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General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov: Shaping Russia's Armed Forces and Military Thought

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Introduction

Russia's current Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, has now been in charge of the General Staff for over six years. Along with President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, he has orchestrated a major upgrade of the Armed Forces. The force is now in possession of thousands of pieces of new equipment and numerous new organizations to improve its command and control. Perhaps as important is that Gerasimov has led a rejuvenation of military thought in Russia, motivating professors and instructors to train officers at the General Staff Academy (GSA) in ways to use their knowledge to develop new concepts in military art and forms and methods of fighting. Officers are encouraged to be innovative and creative in these activities. Gerasimov has also gathered and shared the experiences of the officers and soldiers who have participated in combat operations in Chechnya, Ukraine, and Syria at forums such as the Academy of Military Science (AMS); and he has shared the General Staff's observations of foreign military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The following discussion of Gerasimov's tenure is divided into four parts. First, Gerasimov's background is constructed, which indicates his extensive command responsibilities and experience. Second, Gerasimov has issues with the West. Many, it turns out, are self-generated issues caused by the Russian proclivity to avoid responsibility (for example, its unwillingness to admit responsibility for the shootdown of the Malaysian airliner, generating fake stories that its force is not in Ukraine, etc.). Third, a summary is provided of some of Gerasimov's more important interviews or presentations at localities other than the AMS. Finally, there is a summary of important points from the seven presentations he has made at AMS from 2013-2019, each of which has made a difference in how Russia's military operations are viewed abroad.

Part One: Background

General of the Army Valery Gerasimov was born in 1955 in Kazan. He initially served in tank or motorized rifle assignments. In 1997 he graduated from Russia's General Staff Academy and soon thereafter served in Chechnya. Between 2003 and 2005 he served as the chief of staff in the Far Eastern Military District before becoming the head of the Main Directorate for Combat Training of the Russian Armed Forces. In 2006 he was appointed as the Commander of the Leningrad Region Military District and in 2009 Commander of the Moscow Military District. In 2010 he became a Deputy Chief of the General staff, in 2012 the Commander of the Central Military District, and in November 2012 the Chief of the General Staff and the First Deputy Defense Minister.¹ He apparently commanded the Victory Parade on Red Square, an honor, from 2009-2012. Thus, his command experience is hard to top. Further, he is known for demanding professionalism from the force.

As a Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Gerasimov helped introduce digital technologies to the force (with a focus on command and control issues), helped create a joint air defense system with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and helped with negotiations with NATO

¹ *Interfax*, 9 November 2012. No author or title provided.

on military cooperation.² He took a special interest in the US's missile defense system, claiming in 2011 that it upsets the strategic balance of nuclear forces.³ In 2012, speaking at a Defense Ministry conference, he stated that the US system poses a threat to Russia's ability to hit targets in the US. He showed computer generated images of potential flight trajectories to demonstrate that, from his perspective, US defense systems in Poland and Romania were aimed against Russian missiles rather than Iranian ones, as the US had stated. He also stated that the US and Russia should "take advantage of each other's radar capabilities to counter missile threats."⁴ Cooperation was not out of the question, and he has continued to meet with US Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to this day.

Gerasimov was described by former Russian Strategic Rocket Forces' Main Staff Chief, Colonel-General (retired) Viktor Yesin, as "having excellent creative skills as a leader and efficiency as an organizer."⁵ He was expected to do away with the chaos of the recent years that preceded his appointment, in Yesin's opinion. Another complement, an interesting and important one, was paid to him by journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was gunned down in Moscow by assailants near her apartment. She was a critic of the Chechen conflict and President Putin but wrote that Gerasimov is "a man who was able to preserve an officer's honor" during the war.⁶

President Putin stated that Gerasimov's main tasks would be the "rearmament of the army and the fleet" and improving "both the structure and the command of troops." An additional task would be to organize stable relationships with the defense-industrial complex.⁷ Putin had noted that "The situation keeps changing in science and technology and new means of warfare emerge,"⁸ which makes Gerasimov's creative skills important to capitalize on new warfare means. On 15 November 2012 Gerasimov was appointed to Russia's Security Council.⁹

Part Two: Gerasimov's Issues with the West

Gerasimov has made numerous outstanding presentations to his officer corps. However, they often include accusations against the West. Gerasimov points out alleged Western threats and dangers to Russia that the West would consider responses to Russia actions, not threats. Gerasimov ignores Russian territorial conquests or half-truths over situational context and blames "color revolutions" directed from the West to detract attention from the Kremlin's land grabs. Despite overhead images of Ukraine showing Russian vehicles presence or text messages from Russian soldiers on the ground in Ukraine, Gerasimov's military denies the occupation of Ukrainian territory. Former President Ronald Reagan's dictum of "trust but verify" fails to function in the Putin era, since Russia rejects even the results of verification from such images and phone messages. The Kremlin continues to manipulate objective reality to its desire with such rejections

² Sofya Shaydullina and Roman Dobrokhotov, "No Mere 'Ceremonial' General Gerasimov," *Slon*, 9 November 2012.

³ *RIA-Novosti*, 30 November 2011. No author or title provided.

⁴ *Rossiya 24 TV*, 3 May 2012. No presenter or show title offered.

⁵ *Interfax* (in English), 9 November 2012. No author or title provided.

⁶ *BBC Monitoring* (in English), 9 November 2012. No author or title provided.

⁷ *Channel One TV*, 9 November 2012. No presenter or topic title was listed.

⁸ *Interfax* (in English), 9 November 2012. No author or title provided.

⁹ *Interfax*, 15 November 2012. No author or title provided.

of responsibility, which has resulted in a backlash from the West in the form of a loss of trust in Russia's civilian and military authorities.

