**Staffs for New Wars**

***“In Syria like never before we have witnessed the importance of information warfare”***

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**In his speech before the Federal Assembly the President of Russia Vladimir Putin placed a great emphasis on the problems of national security, enhancing the combat capabilities of the Armed Forces, and equipping them with modern and future armaments. It is not possible to solve these problems without developing the military science. In anticipation of the international forum “Army-2018”, the Military-Industrial Courier, in cooperation with the Academy of Military Sciences of the RF, is launching a new series of articles discussing the problems of the development of the strategy and tactics of the Armed Forces of the RF, analyzing the experience of regional conflicts, and assessing scientific-technical problems. The experts are familiar with the range of problems featured in some of those materials based on the scientific-military conference of the RF Academy of Military Science that took place in March of this year.**

The experience of the military conflicts from the last decades demonstrates that the rapid development of science and technology has produced considerable changes in the character of armed warfare. Our Western “partners” (the Armed Forces of NATO) are actively promoting the methods of a new-type of warfare or the so-called “hybrid” wars, that are based on non-military means. At that, the borderlines between the states of war and peace are being deleted.

**A Departure from the Classics**

The analysis reveals changes in the conduct of traditional warfare. The last example of a classical war was the operation of the multi-national forces of NATO in Iraq in 1991, whose main task was the destruction of its armed forces and capture its territories. In the quarter of a century that followed it, such operations that use large-scale groupings of ground forces have not been carried out.

***“”Information work with the local population enabled us to liberate entire neighborhoods without a fight”***

At present, an aggressor-state obtains its geopolitical goals through a set of non-military means, which in a number of cases considerably exceed the military ones in terms of effectiveness. Their main task is not the physical destruction of the adversary, but its total subjugation to its will.

Yugoslavia, Iraq in 2003, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Ukraine …We are witnessing almost the same scenario everywhere. However, compared with the conflicts of the past century, in which the ground forces groupings of the aggressor participated directly in the operations on the ground, the emphasis now has been placed on reaching the objectives by means of neatly camouflaged integrated formations.

Such groups are being created on the basis of local resources on the principle of opposition, national and confessional divisions, by means of organizing irregular troops and popular militias in units that are capable of coalescing into larger-scale formations with the support and under the leadership of the Special Operations Forces and private military companies of other states. This also involves the armed forces of the host-nations, foreign Air Force, Navy and other groupings of troops (forces), civil and non-governmental organizations, that are all brought together for the purpose of performing tasks in the strategic or operational directions in a unified information-intelligence space. The examples include the IS and “Jabhat-an-Nusra” groups (banned in Russia), the Kurdish self-defense units of Iraq’s popular militias, the “Libyan Dawn” and the “Zintane Brigades”, the Albanian “Kosovo Liberation Army” in Yugoslavia, and in Ukraine – the “right Sector” units, the “Asker” Crimean Tatar battalion, private military companies, etc. Along with that, achieving air and sea dominance, and launching cruise missile strikes, are being carried out by the regular Navy and Air force of the aggressor within the specially created no-flight zones, as a rule of thumb, under the guise of peacemaking activities and crisis resolution. As a result, an “obedient” government is installed in that state, the country is fragmented, chaos and lawlessness are being spread, the resources are placed under control, and the aggressor’s military bases are built on the country’s territory.

Modern armed conflicts take the most diverse forms which are being created out of various elements that merge into a single entity depending on the region and the specific situation. We have summarized this experience, which has been extremely informative and which we have used in carrying out the operation in Syria.

**The Special Forces Experience**

The use of the troops grouping in Syria was set in the form of a special operation with a complex structure. At that, the borderlines between the tasks at the strategic, operational and tactical levels were deleted, and the strategic (operational) goals were attained by employing military formations at the tactical level. It was based on combat activities under special conditions, such as: desert area, capturing of residential settlements (in some cases following the fording of water obstacles), tunnel warfare, the launching of long-range precision weapons strikes by the Aerospace Forces in a unified intelligence-combat fire information space. A considerable number of those were carried out at night.

