring and handling threats and thought:

- In Soviet times, the leadership expressed concern over capitalist encirclement. Today its leaders fear NATO encirclement.
- In Soviet times there was a tremendous study underway that considered how to take advantage of the initial period of war (IPW), where mobilization priorities were examined along with deployment schedules. Today the IPW is focused on the potential insertion of viruses into an adversary's infrastructure in peacetime which can serve as an "on-call" capability if war erupts. The goal will be to destroy the state control facilities of an adversary.
- In Soviet times mobilization issues were a key takeaway from World War II's lessons learned, since the USSR was unprepared for war's beginning. In a 2016 article devoted to the Kavkaz-2016 exercise, General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov noted that optimizing mobilization issues remains crucially important. The Kavkaz exercise included the mobilization of the military-industrial complex and numerous administrative offices in the region.³ In 2018 Defense Minister Shoygu opened an operational-mobilization leadership conference.⁴ A mobilization focus further increases Russia's preparations for the IPW.
- In Soviet times, there were studies of deep strikes that included ways to use aviation and special forces to strike deep into an opponent's territory and strike at command posts. Today such cyber deep strikes can potentially disrupt or destroy stock markets while hypersonic weaponry is designed to strike capitals on the other side of the globe. Technology is causing thought to move forward at hyper speed.
- In Soviet times there were political officers. In 2018 the Defense Ministry developed a Main Military-Political Directorate to handle the moral and psychological stability of servicemen.

² F. F. Gaivoronsky and M. I. Galkin, *The Culture of Military Thought*, Moscow: Voennoye Izdatelstvo, 1991, p. 19.

³ Aleksandr Tikhonov, "In the Southwest Sector," *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* Online, 16 September 2016.

⁴ See, for example, "Russian Federation Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu Opened Russian Federation Armed Forces Operational-Mobilization Leadership Conference," *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 12 February 2019.

- In Soviet times there were exhibitions of World War II trophy weapons, designed to foster patriotism, that crossed the country. This tradition has been reinstated with a Syrian trophy train that has been touring Russia since 23 February with plans to visit 60 cities. Military bands, song and dance ensembles, and a field kitchen accompany the train, as well as mobile recruitment posts for contract service.⁵
- In Soviet times, the economy was an appendage of ideology. In a 2018 report it was stated that patriotism is the main reason for adopting decisions in the sphere of economic development. Economic projects “show off a bridge or missile, or pipeline, and in passing employ people to create them, provide work for manufacturing plants, and so forth” which ultimately “serve the purposes of patriotic propaganda.”⁶

In addition, several prominent Russian journalists have noted that the Soviet experience is being repeated. Russian journalist Pavel Felgengauer offered the following statement about the Soviet and now Russian experience in the Middle East:

The present return to the Middle East is increasingly akin to a repetition of the Soviet experience of 30-40 years ago: the confrontation with America, which has already entirely officially been renamed from ‘partner’ to ‘probable adversary’; the growing costs and uncompensated supplies of arms, equipment and apparatus to Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Lebanon. The capital investments in the development of useless overseas bases. The loss of life and losses of equipment; and the most displeasing—local allies, who, as in the past, are dragging our country increasingly deeply into endless, pointless, and bloody quarrels.⁷

Well-known journalist Aleksandr Golts offered a similarity with the Soviet period from a different perspective. He wrote in 2019 that the Defense Ministry is drawing a closer link between the military and civilian enterprises, since new developments (drones, cyber, artificial intelligence, social networks, etc.) influence both. There is also a constant requirement to foster patriotism, as in Soviet days, and an emphasis on mobilization potential.

Golts claims that the military-civilian relationship has been a constant in the minds of Russian citizens for a few centuries based on the nation’s history. He wrote that the “militarization of Russian minds” is a process that strongly influences modern leaders and it is based on old Russian and Soviet-era thinking. Golts wrote that Nicholas I purportedly wrote in the margins of a geography textbook that Russia is a military state and its purpose is to menace the rest of the world; that Alexander III believed Russia’s only friends are the army and navy; and that Russian political philosopher Petr Struve wrote that the army is the living embodiment of Russian statehood. Golts’s point is that the military component of statehood has always influenced Russia’s national consciousness in many ways. Militarism has been a way of state building that Putin has

⁵ Vladimir Ruvinskiy, “Trophies of a New War. Exhibition of Trophy Arms from Syria Looks Not Like a Continuation of Soviet Tradition but Like a Simulacrum,” *Vedomosti (Bulletin)*, 28 February 2019.