These issues are pointed out here since Gerasimov's discussions of military affairs and his anti-Western statements need to be placed in some sort of situational context. Russian denials are part of a general mindset among Russian leaders, who appear intoxicated with their own paranoia and suspicions that bring out fantasies about Western behavior. Russian leaders are beginning to resemble the Soviet Union's leadership's characteristics, which former Warsaw Pact nations and former members of the Soviet Union despised.

Actions have consequences. Here are three examples. Russia's numerous cyber intrusions, some military, into Western nations have united them against Russia. The latter's denunciations only cause the further deterioration of trust in Russia. Nearly every country in Europe and North America has been a victim of a Russian cyber-attack. The US even gave Russian authorities the names of the Russian military personnel behind the attacks,¹⁰ which indicates Gerasimov was very aware of what operations were being conducted. In other cases, only the Russian military intelligence service was charged.¹¹ The sum of these charges must number close to 15 countries by now. This is not Ukraine in 2014, where that one nation was affected by Russian pressure on Kiev's leadership. This is 15 or so nations which independently express the same concern for being targeted, and their blame points directly at the same culprit. Such overwhelming evidence has cost Russia not only trust but its credibility as well. A second example is Western accusations that Russia had violated the INF treaty. It was the cause for the crumbling of the treaty. Russian statements that they have not violated the treaty were met with skepticism, since their credibility is razor thin. Treaties have also crumbled due to the Kremlin's grab of Crimea and insertion of troops into Eastern Ukraine, which Gerasimov blames on the West. Finally, Gerasimov continually notes that Russian weaponry has no analogues in the West. Russia has developed and now uses weapons based on new physical principles that support Gerasimov's intent to construct a nonnuclear strategic deterrence concept that can be used to scare nations into compliance. If there are no analogues to these weapons, shouldn't the West be the one fearing Russia and Russia the one threatening others? If the US was really out to "put Russia in its place" as Gerasimov contends, shouldn't it have done so in the 1990s, when Russia was in its weakest condition in decades and had no high-tech weaponry? The West made no such attempt.

Thus, the reader is warned to keep these points in mind as one examines Gerasimov's many presentations, which describe many advances Russia has made in acquiring new armaments and forces that can deter, in his opinion, any adversary. The work of Russia's military-industrial complex is noteworthy, for sure. But the other side to his presentations is their stark accusations of the dangers and threats associated with Western actions, while ignoring the causes associated with them. The issues raised above do, however, demonstrate how an authoritarian regime's

¹⁰ Mark Mazzetti and Katie Benner, "12 Russian Agents Indicted in Mueller Investigation," *The New York Times*, 13 July 2018, as downloaded on 19 March 2019 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13>. All 12 officers were named in the Mueller indictment.

¹¹ In the latter case, see Aruna Viswanatha, Sadie Gurman, and Del Quentin Wilber, "Russian Indicted in DNC Hacking," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 14-15, pp. A1, A3.

paranoia and suspicion can affect their perceptions of the West and, vice versa, Western perceptions of Russia.

Part Three: Gerasimov's Non-AMS Interviews and Presentations

2012

Gerasimov's late 2012 interviews included a discussion of the academy's importance and a few comments about the military's role in Syria. At a speech on Russian television, speaking about the GSA's anniversary celebration, Gerasimov noted that the academy's focus on strategic studies and economics, the "root cause of any war, any conflict," was important.¹² In a way the interview gave viewers a taste of Gerasimov's interest in nonmilitary issues.

2013

In January 2013 Gerasimov warned against foreign intervention in Syria, which he said would have disastrous consequences for the region. The accumulation of arms, he notes, causes increased risks and can lead to potential provocations as well.¹³ A day later he noted that the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan might provoke radical forces in that country.¹⁴ He clearly appeared interested in keeping Syria free from outside influence but was interested in getting help in Afghanistan.

2014

At Moscow's Third International Security Conference, Gerasimov and other military leaders were to discuss "color revolutions" in many areas of the world, especially the Middle East and North Africa. However, much of the discussion focused on Ukraine. A different color revolution is unfolding in Ukraine, he noted, one that is gradually moving toward a civil war. Authorities there are taking an adaptive approach to the use of force against the unarmed population in the East of the country.¹⁵ Naturally, Gerasimov's conclusions vary dramatically from the way the West views the situation there, where the involvement of Russian forces has been demonstrated. It is Russia's involvement and not the use of force by Ukraine against its own people that is the issue.

At the end of 2014 Gerasimov summed up the year. Top priorities were strengthening the nuclear deterrent, rearming with modern weaponry, and establishing forces in Crimea. The top event in his estimation was the development of the National Defense Command Center. The latter allows the Defense Ministry to monitor situations in real time. Also, a Joint Strategic Command focused on the Northern Fleet was set up. Overall Gerasimov stated that the combat capability of the Armed Forces rose by 30 percent.¹⁶ However, Russia's Defense Ministry Press Service and Information Directorate noted that Gerasimov, some two weeks earlier in a meeting with foreign military attaches, used a significant portion of his talk to blame the US and the West for causing

¹² *Rossiia 24*, 8 December 2012. No presenter or topic title listed.

¹³ *Interfax-AVN Online*, 16 January 2013. No author or title provided.

¹⁴ *Interfax* (in English), 17 January 2013. No author or title provided.

¹⁵ *Rossiia 24 TV*, 23 May 2014. No author or title provided.

¹⁶ *Rossiia 24 TV*, 29 December 2014. No author or title provided.

instability and he stated that, in great divergence from what is known to be true in the West, that “Russia is not a party to the conflict in Ukraine, since this is directly contrary to its national interests and to the Russian and Ukrainian peoples’ many centuries of shared history.”¹⁷ Obviously this goes against all of the images from Russian selfies and Western overhead imagery that prove otherwise.