The special forces experience enabled us to define the main and most effective form of their use:

* Combat activities aimed at destroying the most dangerous units of terrorist formations;
* The protection of important infrastructure sites and the main road directions;
* Combat activities that enabled the forces and means of combat fire of the RF Armed Forces to use the intelligence data;
* Protection of the state border;

However, a number of peculiarities exist when performed tasks with the use of integrated elements:

* Comprehensive use of military forces with the participation of military formations of the interested states and the popular militias units;
* Launching of strikes aimed at reducing the economic potential of the enemy;
* Active information and psychological targeting of the militants in order to impact their moral-psychological state of mind;
* The conduct of highly maneuver combat activities by autonomous groups of forces (troops) in the various directions;
* The use of the methods of guerilla warfare together with the classical forms of conducting military actions;
* The wide use of underground passages, tunnels and communication, and construction equipment;
* The use of mobile units riding on “Tachanka”-type pickups *[“technicals” or pickup trucks mounting a heavy weapon, “Tachanka” referring to the Soviet battlewagons of the Civil War (1917-1920)] (translator’s comments)* for raids, ambushes and counterattacks.

We also had to take into account the fact that toward the summer of 2015, the Armed forces of Syria had ben completely depleted, the personnel were demoralized, the officer corps was degrading, and the Armed Forces leadership was demonstrating extremely low effectiveness in commanding their troops. Given this situation, we were forced to place our bets on the most combat ready elements of the popular militias, such as the units of brigade general Suheyl, the “Desert Hawks”, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, the “Hezbollah” and “Fatimids” combat units, the units of sheikhs Turki, Ibrahim and Suleyman, and later on the brigades of the 5th voluntary assault corps formed by volunteers who became part of the most combat ready ground forces grouping.

Effectively, we are talking about fragmented irregular armed formations. However, when they are united under the command of the RF AF troops grouping commander, and when acting under a single concept, they acquired a new status, so now they can be called an “integrated grouping” in the full sense of the word.

The use of new methods of conducting military actions allowed us to reach our first successes at the initial stage in upper Latakia. In the course of operations, the Russian Aerospace and Naval forces, as well as the Special Forces units, managed to destroy the critical sites of the enemy, the infrastructure and the large gatherings of terrorist formations, in order to perform the tasks of the ground formation. The main role in it was played not by the regular forces, but by the above-described units, which played the decisive role in the key operations in upper Latakia, Palmyra, Quaysr, Aleppo, the liberation of Akerbat, Hama and Deir-ez-Zor.

In the mountainous area, the activities were conducted in the advantageous directions with the capture and holding of dominant heights, ridges and mountain passes, the wide use of flanking units, as the familiarity with the theater of military action played an important role. Thus, in the desert terrain, we used widely the results of aviation and artillery strikes along the entire depth of the enemy defenses, as the offensive actions were conducted actively during nighttime. Bulldozers were used to fortify the defensive lines and positions in separate directions. The tanks placed under the direct command of the assault units commanders were used efficiently.

The blockade of Deir ez-Zor was lifted in the end of October 2017 by two strikes launched by the units of General Suheyl and five volunteer units. After the massive fire strike by using “Kalibr” cruise missiles from the “Admiral Essen” frigate, followed by the capture and subsequent expansion of the beachhead on the left bank of the Euphrates, the Syrian army entered the city, which had been besieged for three years. Further on the terrorist grouping was encircled, fragmented and destroyed piece by piece.

**The most effective resources**

Another peculiarity was tunnel and counter-tunnel warfare. The passages dug underground were used for moving within the cities between the positions, as well as for clandestine approaching toward the enemy, in particular in the Syrian capital and in Homs. In Aleppo and in Damascus, the terrorists used the tunnels also for planting explosive devices, and for the destruction of governmental sites that were controlled by the government.

The operation for the liberation of Aleppo became one of the key events during the Syrian war. It was offensive-defensive in nature. For the purposes of firing against the enemy constantly, a three shifts offensive tactic was applied day and night, uninterruptedly. A defensive grouping was created along the outside perimeter. The aviation launched strikes against the sites and groupings of the terrorist formations only along the inside perimeter, while the rocket troops and artillery and the tactical fire assets were firing upon important targets within the city, but only after receiving confirmation from three or more sources. Apart from that, the Spetznaz elements conducted subversive activities against the terrorist formations sites.

The humanitarian operation was conducted in parallel with the conduct of offensive actions and the aviation precision strikes against the targets, as it ultimately became the breaking moment in the liberation of Syria.

It is also necessary to talk specifically about the activities of brigadier Suheyl as the most capable commander in the Syrian army. He commands the irregular formations. During the course of the combat activities he achieved considerable successes, he was able to evade templates, and he was using different methods to conduct special operations in an intelligent way.

The fundamentally new approach to offensive tactics that was introduced into the practice of general Suheyl was the creation of the so-called Syrian Wall in order to reduce the losses in personnel and equipment. The fortifying of the positions was carried out by using general purpose road vehicles, which was also used for offensive operations following the adding of armor by the armor specialists.