⁶ Vitaliy Shklyarov, “Business Soviet-Style. How Patriotism is Taking control of the Economy,” *Novaya Gazeta (New Newspaper) Online*, 17 June 2018.

⁷ Pavel Felgengauer, “‘Above the Arabian Peaceful Hut.’ Israel Could Once Again Become the Adversary,” *Novaya Gazeta (New Newspaper) Online*, 24 January 2019.

adopted, as it helps legitimize his regime and his system for governing Russia and elevates his global influence.⁸

Another 2019 article noted that President Putin's preoccupation is not with domestic or economic affairs but rather with foreign policy and defense building. He has shaped a Russian corporate identity with the security services at the helm, resulting in their production of conspiracy theories and a desire for control, like the Soviet period. Finally, it was noted that Russian strategic culture is shaped by the recognition of post-Soviet territory as a sphere of Russian influence, with Ukraine and Belarus as important territorial buffers against Western influence. Soviet and now Russian strategic patience indicates the Kremlin is waiting for a window of opportunity to take advantage of these issues.⁹

Two Important Books on Military Thought

This section discusses two books of interest about Soviet military thought. They are I. A. Korotkov's 1980 *History of Soviet Military Thought*, which covered Soviet thought from 1914-1941 and the 1991 work of editors F. F. Gaivoronsky and M. I. Galkin titled *The Culture of Military Thought*. The latter covers much of the period in the few decades before the fall of the Soviet Union. Both offer interesting insights into the thought patterns of two major periods in Soviet history. Some of their main points of emphasis still influence Russian military thought today.

Korotkov

Korotkov's work consisted of six chapters. They covered Marxist-Leninist theory; the preparation of a Soviet military-scientific cadre; the struggle for the confirmation of Marxist-Leninist theory as a military branch; lessons from war's experiences; basic problems of military art; and the theory of military economics.¹⁰

Korotkov stated that he had limited his book to researching both the origin of problems associated with military theory and a determination of the nature of a possible war and its initial phase. New weapons and the impact of shifting to a war economy for future operations were also discussed. He stated that the goal of military thought is to uncover the nature of future struggle and its direction at every period of development.¹¹ He listed as important sources for understanding military thought the speeches of political and military figures on war and military affairs. Korotkov noted that Lenin had cautioned against using arbitrarily chosen facts to create "subjective" concoctions. He added that Lenin had underscored the importance of studying context as well, stating that theory must take into account "the relationship of an epoch to a given war."¹²

⁸ Alexandr Golts blog post, "Why Militarization of Russian Minds Happens and Why it is Dangerous," *Ekho Moskvyy (Echo Moscow) Online*, 19 February 2019.

⁹ Valeriy Solovey, "'What Are They Doing?!' How the Thinking of Russia's Ruling Elite is Organized," *Republic*, 25 February 2019.

¹⁰ I. A. Korotkov, *The History of Soviet Military Thought*, 1980, pp. 3-4. The translation of Chapters 1-3 of this work are the product of Francis J. Sullivan's 1983 Student Research Report at the US Army Russian Institute, Garmisch Germany. However, actual pages in Korotkov's book are cited for reference purposes.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 15, 21.

Strategic plans must correspond to objective conditions of a struggle, and they must be flexible, since even defeats must be endured and studied. A retreat can win time¹³ and offer another opportunity for success. Soviet military thought in the 1920s began to develop the theory for organizing and conducting deep operations.¹⁴ This continues today with Russia's focus on using cyber operations to attack deep into an opponent's territory.

Korotkov notes that M. V. Frunze wrote during the 1920s that military doctrine's goal is to reveal the nature of military confrontation and determine whether passive defense or active offensive operations are required. Doctrine indicated the system of training required and the system for preparing the country's security.¹⁵ Frunze listed the tasks for developing the theoretical foundations of military doctrine in the following way:

To study the nature of the social environment that surrounds us, to define the nature and essence of military tasks that stem from the essence of the state itself; the study of those conditions which guarantee their fulfillment not only in relation to material prerequisites but spiritual ones as well; the study of the peculiarities of building up the Red Army and the methods of struggle that are applied in it; agreement between the demands of military science and art of those peculiarities that are objectively and inseparably connected with the nature of our proletarian state and the revolutionary epoch which we have experienced.¹⁶

Military theory's conclusions are used to build up the military via military doctrine, that is, the officially accepted views of military and Kremlin officials.¹⁷ It was noted that:

Politics, without a doubt, plays the deciding role in determining the means and methods of conducting war, but we must also direct our attention to the internal logic of the development of military technology in order to correctly define in the future the general tendencies of military affairs. Taking into account the changes in the means and methods of struggle, politics then defines their direction and possible use in war.¹⁸

Korotkov's chapter on military art was of interest. It covered the social-political character of future war, war's strategic concept and the content of the initial period of war, questions on the theory of operational art and tactics, and the character of the future use of the various branches of the armed forces. Many of the thoughts he uncovered are in use today in the political-military speeches of President Putin.