2015

In January Gerasimov focused his attention on responding to the US missile defense system, stating that it had changed the military-political situation. He accused the US of violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the Start-3 Treaty. He stated that a military priority was to improve the quality of the strategic nuclear force as a result.¹⁸

In May 2015 the journal *Armeyskiy Sbornik* published Gerasimov’s presentation at the Fourth Moscow Conference on International Security. He stated that it was the US, NATO, and the EU who were trying “to put Russia in its place” after the latter’s principled and independent position regarding the settlement of the situation in Ukraine.¹⁹ Gerasimov noted that NATO is expanding its structure eastward toward Russia’s western border. This attitude is destroying the security architecture and the equal security of all states.²⁰ Borders are also threatened by frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space, such as the Dniester area in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Armenia and Azerbaijan. Unfreezing them carries the threat of armed clashes in the area’s proximity. The threat of global terrorism cannot be forgotten either.²¹

In December Gerasimov summed up the year as follows: Main priorities are the ability to maintain strategic offensive and defensive forces at levels that provide for the deterrence of aggression against Russia; the need to increase Aerospace Forces and the potential of strike forces and information and command and control systems to support deterrence; and the need for improvements in the system of research and development.²²

2016

Moscow’s Fifth International Security Conference was reportedly designed to discuss problems associated with terrorism, cooperation, security, and the Asia-Pacific region. Color revolutions, Middle East and Central Asia challenges, and the military’s role in assuring the stability of countries were also problems to consider.²³ No formal report of Gerasimov’s comments has been available, and all that is known of his presentation is included here from a variety of sources. He stated that the Arab Spring has resulted in a migration chaos in Europe; that Russian

¹⁷ Defense Ministry Press Service and Information Directorate, “Russian Chief of the General Staff General of the Army Valery Gerasimov Met with Foreign Military Attaches,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 10 December 2014.

¹⁸ *Interfax*, 30 January 2015. No author or title provided,

¹⁹ Valery Gerasimov, “The Military Dangers and Military Threats to the Russian Federation in Contemporary Conditions,” *Armeyskiy Sbornik (Army Journal)*, No. 5 2015, p. 58.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²² *RIA Novosti*, 14 December 2014. No author or title provided,

²³ “Russian Defense Ministry to Organize the 5th Moscow International Security Conference on April 27-28,” *Interfax* (in English), 14 March 2016. No author provided.

advisors are helping the Syrian army command plan combat operations; and that terrorism cannot be defeated without military force.²⁴

In an article in *Red Star* in September, Gerasimov discussed his impression of Kavkaz-2016, a yearly huge military exercise, this time organized in the Southern Military District. A focus of the exercise was to tackle the topic of territorial defense. The idea is to incorporate into one mission the national economy, personnel from the Defense Ministry, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service, National Guard, and Ministry of Emergencies. Mobilization priorities and plans were addressed as well. Information warfare was paid close attention to for the first time. Gerasimov noted that “information warfare is comparable to effective engagement and could at some stage even prevail.”²⁵

2017

Gerasimov made one of his most important presentations in December of 2017, so this section is a bit longer than the others. In the journal *Military Thought*, he outlined what he had accomplished in fulfilling a plan that President Putin devised and implemented by decree in May 2012. Putin’s May Decree was published in full that year in the military newspaper *Red Star*. It noted in particular that the Armed Forces should be equipped up to 70 percent with modern models of arms and special equipment by 2020. Putin’s priority developments (in the order they were stated) were the nuclear deterrent forces; air and space defense systems; systems of communication, reconnaissance, command and control, and electronic warfare; unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); robotized strike systems; modern transport aviation; precision weapons and means of combating them; and systems for the individual protection of service personnel. The Navy received attention to develop the means to protect the Arctic and Far East, and Putin stated that a new system of analysis and strategic planning in the interests of countering threats to national security for 30-50 years was planned for state arms programs.²⁶

Gerasimov stated in his 2017 *Military Thought* article that his primary efforts were directed at the readiness of the strategic nuclear and nonnuclear forces, aerospace defense, improving command and control systems, and developing general-purpose forces and creation of self-sufficient groupings. Nonnuclear forces included precision-guided munitions, to include the Iskander-M and the Kalibr missiles.²⁷ Gerasimov added that “all told, the proportion of state-of-the-art models of arms in the ground, air, and naval strategic nuclear forces was taken to 74 percent.”²⁸ Thus, his comments appeared to be his report card as to how he had fulfilled Putin’s directions from 2012 and, if the numbers are correct, he did quite well.

²⁴ TASS, 27 April 2016. No author or title provided.

²⁵ Aleksandr Tikhonov, “In the Southwest Sector,” *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* Online, 16 September 2016.

²⁶ Nikolay Voronin, “Edict of the Russian Federation President ‘On the Implementation of Plans and Programs for the Building and Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and Other Troops, Troop Formations, and Organs and the Modernization of the Defense Industry Complex,’” *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* Online, 8 May 2012.

²⁷ 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. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

With regard to each area, Gerasimov's article listed several specific systems that were major developments in the past five years. He stated that with PGMs, hypersonic missiles shift strategic deterrence missions from the nuclear to the nonnuclear sphere. The Voronezh and Daryal, Dnepr, and Volga radars were being modernized, helping eliminate gaps in the northern and southern parts of the nation. There were 55 military spacecraft launched in the past five years, which provide communications, intelligence, and navigational information as needed.²⁹ For the 38 units and subunits activated in the last five years, over 1800 UAVs were delivered to outfit them. They can perform reconnaissance up to 500km in depth and can employ electronic warfare capabilities and support for reconnaissance-strike and reconnaissance-fire delivery loops.³⁰ Azart radios provided communications in areas where adversary electronic countermeasures were encountered. New electronic warfare models, some nineteen altogether, along with 2000 new-generation complexes came into the inventory, expanding the engagement and countermeasure ranges by some 3.5 times. EW assets on UAVs can block radio communications within a radius up to 100 kilometers.³¹ Snap inspections are essentially operational-tactical exercises that rehearse a full package of missions, especially along strategic axes. At this time, two battalions are of contract personnel and a third is manned by conscripts in each regiment and brigade. It was noted that a mandatory requirement was the rehearsal of problems associated with the employment of reconnaissance-fire and reconnaissance-strike loops.³²