In the course of the operation in Syria, like never before, we witnessed the practical importance of information warfare. The information resources became one of the most effective types of weapons. Their wide use allows for destabilizing the situation from within in a matter of days. For example, during the operation for the liberation of Aleppo, the information work with the local population allowed us to liberate entire neighborhoods without fighting by allowing more than 130 thousand peaceful residents to leave.

The effects of such type of influence are comparable with the results of a large-scale operation with the use of troops and forces. At that, it must be noted that information warfare was conducted by both sides. Its results had a direct impact on the world public opinion. I would say this: without conducting information warfare, we would not have succeeded in Aleppo, Deri ez-Zor and Guta.

This way, the modern military science demonstrates flexibility, adaptability to the specific situation, and the ability to reach geopolitical, strategic goals without the wide use of military force – through means of non-military nations, by using integrated forces groupings.

**The Peculiarities of Command**

A separate question was the organization of the command of the integrated groupings in the Syrian Arab Republic. From the very beginning of the special operation the overall planning of the use of troops was carried out by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, while the detailed one – by the commander of the grouping. The overall command over the troops actions was assigned as a task to the commander of the grouping of troops (forces) directly through the General Staff of the armed forces of Syria.

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***0“A new approach in the offensive tactics was the creation of the so-called Syrian wall in order to lower the number of losses of personnel and equipment”***

Along with that, from the start of the first operations for stabilizing the situation, the organization of the command required serious corrections. Given the low effectiveness of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Syria, all work on preparing the operation fell upon our officers. For the purpose of direct command of the grouping, operational groups from all formations were deployed to the command center in Hmeymim, together with the Mukhabarat *[Syrian intelligence, translator’s note]*, the IRGC combat units, “Hezbollah”, “Al-Quds”, the people’s defense units, and others.

For the purpose of further optimization, we took the decision to deploy operational groups from the Armed Forces of the RF to the tactical direction in accordance with the territorial division of Syria to areas of responsibility. At the initial stage these groups were low in numbers and included up to five officers, but they were already able to secure effective command. Later on, they incorporated additional officers as operators, reconnaissance, artillerists, engineers, communications and interpreters. Depending on the performed tasks, and in the most active phases of the operation, the number of officers in the operational groups reached up to 15-20 persons.

We also optimized the operational staff of the Hmeymim command station to reflect the abruptly-changing situation. The command center’s duty shift included representatives of the strategic planning group, reconnaissance-strike actions command groups, an information-analytical center, a joint air defense and fighter aviation command center, combat fire planning group, center for reconciliation of the warring parties, and groups for negotiations with the representatives of the coalition, Israel and Turkey.

The work of the joint command center of the grouping of troops (forces) that was organized in this way, allowed us to secure uninterrupted command, shorten the decision-making cycle and increase the operability of performing the set tasks.

The composition of the combat command group of the command center was changing in accordance with the newly emerging tasks. For example, prior to the deployment to the Mediterranean Sea of the aircraft carrier group, we created a naval operational group comprising 12 persons from the headquarters of the Northern and Black fleets, in order to organize the use of the aircraft aviation against the ground sites of the armed formations.

In February 2016, by decision of the Minister of Defense of the RF, a fundamentally new element of the command system was formed – the center for the reconciliation of the warring parties whose task was to exert control over the ceasefire regime.

The above comprehensive set of measures enabled us not only to secure the command’s sustainability, uninterruptedness and operational tempo, but also tied all elements into a single reconnaissance-strike information field. Video conferencing connection was established within all operational groups with the command center of the troops grouping.

One of the most considerable improvements were the measures aimed at countering the combat UAVs of the enemy. A group for combating UAVs was introduced in the composition of the center for complex security of the command center, headed by the ranking officer in the duty shift. Its main task was to organize the coordination between the forces and means for electronic warfare, the aviation, the UAVs, the combat fires and the communications (this practice is also relevant in conducting operational and combat training during the day-to-day activities of the troops).

The so-created system provided for the command of the troops groupings in the operational-tactical directions, together with the future and round-the-clock planning of combat activities (long-distance precision weapons strikes against the critical and economically important sites), which allowed us to assess the situation in real time, plan the combat fires, and correct the results of the launched strikes simultaneously in all directions.

The modern art of war and the experience from the conduct of combat activities in regional conflicts over the last quarter of a century demonstrate that the creation and use of integrated groupings in the wars of new type, are becoming more and more relevant, and the problems of their deployment and command includes aspects that require thoughtful, detailed elaboration. We need to develop a unified understanding of the theory of the use of such groupings in the practice of the combat actions of the RF Armed Forces.