In Korotkov's section on strategy, he stated that an incorrect determination of war's future scale will adversely affect how a nation conducts it. Everything an armed force requires must be

¹³ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 90-91.

provided when war appears imminent. A reliable estimate of the war's scale and duration are needed.¹⁹

In the early 1920s, the reliable estimate in use appeared to predict a war of attrition and not one of lightning strikes and annihilation. However, the point was debated, even at the Frunze Military Academy in 1926. K. D. Golubev believed in a strategy of annihilation and B. B. Kasani believed in a strategy of attrition. Other analysts contributed to the discussion. Svechin's *Strategy* focused mainly on annihilation, and he believed annihilation would lead to faster political goals and the use of fewer resources. His theory was predicated on the existence of four things: that military preparations for conflict were available; that there were good lines of communication; that there was a superiority in forces; and that the enemy state appeared politically weak.²⁰

Other theorists supported the thought of annihilation as well. It was noted that "the best strategic defense was a swift offense into the depth of an enemy country, turning foreign territory into a theater of military operations."²¹ Attacks ensured that the initiative and surprise were in friendly hands, which a defensive posture could not produce. Frunze, while in favor of annihilation, did not discard attrition, noting that idealizing conclusions was the wrong approach to take. He believed there are times when withdrawal may be necessary to prepare for a new offensive. Thus, the idea was to remain flexible²² and, perhaps more like the thoughts of Svechin, take into consideration that each situation may have a logic all its own.

Lenin wrote that all forms of struggle should be used, especially swift and unexpected changes in an operation's form. He also stated that he preferred the offensive and that pauses in such operations had to be expected. Frunze emphasized that maneuver was preferable over positional forms of military operations. He considered the latter as an exception and not a main form of operations.²³

Writing on the initial period of war, Korotkov noted that the mobilization period and the massing and strategic deployment of the main forces were indicators of war's preparation. The political and economic situation in a country along with geographic and other factors help determine the tempo of the deployment. He added that whichever force could accomplish these goals in the shortest time period would achieve strategic superiority.²⁴

Gaivoronsky and Galkin

Gaivoronsky and Galkin's book covered numerous topics. The work's 16 chapter titles are listed below. They offer their own insight into the elements that made up Soviet military thought in 1991. Many of these topics probably influence Russian military thought today. They are:

PART ONE: The Essence and Distinctive Features of Military Thought

1. Military Thought: The Specific Nature of Cognition

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 120-123. The translation of the rest of this section on Korotkov's book was provided by Dr. Harry Orenstein.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 123.

²² Ibid., pp. 123-125.

²³ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 129-130.

2. The Interrelation of Thinking and Language
3. The Creative Nature of Thought
4. Military-Theoretical Thought
5. Military-Practical Thought

PART TWO: The Methodology, Logic, and Methods of Military Thought

6. World View and the Methodology of Military Thought
7. The Dialectic of Military Thought
8. The Formal and Logical Bases of Thought
9. Methods of Cognition of Military Phenomenon
10. The Systemology of Military Thought
11. Mathematical Modeling and Scientific Thought

PART THREE: The Perfection of the Culture of Thought

12. The Stimuli of Creative Thought
 13. The Teaching Process in Institutes
 14. The Rational Organization of Combat Preparations, Learning
 15. War's Experiences, the Patterns (Rules) of the Development of Military Affairs
 16. The Culture of Military Thought and Style of Work
- Conclusions

Only chapters one, three, seven, and eight are discussed below. What is interesting is the focus on creative thought and risk-taking, which are also stressed today.