The remainder of Gerasimov's 2017 article focused on Russia's experiences in Syria. Combat experience activated new forms of employing the Armed Forces and methods of conducting operations. The use of reconnaissance-strike and reconnaissance-fire delivery loops developed at the tactical level were discussed.³³ The latter implemented the principle of "one target—one bomb" where fire engagement was organized on a zonal principle. Near fire engagement zones used the Strelets and the Su-24M bomber. Medium engagement zones (up to 500 Kilometers) used Su-24 bombers and Su-33 fighters using PGMs. Long-range fires included the Kalibr sea launched cruise missiles, Kh-101 air-launched cruise missile, and Tu-22m3 bombers for a fire engagement zone with a radius of 4000 kilometers.³⁴

Also, in December 2017 Gerasimov discussed operations in Syria with Viktor Baranets. He stated that the first mission the Armed Forces encountered was identifying and destroying enemy control centers. Gerasimov said the most difficult thing for the General Staff was the organization of collaboration with Syrian government troops and all the various other groups involved. Countering terrorists use of vehicle bombs was another problem, as they would often rush several vehicles at a defensive position or roadblock at one time. Finally, there have been 60-70 UAVs in the air every day in Syria on the average. They help coordinate the use of reconnaissance-strike and reconnaissance-fire loops. Several conferences on the Syrian campaign

²⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³³ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

have been held and a whole series of manuals were published that generalized the experience, according to Gerasimov.³⁵

2018

In December 2018 Gerasimov addressed military attaches in Moscow. He stated that there was an increasing potential for conflict and that the struggle for energy, water, food, and other resources was intensifying. The address was similar to the one he provided in 2014 in regard to his criticism of the West. Gerasimov stated that Washington wants to contain Russia and discredit its role in international affairs. He stated that the alleged threat from Russia has caused NATO to increase its military presence close to Russia's borders. He stated that Russia is not increasing the strength of its Armed Forces and is not involved in an arms race (yet in most interviews he underscores Russia's work on new weapons and its plans to increase its force quantitatively). Anything the US is doing or has done in Syria was criticized by Gerasimov during his presentation. He went so far as to say that one Western coalition bombing campaign wiped the city of Raqqa off the face of the earth. The US's irresponsible actions, he added, have demonstrated a complete indifference to the stabilization of the situation there. After this constant bombardment of the West, along with only praise for Russia's efforts in Syria, Gerasimov stated that in 2018 several improvements were made to the Russian Armed Forces. The force's combat potential was raised, nuclear and nonnuclear forces maintained a high level of combat readiness, a layered aerospace defense system was built up, and command and control system training was improved.³⁶

Part Four: Presentations at the AMS

Each February or March, a general assembly is held at the Academy of Military Science. The Academy's President, General of the Army Makhmut Gareyev, opens the conference. Gerasimov is the featured speaker. Summarized below are the seven presentations he has made. These presentations initially included numerous tables and graphs, but this habit ended in 2016. Now only a photo of Gerasimov and his presentation are included in the *Journal of the Academy of Military Science*, usually in the first edition of the year.

2013 Speech at the AMS—Forms and Methods of Warfare

There were several important aspects of Gerasimov's presentation, the best known of the seven he has made. First, he used the term "new-type military conflicts" to describe conflicts that are comparable in their consequences to "regular" war. The term new-type took hold in the Russian military and has been used by numerous Russian military authors to the present time. Second, he called for the creation of "a holistic theory of asymmetric operations." Asymmetric actions, he noted, include the use of special operations forces, internal opposition to create a "moving front of struggle," and information effects. This, of course, requires Western analysts to understand how Russia further defines asymmetry and the expansion of the concept for military use. Third, he described numerous new trends in the character of war. They were:

³⁵ Viktor Baranets interview with Valery Gerasimov, "Russian Armed Forces Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov: 'We Broke the Backbone of Terrorism's Shock Forces,'" *Komsomolskaya Pravda Online*, 27 December 2017.

³⁶ *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Website* (in English), 5 December 2018. No author or title provided.

- The differences between the states of war and peace are being erased;
- Wars are no longer declared and do not follow stereotypical patterns of the past;
- Safe states territory can be turned into an armed struggle arena in months or days;
- The rules of war have changed;
- Nonmilitary methods to achieve goals have grown. Opposition methods use political, economic, information, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures;
- Military methods include covert measures, such as information opposition, peacekeeping, crisis management, and special operations forces;
- Military methods are more dynamic, energetic, and effective³⁷ using remote, noncontact effects;
- Differences among strategic, operational, and tactical levels of operations (and between offensive and defensive) are being erased;
- Precision weapons, weapons based on new physical principles, and robotics are being introduced into military affairs.³⁸

Finally, Gerasimov eleven times referenced the need to develop new forms and methods of warfare. Specifically, he stated that improved forms and methods of information effects were being developed,³⁹ and that new forms and methods needed to be developed for the following: asymmetric operations and employing force groupings,⁴⁰ operating aerospace defense systems and using Russian forces outside its borders,⁴¹ and forms and methods of all-round support systems.⁴² Thus, Western analysts need to understand just how Russia understands the terms forms and methods.

Gerasimov's presentation also mentioned, through the use of quotes, two famous Soviet military theorists. They represent, from the Soviet period, how to think about the initial period of war and military strategy, and the concepts appear to have carried over to Gerasimov's present-day thought. He quoted former Division Commander Georgii Samoilovich Isserson as follows:

War, in general, is not declared. It simply begins with armed forces that have been deployed beforehand. Mobilization and concentration are associated not with the

³⁷ V. V. Gerasimov, "Principal Trends in the Development of Forms and Methods of Employing Armed Forces and Current Tasks of Military Science Regarding their Improvement," *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, 2013, No. 1, p. 24. The author would like to thank Dr. Harold Orenstein, who has translated Gerasimov's presentations from 2013-2018.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴² Ibid., p. 29.

period after the advent of a state of war, as happened in 1914, but rather unnoticeably, conducted gradually, long before this.⁴³

Russian use of cyber issues to infiltrate and map the information infrastructure of another country would fit Isserson's understanding of the initial period of war.

