



Russian Operational Art, Military Science, and Leadership Signaled From Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Russian media recently reported that Colonel-General (3-Star) Sergei Surovikin is relinquishing command of Russian forces in Syria to Colonel-General Andrei Serdyukov. The first accompanying article notes that Surovikin has held the command in Syria longer than any of his predecessors, and is returning to command the Aerospace Forces. The Aerospace Forces is the newest branch of the Russian Armed Forces, and it has a special expectation in evolving Russian military art: leading efforts in exercising the deployment of capabilities that Chief of the Russian General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov has described as “self-sufficient groups of... highly mobile troops.” Surovikin in this position is the first combined-arms general who has commanded the Aerospace Forces.

Meanwhile in Syria, Serdyukov, according to *Kommersant*, is tasked with “speeding up the Russian-Turkish agreements on organizing joint patrols in areas of the Idlib de-escalation zone.” This is seen by the Russians as pursuing a standing initiative delayed since fall of 2018. In Russian operational art, the concept of joint patrols may or may not include integrated activity between cooperating sides, rather just coordinated or de-conflicted actions. Humanitarian convoys, in Russian military art, are distinct from patrols but seem to bridge the line between military and non-military actions in General Staff thinking.

The joint patrols are an example of Russia’s “strategy of limited actions” which Gerasimov discusses in the second accompanying passage. The passage features segments of a speech that Gerasimov gave during a meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences. He discusses Russia’s “strategy of limited actions” including “humanitarian operations,” which Russian military police have prominently been leading in Syria (like convoys to removing civilians from battles zones), as “new methods.” This is key because the term “methods” signals doctrinal prominence and establishment in Russian military science practice. He also notes that the Syrian experience has had an important role in the development of the “new methods”. Thus, it is not surprising that the out-going commander Surovikin will lead the Aerospace Forces after his time in Syria, to further Russian military art. It is worth also noting, in this regard, that he had previously been one of the key officers in the establishment of the modern Russian Military Police Forces. (See: “Russia’s Game Plan and Turkish-Russian Joint Patrols in Idlib,” in this issue of *OE Watch*, p. 47) **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**



Sergey Surovikin in 2018.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=68214425>, CC BY 4.0.

“We got a rationale for new methods of action of the troops during the operation. The role of the military strategy was to plan and coordinate joint military and non-military actions of the Russian group of troops (forces) and formations of the armed forces of the interested states, militarized structures of the countries participating in the conflict.”

Source: “Командующего ВДВ десантировали в Сирию Газета “Коммерсантъ (Airborne Troops Commander “Air-dropped” into Syria),” *Kommersant*, Issue No. 65, 12 April 2019. <https://kommersant.ru/daily/118094>

Starting from March 17, their routes were extended in areas west of Aleppo, north of Hama and mountainous Latakia. As of yesterday, “*Kommersant*” sources say, coordinated patrol of joint convoys of Russian and Turkish soldiers should have commenced along the front line between the opposing sides in the area between the Turkish checkpoints of Barkum and Surman. If these maneuvers are recognized as successful then after April 20 the military personnel of the two countries will start joint patrols of the north-eastern part of the de-escalation zone. “We assume the fact that in May we will be able to start coordinated patrols consisting of joint convoys inside the demilitarized zone,” a military source told “*Kommersant*.”

Source: “Векторы развития военной стратегии Анастасия Свиридова Выбор редакции, Фактор силы (Vectors of Military Strategy Development Anastasia Sviridov Editor’s Choice, Power Factor),” *Redstar.ru*, 3 April 2019. <http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/>

“The strategy of limited action” outside Russia

The Syrian experience has an important role in the development of the strategy. Its development and implementation allowed us to identify a new practical area- the fulfillment of tasks for the protection and promotion of national interests outside the territory of Russia, within the framework of the “strategy of limited actions.”

The basis for the implementation of this strategy is the creation of a self-sufficient group of troops (forces) based on the formations of one of the branches of the Armed Forces, which has high mobility and is able to make the greatest contribution to the solution of the tasks. In Syria, this role is assigned to the formations of the Aerospace Forces.

We got a rationale for new methods of action of the troops during the operation. The role of the military strategy was to plan and coordinate joint military and non-military actions of the Russian group of troops (forces) and formations of the armed forces of the interested states, militarized structures of the countries participating in the conflict.