In Chapter One the authors write that thought is the product of the interaction of objective (surrounding reality) and subjective (knowledge and a thinking person's attitude to it) processes. The latter is affected by technology, since battle is perceived as a complex, organized process where speed in recognizing a situation is more important than it was before. This is due to combat systems that rely on precision and rapid response.²⁵

It is necessary to know not only one's forces, the authors write, but also those of an adversary, otherwise there is no way to understand how to efficiently use one's weapons or offer operational goals that ensure success. Operations require daring creative thought as one side tries to disorganize the other and impose its will while preserving friendly forces and command and control capabilities.²⁶

Risk-taking is an important element of military thought and it "could be said that this is the highest manifestation of a commander's military skill, experience, endurance, and ability to anticipate."²⁷ It must be based on reasonable caution and a "profound knowledge of the nature of the battle" and the conditions of the adversary. The greatest risk can be inactivity. A commander must examine objective facts and consider them as constantly changing and developing.

²⁵ F. F. Gaivoronsky and M. I. Galkin, *The Culture of Military Thought*, Moscow: Voennoye Izdatelstvo, 1991, pp. 9, 12-13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Contradictions must be unearthed, and commanders must have the ability to creatively apply their knowledge of theory to real situations.²⁸

In Chapter Three, “The Creative Nature of Thought,” it was noted that military art is where creative thinking fuses with practical activities. Creativity offers something qualitatively or quantitatively new and previously nonexistent. It is novel and original, procuring new knowledge outside the framework of existing ideas (these actions also contain some risk, the authors note). The creative process is a synthesis of cognition, emotions, and knowledge that can produce an epiphany.²⁹ Knowledge is the prerequisite of creativity while inspiration and enthusiasm motivate its discovery.³⁰ Other attributes of an officer who possesses creativity are: receptivity to new ideas; overcoming conservatism and inertia with independent judgement; a critical and daring nature; tenacity and persistence; and intuition.³¹ The latter usually is described as the immediacy of result with no real logical reasoning or rationale, just discovery.³² Finally, there is premonition, the advanced reflection of reality or the potential for foresight. Premonition can be based on a cause-effect link among the past, present, and future.³³

In Chapter Seven, “The Dialectic of Military Thinking,” it was noted that there is a difference between objective and subjective factors because the former does not depend on the will and desire of humans. The latter is determined by them. The cognition process is affected by both factors, as the following example demonstrates:

When developing a plan for a forthcoming battle, the commander and his staff highlight the objective circumstances affecting its outcome, including the correlation of forces, both qualitative and quantitative, terrain conditions, weather, and so on. Nevertheless, occasions are not uncommon where even the most favorable circumstances are not taken advantage of and the mission is not accomplished because of actions with subjective causes: an inadequately thought-out decision, erroneous instructions during combat operations, and so on.³⁴

The authors state that it is important to continually follow the thoughts of an adversary and to highlight any changes in their tendencies or other aspects of organizing their forces. An opponent’s military art, like that of friendly forces, depends on his level of knowledge, intellect, and other qualities, to include his battle experience and lessons learned. The authors add that “what is true in military knowledge is what has been confirmed by the totality of practical military experience.”³⁵ The task for officers lies not in using stereotypes or ossified ways of thinking or “minted coins,” the latter being something ready-made. The task is to extract something different or create something new.³⁶

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 34, 36-37.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

³¹ Ibid., p. 45.

³² Ibid., p. 47.

³³ Ibid., p. 81.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

In Chapter Eight, “The Formal and Logical Bases of Thought,” a definition of formal logic was offered. It was said to be a science about the laws of correct thought and the demands made of consistent and evidentiary discourse. Numerous laws of logic were then offered. They were:

- The law of unity was said to reflect the relative stability and distinctiveness of objects and the phenomena of reality.
- The law of contradiction’s essence is to prevent logical contradictions during discourse.
- The law of the excluded middle aims to exclude contradictions in thought about the same object taken at the same time and in the same relation.
- The law of sufficient grounds is that any correct (and objectively true) idea must be reasoned and based on sufficient grounds.

The authors added that the main form of an indirect thought is an inference, and there are three types: induction (particular to general), deduction (general to particular), and analogy (particular to particular).³⁷

A final discussion in the chapter was on the balance of forces in combat. It was noted that to ensure victory, calculating possible changes in a balance of forces during military operations is important as well as determining ways to create or maintain them. Victory may, however, not go to the stronger side if superiority is achieved by an adversary on the main direction or through surprise or the use of a combat method that was unexpected. Further, foresight can help attain victory if it is able to objectively analyze the present and use important lessons from the past, thereby providing a quantitative and qualitative prognosis of the probability of an event.³⁸

Modern Times

Much of the content of Soviet and Russian thought has carried over to today. Subordinates are taught to be creative, innovative, and risk-taking. Examples are provided later below from major contemporary leaders of Russia’s military that highlight these consistencies. However, other specific elements of thought have appeared as well.