Gerasimov quoted the outstanding Soviet military scholar Alexander Svechin on strategy:

It is unusually difficult...to predict a war situation. For each war it is necessary to work out a special line of strategic behavior, each war represents a specific case that requires the establishment of its own logic and not the application of some stereotypical pattern.⁴⁴

Gerasimov preceded his quote from Svechin by noting that Russia should not copy foreign experience and try to "catch up with" leading countries. Rather Russia should develop its own forms and methods and rely on military science.⁴⁵ Perhaps for this reason Russia has shunned hybrid war for many years and focused more on new-type warfare methods.

There were six tables associated with the presentation. Two of them, "The Role of Nonmilitary Methods in Resolving Interstate Conflicts" and "The Changing Character of Armed Struggle," have appeared often in military journals in the West. The former noted that nonmilitary methods of resolving armed conflict are being used by a ratio of 4:1 over military methods. The latter table listed both traditional and new forms and methods of conflict. The other four graphs were:

- Forms and Methods of Military Operations from the Example of the Afghan War
- Trends in the Development of Robotic Means in the US Air Force
- The Operational Use of Armed Forces Formations Outside the Borders of the Territory of the Russian Federation
- And Principal Tasks of Military Science.⁴⁶

2014 Presentation at the AMS—Role of the General Staff and Changing Nature of War

The essence of Gerasimov's 2014 presentation was to discuss how the country's defense was organized, with a focus on the role of the General Staff, the changing nature of warfare, and requirements for the military-industrial complex to fulfill. The General Staff's activities were somewhat the same, focused on strategic planning, the Armed Forces' development, and the military organization of Russia as a whole, to include the coordination of the activities of the executive authority. Armed struggle changes included

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-28.

taking into consideration its fast-moving character and employment of military and nonmilitary resources. The use of nongovernmental international organizations and private military companies have acquired greater weight in achieving military-political goals.⁴⁷

In Russia's new Defense Plan, measures for the nation's defense and a shift from a peacetime to a wartime footing were discussed, such as the place, time, directions, forces, means, and resources required for coordination. A strategic deterrence plan was developed to convince potential aggressors of the futility of any attack on Russian territory. The Defense Plan led the way for the establishment of a new edition of the Statute on Military Planning in the Russian Federation, which specifies the sequence for using the defense plan, the documents that comprise it, and the state organs and military command and control entities that are responsible for developing the documents.⁴⁸ The state and military entities were integrated in the National Center for Defense Management.

With regard to the General Staff's leadership of the military-scientific complex, several tasks must be fulfilled. The main one is to recommend the most efficient composition of the Armed Forces and the optimum correlation of forces and means for armed struggle. A second task is forecasting and assessing threats to Russia, exposing them as early as possible in order to create a "comprehensive theory of indirect and asymmetric actions conducted by various federal executive organs."⁴⁹ A final task is to develop the forms for employing force groupings and the methods of their operations as well as their optimal composition. This requires a study of combat experiences in various conflicts and highlights new military-technical trends.⁵⁰ Special attention is required in the areas of robotics, telecommunication infrastructure, and strategic deterrence and aerospace forces.⁵¹ It is important to develop both military and nonmilitary measures under modern combat conditions and assess their balance. A plan is being developed to form "the fundamental laws of contemporary international confrontation, taking into account the employment of so-called 'soft force.'"⁵²

There were eleven tables that were included in Gerasimov's presentation. They were:

- Tasks of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation
- Changes in the Nature of Armed Struggle
- Changes Introduced into the Federal Law "On Defense" by the 5 April 2013 Version

⁴⁷ V. V. Gerasimov, "The Role of the General Staff in the Organization of the Country's Defense in Accordance with the New *Statute on the General Staff*, Approved by the President of the Russian Federation," *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 1 2014, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵² Ibid., p. 22.

- The Administrative System of the Military Organization of the Russian Federation
- Forms of Operational Readiness with the Participation of Federal Executive Organs
- The Purpose and Tasks of the Military-Scientific Complex of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation
- The Development of the Military-Scientific Complex of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in 2013
- An Outline of the Structure of the Future Military-Scientific Complex of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation
- Priority Trends in the Development and Creation of Weapons Systems
- The Formation of a Uniform Base of Scientific Knowledge
- And Trends in the Joint Work of Russia's Ministry of Defense and the Academy of Military Sciences.⁵³

The table associated with “Changes in the Nature of Warfare” is listed below. It outlines Russia's understanding of modern conflict and responses to these changes. After the title, the sentence “The use of political, diplomatic, economic, and other nonmilitary measures in combination with the use of military force” was stated, which was followed by the bullets below (the first two entries remind analysts of Russia's strategic operation to destroy critical infrastructure targets):

- Reduction of the military-economic potential of a state by the destruction of vitally important objects of its military and civilian infrastructure;
- Simultaneous effects against enemy troops and objectives to the entire depth of his territory;
- Armed struggle simultaneously in all physical media and in the information domain;
- Command and control of forces and means in a uniform information domain;
- Mass employment of precision weapons, large-scale use of special operations forces, robotic systems, and weapons based on new physical principles;
- Employment of asymmetric and indirect operations;
- Commencement of military operations by peacetime force groupings;
- High-maneuver, noncontact combat operations by interservice force groupings;
- And participation of the civil-military component.⁵⁴

2015 Speech at the AMS—Great Patriotic War Lessons for Today

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 14-22.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

Gerasimov's 2015 presentation listed lessons learned from the Great Patriotic War (GPW or WW II) and what new duties the General Staff had accumulated over the past 75 years. GPW lessons were as follows:

- State administration organs needed restructuring so that peacetime structures would closely resemble wartime manning, which took too long to establish in the GPW.
- Command and control structures need a uniform system beforehand, so that commanders will understand what decisions can be independently made at the start of enemy aggression, especially after a surprise attack.
- Cooperation must be established among services and branches, to include the creation of interservice force groupings in theaters of military operations and under a unified command in peacetime.
- Technical capabilities of the strategic leadership must be established in peacetime, especially command and control of forces.⁵⁵

To ensure strong command and control, and to institute lessons learned from the GPW, Russia created the National Defense Control Center to establish state control over C2. The Center is designed to forecast a situation's development, provide information support for leadership decisions, and coordinate activities of federal executive authorities.⁵⁶ The 2013 General Staff Decree, which outlined its duties, support this development. The General Staff is charged with strategic planning in the area of defense; safeguarding the state's military security; developing the Armed Forces; commanding and controlling the Armed Forces; coordinating federal executive organs activities; developing a Defense Plan for the Russian Federation; and coordinating the activities of the organs of state authority.⁵⁷ To increase state organ leadership capabilities, a special training course was organized at the General staff Academy. Thus, Russia is taking everything it can from the GPW experience that applies and developing military art applicable for the postwar period.⁵⁸ Two diagrams were produced as part of the article. One was titled "Analyzing and Forecasting the Development of the Situation," which listed some of the areas that need to be watched; and the "Organs of Strategic Command and Control of the Military Organization of the Russian Federation," which listed some of the areas and centers that monitor the situation or take part in fulfilling requirements.⁵⁹

2016 Presentation at AMS—U.S. Hybrid Issues and Counters to Them

Gerasimov's presentation appeared to have four main parts: to describe the dangers of hybrid war that other nations are implementing; to find a way to work with the US in Syria; to

⁵⁵ V. V. Gerasimov, "The Experience of Strategic Leadership in the Great Patriotic War and the Organization of Uniform Command and Control of the Country's Defense under Contemporary Conditions," *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 2 2015, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 14 and 13, respectively.

describe organizational changes in the Russian Defense Ministry to combat hybrid's impact; and to inform researchers that new forms and methods of employing various military and nonmilitary activities of territorial defense were required. The latter point thus once again supports Gerasimov's 2013 speech that was oriented on the forms and methods of warfare.

With regard to hybrid war, he noted that methods were changing in the direction of employing political, economic, information, and other nonmilitary measures supported with military measures. The use of internal opposition forces, and partisan and sabotage methods, minimize the need for armed effects. Color revolutions, defined as a state revolution organized from without, are used to achieve military-political goals. The use of such indirect and asymmetric methods deprives an opposing side of sovereignty without the use of military force.⁶⁰ These were the Western hybrid threats that Russia was facing.

Gerasimov then discussed the need to work with the US in Syria, stating that only Russia and the US have the power to stop the war, in spite of their varying political interests and goals. He added that both sides have conducted preparatory work so that combat operations may cease immediately, on 27 February 2016. Information was exchanged about a cease fire and a general understanding of borders was reached.

Next Gerasimov underscored the need to consolidate the efforts of all organs of state power to confront hybrid operations. The military alone was not a sufficient answer to the problem. For example, forty-nine organs of state power worked on the Defense Plan for 2016-2020, which indicates that methods other than military ones can be used to confront hybrid actions. Ways were sought to neutralize dangers and threats from abroad, such as hybrid methods of pressure.⁶¹ Finally, Gerasimov stated that the development of forms and methods for the employment of force groupings and procedures for military and nonmilitary actions were required. Command and control elements of the state's military organization are of primary importance for ensuring the consolidation of executive authority. The National Center for Command and Control of the Defense of the Russian Federation ensures the country's military-political leadership during a crisis situation.⁶²

Gerasimov stated that future research trends included the following: the development of forms of strategic operations for the Armed Forces; improving offensive and defensive forces and the means for struggles in the space and information domains; and developing operational-strategic requirements for weapons and command and control systems.⁶³ He thus makes it clear that strategic issues are the most important for the AMS and the General Staff to consider.

⁶⁰ V. V. Gerasimov, "The Organization of the Defense of the Russian Federation under Conditions of the Enemy's Employment of 'Traditional' and 'Hybrid' Methods of Conducting War," *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 2 2016, p. 20.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶² Ibid., p. 22.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 23.

2017 AMS Presentation—Contemporary War, Elements of Thought

This presentation focused on a discussion of most of the elements of military thought (trends, forecasting, and forms and methods of warfare—strategy was only barely mentioned). Hybrid war was defined as an American proposal that “refers to actions that occur in a period that cannot possibly be associated purely with war or with peace.”⁶⁴ He defined war in accordance with Russia’s Military Doctrine, stating that it is “a form of resolving inter-state or intra-state conflicts with the employment of armed force.”⁶⁵ He added that in 2016 a discussion on war’s concept was organized at the General Staff Academy.⁶⁶

Conflicts between those in the 20th and 21st centuries differ from one another in their composition of participants, weapons employed, and forms and methods of troop activities. In addition, the correlation of the contribution of one type of conflict over another has changed. The US demonstrated its use of new forms in its conflict with Libya, where a no-fly zone, a naval blockade, and the use of private military companies were employed, according to Gerasimov. Social networks were also used to increase the information-psychological impact of the operation. Syria, on the other hand, was described as a US hybrid operation.⁶⁷ Gerasimov stated that he considered the use of the term hybrid warfare as an established term to be premature at present.⁶⁸