For this author, a methodology of Russian thought has developed that might be considered the “five factors” for attaining at least a partial understanding of how to piece together Russian thought. These factors are the trends, forecasts, strategy, forms and methods, and operational design of Russian thought. Initially, trends in military developments and warfare are discussed, which help forecasters predict what a future war might look like. Once this picture is developed, a strategy is orchestrated to achieve successful results in a future conflict based in a particular region of the world. When revolutionary changes occur in situational analysis or due to technological enhancements that might affect warfare everywhere, new military doctrine (the equivalent to US military policy) may be developed (the last doctrinal change in open source writing occurred in 2014). Next, leaders require that theorists develop the proper forms and methods to conduct the conflict. Various branches of service require different forms and methods. An operational design is then constructed to carry out the plan on specific strategic or operational axes. New ways of

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 123-127, 134-137.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 253-254.

employing military art are encouraged, that is, new ways to employ weaponry or forces (to view a detailed discussion of this methodology, see the footnote below).³⁹

Other more recent discussions of military thought are often associated with military art. General of the Army Makhmut Gareyev, President of the Academy of Military Science in Moscow, offered an example of new thinking in military art in 2017 in the journal *Military Thought*. His analysis was noteworthy for its focus on the creative use of knowledge and its combination with many of the items (trends, forecasting, etc.) listed above.

Gareyev began by recounting two important lessons he learned in fighting in WWII—the need for reconnaissance and fire destruction. Russia’s current focus on the development of UAVs and reconnaissance-fire and -strike complexes fit this requirement. Ground troops and other branches of service are important but not as important as the two lessons from WWII in Gareyev’s opinion.⁴⁰

To train for future wars, Gareyev recommends focusing on operational-tactical tasks, teaching or developing creativity, and directing methods of organizational (form) work. While military art contains several long-lasting principles and tenets (surprise, mass, etc.), new ones are required due to new technological achievements. He adds that it is not just experience from the past that informs military art but also “those underlying sometimes hidden sustainable processes and phenomena that have a tendency for further development.”⁴¹ He defined military art in the following manner:

Military art begins where, on the one hand, profound theoretical knowledge and its creative employment help a commander to better see the overall relationship of phenomena that have occurred and to more confidently orient himself to the situation; and, on the other hand, the commander, without fettering himself by a general theoretical plan, attempts to penetrate more deeply into the essence of the situation that has actually developed, grasp its advantageous and disadvantageous features, and, proceeding from their analysis, find original solutions and methods of action that are, to the greatest degree, appropriate with respect to the specific conditions and assigned combat mission.⁴²

Gareyev noted that military art’s essence is determined by the relationship between objective and subjective factors observed and developed by the commander. The fundamental law of military art is that “the greatest enemy of military art is templating and schematism.”⁴³ Peacetime is when educational institutes must train officers to take the initiative and learn to work independently. This is also when it is necessary to examine and foresee whether changes in the nature of armed conflict had occurred and if new requirements have been made on command and

³⁹ For an extended discussion of trends, forecasting, strategy, and forms and methods, see Timothy Thomas, “Thinking Like a Russian Officer,” Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, website.

⁴⁰ M. A. Gareyev, “On the Development of Qualities and Skills in Officers Necessary for Demonstrating a High Level of Military Art,” *Voennaya Mysl’ (Military Thought)*, No. 12 2017, pp. 72-73.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

control systems.⁴⁴ He ended his article noting that it is improper to copy the standards of other armies, but it is acceptable to learn what worked and what did not work for them. He stated that the closer integration of nonmilitary means and forms of confrontation with military ones must be considered more thoroughly.⁴⁵ The following section indicates that Gareyev's opinion matches that of most Russian officers at this time.

Military Leaders and Educational Institutes on Officer Training

This section follows, in temporal order, some of the articles in Russian journals on military thought. Many adhere to the same principles established years earlier in the Soviet period.