Gerasimov then described unfolding trends, forecasting issues, and forms and methods of fighting in more detail. Developing trends included the blurring of the line between a state of war and peace; and the broadening spectrum of reasons and approaches for using military force, such as to support a state’s economic interests. Methods were discussed next. He stated they are moving in the direction of the extensive use of political, economic, diplomatic, information, and other nonmilitary measures, all supported by the protest potential of a population.⁶⁹ The use of forecasting to assess dangers and threats to Russia is also growing. This has moved one task to the top of the list for the country’s defense, that being the development of a strong strategic deterrence potential. Deterrence through capabilities, it would seem, both material and spiritual.⁷⁰

Gerasimov stated that Russia’s capabilities now include the ability to resolve strategic missions in a remote theater of military operations. The Armed Forces have demonstrated the ability to conduct new-type warfare, to include working with allies and organizing coalitions. In closing, he again requested of the AMS to study new forms of inter-state confrontation and to develop effective methods to counter them. This applies to developing counters to hybrid warfare methods of the West. New forms and methods of troop operations under various conditions need

⁶⁴ V. V. Gerasimov, “Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for the Defense of the Country,” *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 2 2017, p. 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁶ From January to June 2017, there were numerous discussions of war in military publications. They are summarized in a MITRE publication titled “Russian Military Thought,” forthcoming in 2019.

⁶⁷ Gerasimov, 2017, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

study as well, especially the organization of force regroupings in remote theaters of military operations.⁷¹

2018 AMS Presentation—Future Wars

Gerasimov began this presentation noting that there are three important trends influencing military operations: those affecting the content of operations; those demonstrating an improvement in the system of comprehensive destruction of an enemy; and those showing improvements in weapons developments.⁷² He added that the type of Armed Forces required is dependent on the quality of forecasting variants of the military-political situation in the world.⁷³ In this regard, he noted that the spatial scale of conflict is expanding at a time when the temporal preparation of the Armed Forces is decreasing. Simultaneous and continuous operations are replacing sequential operations, and the borders of theaters of military operations are increasing. Targets now include the economic potential of a country far from the zone of military operations and command and control superiority has become a necessity for winning. Future wars are expected to include precision guided munitions, state control targets, the use of information and space assets, and the need to counter communications, reconnaissance, and navigation capabilities of adversaries. He added that each conflict has its own distinguishing features.⁷⁴

There is now a necessity to develop interservice force groupings for various strategic axes. Work is being done on an automated interservice reconnaissance-strike system that can reduce the time from reconnaissance to strike by 2.5 times. Ground force formations are being manned according to the principle of two battalions of contract workers and one battalion of conscripts. New weaponry will shift the focus from nuclear strategic deterrence tasks to a nonnuclear strategic deterrence force.⁷⁵

Near the end of his presentation, Gerasimov stated that today, scientifically justified recommendations on the employment and development of the Armed Forces are required of the General Staff. This requirement includes the following:

First and foremost, this involves increasing the authenticity of scenarios being developed and of long-range forecasts of the development of the military-political and strategic situation. Priority tasks for military science must be studying future trends of interstate confrontation, the forms of employment of the Armed Forces, and the methods of conducting operations and combat in future military conflicts.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁷² V. V. 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 (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 2 2018, p. 16.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 19, 21.

The elaboration of the issue of the content of combat operations at the operational and tactical levels is important.⁷⁶

The content of operations at the operational level most likely is indicative of operational design. In this paragraph Gerasimov covers all of the main elements of developing operations—studying trends, making forecasts of the strategic situation, developing forms and methods, and applying them to operations.

2019 AMS Presentation—New Thoughts on Military Strategy

Gerasimov's presentation focused on several themes that he had covered in earlier presentations (robotics, UAVs, new weaponry), which left the impression that scientists and theorists weren't getting his message and he thus had to stress those topics again. The tasks of military science, a term he used nearly 16 times, was stated to be one of two main directions of the presentation.

The other direction was the term military strategy, which he used 23 times, and his definition of the term was very different from his previous discussions. In the past, in two different AMS talks, he stated that "each conflict has a logic all its own," which was understood as saying strategy wasn't fixed but depended on the logic of the situation at hand. There was one instance when he came close to stating this expression in 2019, noting that "It is necessary to form principles of a general, universal nature and principles of actions as applied to the situation specifically taking shape."⁷⁷

Throughout this presentation, however, he offered numerous ways of understanding strategy, to include the following:

- Military strategy as a science is the art of command and control.
- Strategy represents a system of knowledge and actions to prevent, prepare for, and wage war.
- A search for rational strategies of waging war against a varying enemy acquires priority importance for developing the theory and practice of military strategy.
- The forms and methods of employing the Armed Forces in support of strategic deterrence is an important aspect of military strategy.
- Military strategy has gone through stages of evolution from a strategy of annihilation, strategy of attrition, and strategies of global war, nuclear deterrence, and indirect actions.
- Russia's response to US actions is the strategy of the active defense, which envisages a set of measures for preemptive neutralization of threats to national security.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁷⁷ V. V. Gerasimov, "Vectors of Development of Military Strategy," *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* Online, 4 March 2019. This presentation of Gerasimov is the only AMS article NOT based on his report as published in the *Journal of the Academy of Military Science*, since that journal will not be available for a few months.