In 2007, in the journal *Military Thought*, an article was published under the title "The Way Military Leaders Think: Looking into the Past." It recounted some of the thoughts of famous leaders from Napoleon to Clausewitz to Moltke, among many others. At the end of the article author A. V. Lebedev listed criteria and intellectual qualities that form, from his perspective, the bedrock of intellectual thought. Thus, while not purely Russian thinking, the list is indicative of the types of issues Russian theorists are considering. They are:

- The use of spatial and temporal considerations;
- The use of caution and sustained thought (when under threat, limited time, etc.);
- The ability to analyze and synthesize and carry out systemic analysis;
- The ability to generate creative thought and to forecast;
- The use of logical thought and independent thinking;
- The selective power of observation;
- Critical and flexible thought;
- And a rational specification or ability to plan actions.⁴⁶

This, Lebedev noted, was not an exhaustive list but one for constructive discussion.⁴⁷

There have been several important discussions of creative thought over the years, most likely because it is a main contributing factor to the further development of military art. In 2009, for example, N. M. Ilyichev wrote on "Certain Specificities of the Formation of Creative Thinking in the Process of Military Training" in *Military Thought*. Creative thinking in military matters, he noted, is aimed at the development and introduction of new methods and forms of armed struggle and the effective use of military hardware and equipment, among other issues. Ilyichev stated that the creative process involves the emergence of a problem; a search for an idea to resolve it; the elaboration and proof of the idea; its concretization; and its practical implementation. The main idea involves various forms and methods of cognition, to include intuition, which is an original leap in grasping the essence of the subject so long as it does not have an algorithmic method of investigation. Intuition is distinguished not only by spontaneity and free thinking but also using previous knowledge and, in some cases, analogies. Finally, it was noted that teachers must adhere

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁶ A. V. Lebedev, "The Way Military Leaders Think: Looking into the Past," *Military Thought*, Volume 3 2007, in English, downloaded from <https://www.opensource.gov> on 27 March 2014.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

to the demands of dialectical and formal logic.⁴⁸ Thus, many of the points covered in the two Soviet era books are included in this article, some 20 or more years later.

A 2012 article on creative thought appeared in the military newspaper *Red Star*. It stressed the need for learning how to become more creative in order to overcome the dominance of “reproductive” methods of thought, where learning took place according to patterns. It was noted that he who memorizes and simply reproduces is not acquiring creative development. Creative thought does not come from simply repeating arguments made by someone else. The article concludes that problem-based methods are the basis for learning creativity, a way for military school graduates to develop creative thought.⁴⁹

In another 2012 report, this time on the military-controlled *Star TV* in honor of the 180th birthday of the Russian General Staff Academy, it was stated that military economics, strategy, and global political change are taught at the academy. The Integratsiya geo-informational system is used to play out combat scenarios on a vast geographic scale in support of learning how to make decisions in real-time. General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov noted that the academy teaches inter-service and interdepartmental training as well.⁵⁰

A 2018 report stated that the General Staff Academy researches the following: tasks involving threat prediction for the coming 30-50 years; lessons learned in Syria; the feasibility of strategic deterrence; the prediction of the nature of conflicts of various scales; and effective means of using weapons systems based on new physical principles. Command and control issues, the use of forces in new theaters of military operations, and the development of future forms and methods of operational training were also covered.⁵¹ Thus, officers attending the academy are taught a great deal about major issues affecting military thought.

General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov has focused on officer training in several of his interviews with the press. In 2016 he stated, “We cannot operate in stereotyped fashion. We need to seek atypical solution options which result in the achievement of the set goal.”⁵² In a 2017 presentation he stated the following:

Special attention in training military command and control entities is given to introducing foremost methodologies and experience of employing troops (forces) in modern armed conflicts and to developing the ability of commanding generals and commanders to quickly estimate the situation; anticipate its development; make unconventional decisions, employ methods of operations and stratagem unexpected

⁴⁸ N. M. Ilyichev, “Certain Specificities of the Formation of Creative Thinking in the Process of Military Training,” *Military Thought* in English, Volume 3 2009, downloaded from <https://www.opensource.gov>, accessed on 4 August 2017.

⁴⁹ V. Volodin, “Learning Creativity,” *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)*, 26 September 2012, p. 3.

⁵⁰ No author provided, “News of the Day,” *Zvezda TV (Star TV)*, 8 December 2012.

⁵¹ Dmitriy Semenov interview with Aleksey Kim, “Priority Given to Syrian Experience. At the General Staff Military Academy Emphasis in the Teaching Process is Placed on Experience Gained while Performing Assignments in Syria,” *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* Online, 6 July 2018.

⁵² Aleksandr Tikhonov, “In the Southwest Sector,” *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* Online, 16 September 2016.

by the enemy, function actively and purposefully, achieve surprise, take a substantiated risk, and seize and hold the initiative.⁵³

Later in the same article he stated that combat operations in Syria had educated personnel under difficult conditions. This helps instill in them “such qualities as an aggressive spirit, initiative, boldness, decisiveness, readiness to take a risk, staunchness, endurance, and the ability to overcome any difficulties”⁵⁴ when faced with new situations.