- The development of strategy as a science must encompass the development of a system of knowledge about war and an improvement of practical activity to prevent, prepare for, and wage war.
- Strategy must engage in predicting the nature of future war and the development of new strategies for waging them.
- The famous Russian commander Aleksandr Vasilyevich Suvorov noted that “Theory without practice is dead” and this is why it is impossible to imagine the practical activity of military strategy without its scientific substantiation.
- An urgent task of military strategy is the substantiation and upgrading of nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence measures.
- Russia’s experience in Syria has played an important role in strategy’s development, as fulfilling tasks outside of Russian territory is part of a strategy of limited actions.⁷⁸

Gerasimov listed some additional items in regard to the military’s experience in Syria that appear to have more general application. First, he stated that the most important conditions for implementing the strategy of limited actions are winning and holding information superiority; preemptive readiness of command and control and comprehensive support systems; and covert deployment of necessary groupings. Second, new methods of troop actions were substantiated. Military strategy consists of planning and coordinating joint military and nonmilitary actions of the Russian grouping of troops and the force elements of involved states.⁷⁹

Further, Gerasimov underscored four directions for strategy’s development. The first involves creating and developing a unified system of integrated forces and assets of reconnaissance, engagement, command and control, and fire control based on state-of-the-art information and telecommunications technologies. The second direction involves the use of military robotic complexes, especially UAVs. The third direction involves countering adversary UAV and PGM use. A deciding role here will be played by electronic warfare forces and assets. Finally, increasing the Armed Forces combat might is a priority direction, determined by the numerical and qualitative composition of the force, its strength and outfitting, its morale and training, and its combat readiness and effectiveness.⁸⁰

Other items deemed important in the theory and practice of military strategy were control over territorial defense missions during times of escalating threats or crisis situation periods; and the substantiation of an integrated system for protecting critically important facilities of a state’s infrastructure, when an adversary might try to use attacks on them to destabilize a situation or create chaos and uncontrollability. Finally, Gerasimov stated that new approaches are needed to create ties between the economy and military strategy. Strategy must answer the following questions: “For what kind of possible war and in what directions to prepare the economy? How to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

ensure its survivability and stability? And how is it more advisable to accommodate facilities of the economy with consideration of their protection?”⁸¹ All of the above concerned strategy.

There were two other aspects of the presentation worthy of note. First, Gerasimov continued his anti-West and anti-US diatribe that he began in December 2018 when he addressed military attaches in Moscow. He stated that geopolitical rivals (who but the US and the West?) are prepared to wage wars using precision-guided munitions and information warfare. The goal of the US, he notes, is to eliminate the statehood of undesirable countries and change the legally elected state authorities (Russia? Venezuela?), a contention most European nations and the US would contest. He notes that a “trojan horse” strategy of military operations has been developed by the Pentagon, which few have heard of in the US. It supposedly involves a fifth column of media and other elements to destabilize a situation followed by PGM strikes against important targets. Further, Gerasimov stated that the US and NATO are now at Russia’s borders (with no mention of the reason, that Russia has taken Crimea from Ukraine and intervened in the nations Eastern sector); that the US is destroying arms control treaties (not stating it was due to Russian infractions); and that the US is developing space troops (not mentioning Russian thoughts on the same issue).⁸²

Finally, Gerasimov listed several principles for preventing, preparing for, and waging war. Preventing wars are accomplished by foreseeing the military-political and strategic situations and identifying threats and dangers. Advance preparation is accomplished by ensuring constant combat and mobilization readiness. Waging war requires the coordinated use of military and nonmilitary measures. Utilizing surprise and decision-making speed allows Russia to preempt an opponent in case of war and ensures the strategic initiative.⁸³ These principles are worthy of the interest of Western analysts.

Conclusions

Gerasimov has commanded military districts, served in Chechnya, organized and led the battles in Ukraine and Syria, and helped in the procurement of numerous weapons and other pieces of equipment from the military-industrial complex. He has repeatedly requested the officer corps, professors, and academics to update military thought, to identify trends and thus threats to Russia, to propose new theories of strategy and asymmetric war, and to organize counters to a host of potential threats, whether it be UAVs, electronic warfare systems, command and control structures, or satellites. He has talked about new-type war and has only referred to hybrid war when talking about the West and US in particular. He has also bought into the ideology of denying responsibility for his actions, like other Kremlin leaders, causing the military’s mindset to resemble that of the Soviet period in many respects.

There are several important take-aways from Gerasimov’s numerous presentations that offer areas for Western focus:

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

- On numerous occasions he has requested that new forms and methods of warfare be developed, whether it be to confront hybrid war capabilities of the West or terrorist actions in Syria or how to confront new conflicts. It is imperative that Western analysts understand just how a form and a method might be defined and further developed. There are very few Western analysts who know what each term means, even though the Russians use the terms repeatedly.
- Russian officers and scientists are told not to stereotype combat scenarios but to be prepared to develop new innovative and creative means of combat. Gerasimov has focused on making officers learn to take the initiative and make decisions in a timely manner. Russian officers are told to understand both classical and asymmetric types of combat. The latter can include new forms of military art. This requires continual study of the changing nature of war.
- Officers are told to be prepared for the initial period of war, which makes them focus their attention on the preparation of the force in peacetime and to focus on attaining information superiority, two items crucial for success; and to make updated calculations of the necessary correlation of forces (qualitatively as well as quantitatively), since the correlation is affected most by information technologies.
- In conjunction with the military-industrial complex, Gerasimov is developing weapons based on new physical principles that will both serve as a counter to an adversary's high-tech weapons and ensure the implementation of strategic nonnuclear deterrence for Russia over potential opponents.

Gerasimov is ensuring that Putin gets the type of Armed Forces, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that the Kremlin leadership desires. On the one hand, he has called for an innovative and creative officer corps, one which can lend impetus to the development of military art and can develop his call for a holistic approach to asymmetric operations. In this sense he understands that new weaponry requires new forms and methods of their employment. On the other hand, he still harbors a traditional Soviet military mindset that looks for Western dangers and threats while ignoring that the Kremlin's actions in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, or elsewhere may have caused them. In this sense he is guided by Russia's desire to impose its objective reality on others.

The real dangers are a Gerasimov or Kremlin miscalculation of the West's capabilities and motives and their consequences for strategic stability, or the West's misunderstanding of Russia's motives, which appear driven by Putin's security concerns and desire to reestablish the Russian empire, without due regard for the cost. Gerasimov notes that Russian officers are being taught not to stereotype combat actions. The Kremlin should stop stereotyping the West and ignoring its attempts to impose its version of objective reality on others.