During his 2018 presentation at the Academy of Military Science, Gerasimov noted that contemporary military operations are demanding new training techniques. He stated that “special attention is being focused on the development of skills for a commander to make rapid and completely justified actions. Skills for making nonstandard decisions are being developed.”⁵⁵ These skills include forecasting the situation, acting decisively, and being prepared to take a justified risk. Most of the requirements were conditioned by Russian experiences in Syria.⁵⁶

In another interview related to Syria, General-Lieutenant Mikhail Matveyevskiy, Chief of Russia’s Ground Force Missile Troops and Artillery, stated that the Syrian experience had changed training for artillerymen. Now, “on all tactical drills and exercises we create a situation that requires initiative, military cunning, perseverance, and persistence to be displayed.”⁵⁷

Another report stated that the General Staff had developed a code of conduct for commanders. It describes what an officer’s appearance should be and how he or she should speak to subordinates about their tasks. A “special section is devoted to information technology and security discipline,” with cell phones receiving special monitoring and social networks declared “taboo.” The code has Gerasimov’s ratification, but it is only of a “recommended” nature. However, the code’s observance will be part of an officer’s evaluation report.⁵⁸ Jackets and t-shirts with slogans in foreign languages and flags of other nations are deemed as inappropriate.⁵⁹ The code and regulations may affect military thought in other ways.

Service to the nation and other leadership attributes are part of 21st century military thought. A few days before 9 September 2018, which is Tank Day in Russia’s Armed Forces, the military paper *Red Star* interviewed the deputy head of the Kazan Red Banner Higher Tank Command School, Colonel Aleksandr Sukhikh. He stated that the qualities of a tank officer include

⁵³ V. V. Gerasimov, “On Implementing the Executive Orders of the President of the Russian Federation of 7 May 2012, No. 603 and 604, and the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,” *Voennaya Mysl’ (Military Thought)*, No. 12 2017, p. 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Valery Gerasimov, “The Influence of the Contemporary Nature of Armed Struggle on the Focus of the Construction and Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Priority Tasks of Military Science in Safeguarding the Country’s Defense,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk (Bulletin of the Academy of Military Sciences)*, No. 2 2018, p. 20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Aleksey Ramm and Aleksey Kozachenko, interview with Mikhail Matveyevskiy, “Fire Barrage: How Russian Artillery is Being Reequipped,” *Izvestiya (News) Online*, 19 November 2018.

⁵⁸ Aleksandr Kruglov, Nikolay Surkov, and Aleksey Ramm, “Army. Taboo on Social Networks Has Been Included in the Code. Detailed Collection of Rules of Conduct Drawn Up for Commanders,” *Izvestiya (News) Online*, 28 February 2018.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

professionalism, independence, determination, initiative in battle, courage and bravery, dedication, and willingness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of victory. Sukhikh added that the most important issue is a deep sense of camaraderie, fairness, and respect for subordinates.⁶⁰

The Chief of the Mikhaylovskaya Military Artillery Academy, General Lieutenant Sergey Bakaneyev, stated that a statistical-probability style of thinking is needed among artillery officers. This type of thought is “most effective for decision-making under conditions of a fast-changing situation: it is a question of predicting a situation’s development when it appears unpredictable.”⁶¹ This requires knowledge of mathematics, Makaneyev added.⁶² Thus, military thought has special characteristics depending on the branch of service.

In 2018 the journal *Military Thought* celebrated its 100th anniversary in Russia. The journal continues to publish articles attempting to solve problems of military science and military art. These include articles dealing with geopolitics and security, Russia’s vital interests, the nature of warfare and conflicts, strategic stability, information-technologies and automated systems of command and control, various branches of service, nuclear deterrence, and numerous other topics. While an unclassified edition is available for purchase, it is suspected that a classified version also exists.

The journal’s tasks in the coming months of 2018 were deemed to be as follows:

- Participate in generalizing the practice of contemporary warfare (especially local wars and armed conflicts of varying intensity) regarding major issues of strategy and operational art, and defining the nature of future warfare;
- Highlight the methodology of military science, military art, military development, specialized branches of social, natural, and technical sciences that underly the military affairs of the state;
- Render science-and-information support for the main development trends in weapons and military hardware, military technological cooperation, and state programs of arms and military hardware;
- Generalize the experience of operational training of troops/forces, particularly operational-strategic exercises, in the interest of furthering military art and the development of new manuals;
- Cover the more important incidents in military history, especially the history of domestic and foreign military thought, and propagandize the heritage of domestic military theorists and outstanding army commanders and military leaders;
- Participate in generalizing the practice of moral and psychological training of the Armed Force’s personnel, in solving the problems of military training and

⁶⁰ Aleksandr Tikhonov, “A Fusion of Knowledge, Will, and Armor; It is Formed at Renowned Military School; 9 September is Tank Troops Day,” *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star) Online*, 7 September 2018.

⁶¹ Anatoliy Stasovskiy and Aleksandr Drobyshevskiy, “It is Impossible to Imagine a System of Modern Education without a Reliance on the Principle of Surpassing Instruction,” *Yezhenedelnik Zvezda (Weekly Star)*, 24 September 2018.

⁶² Ibid.

- education, and of normative legal support of the activity of state military organizations;
- Cover issues of foreign army buildups, combat, and training experiences;
 - Review domestic and foreign military theory literature.⁶³

In addition, the editorial board plans to discuss new problems and encourages the participation of younger scholars.

Finally, in February 2019 a mock battle was reviewed in a district journal that focused on the use of a commander's intuition. Innovations and nonstandard decisions were employed instead of predictable routines. Intuition was in demand as much as military skills. It was noted by one participant that "We operate within an integrated reconnaissance and fire system" which allows for independently using forces and fires. The time between detecting a target and destroying has been reduced severalfold. A key factor in modern warfare is thus the speed of data-gathering and decision-making.⁶⁴

Conclusions

There appears to be much in common with the way thought was developed and expressed in the Soviet period when compared to its Russian counterpart. This includes both general trends and specific processes. However, these general concepts are all affected by the technological achievements of the modern era, and herein lie major differences.

Of primary interest is the emphasis in Russia on its leaders developing creative and innovative thought; on learning when and how to take risks; and on the further development of military art. The academies, journals, and leaders have the nation oriented in the direction of advanced and independent thought. Several theorists, to include the Chief of the General Staff, have advocated for the elimination of stereotypical and "minted coin" thought, stressing the need to learn how to use intuition and knowledge together when confronting new situations. It is apparent that lessons learned in Syria are having a great impact on training methods, as they are stressed in most contemporary exercises.

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. All three appear to have some contemporary relevance. Annihilation could be linked to Gerasimov's 2018 statement that "the comprehensive destruction of the enemy has advanced to the foreground."⁶⁵ Attrition could be the nonmilitary propaganda and cyber-attacks designed to slowly erode a nation's national will. Maneuver could be Gerasimov's belief that operations now are continuous, dispersed, and simultaneous. He also stated that theaters of military operations are expanding their borders, which can imply a global or planetary scope; and that military and economic targets can be a significant distance from where operations are being conducted.⁶⁶

⁶³ S. V. Rodikov, "The Journal *Military Thought* is 100 Years Old," *Voennaya Mysl' (Military Thought)*, No. 5 2018, p. 16.

⁶⁴ Natalya Borodina, "An Integrated Reconnaissance and Fire System is a Lesson for All Participants," *Voyennyi Vestnik Yuga Rossii (Military Bulletin of the South of Russia)*, 11 February 2019.

⁶⁵ Gerasimov, "The Influence..." p. 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Technology has offered a new impetus and immediacy to military thought. Today the IPW might last seconds if the correct cyber destruction of an opponent's infrastructure and command and control is possible. The immediate consequences of the use of technology are its impact on the speed of decision-making and the vast scale of territory to which such thinking can be applied, since it can now affect a spectrum from the strategic to the planetary. The potential speed of maneuver and destruction is where military thought today differs from its Soviet predecessors and where the most important lessons for Western analysts lie for consideration. Attrition, on the other hand, from a Russian perspective appears to be more associated with color revolutions or nonmilitary matters due to their slower impact.

Russian military thought and advancements in military art should be studied closely in the West. Without doing so, it will be even less capable of attaining the initial quote of this article:

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.⁶⁷

As General of the Army Makhmut Gareyev stated, Russia should not copy what other armies do, but should learn from their mistakes and successes.⁶⁸ Learning about Russian military thought can improve our own combat thought and capabilities and help us avoid stereotyping Russia with US concepts such as hybrid operations, C4ISR, and A2AD, among others. Analysts need to dive into real Russian thought templates.

⁶⁷ A. M. Goncharov, V. N. Dybov, and Yu. D. Podgornykh.

⁶⁸ Gareyev, p. 45.