

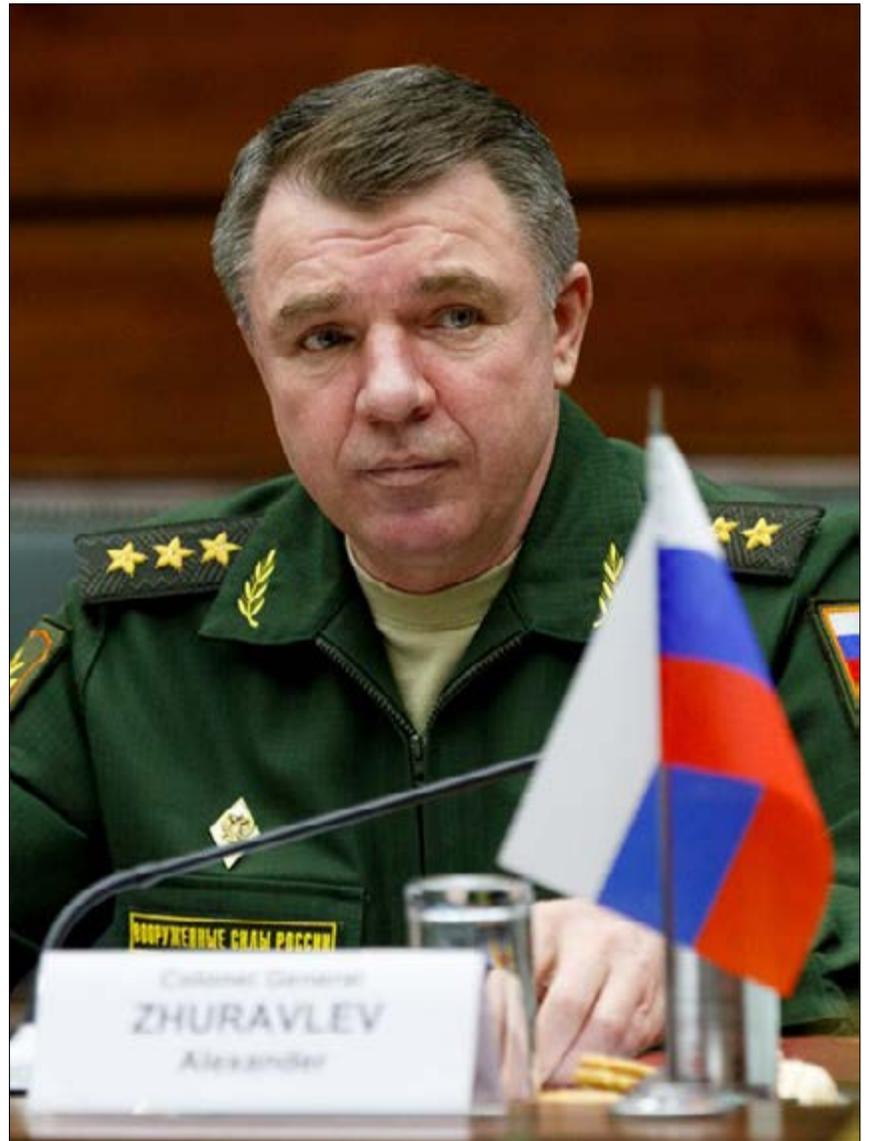


## Russian Senior Leaders on the Lessons Learned from Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted interview of the commander of the Western Military District, Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, in *Krasnaya Zvezda* sheds light on the impact that Russia's involvement in Syria is having on the training and development of the Russian Armed Forces. Colonel General Zhuravlev explains the importance of effective command and control, use of unmanned vehicles, military deception, and the increasing need to plan for urban and underground warfare in combat operations.

The second accompanying excerpt, which is from an interview of the commander of the 41st Combined-Arms Army, Major General Yakov Reztantsev, also in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, is in many respects quite similar to Colonel General Zhuravlev's account of the importance of Russia's Syrian experience. Major General Reztantsev makes an interesting observation about how Russia sees the nature of current and future warfare: "We are training the troops to counter the enemy under the conditions of a so-called inverted front [перевернутый фронт] or when the front is everywhere." This mention of 'inverted front' is likely the view that current and future conflicts will be fought through the depth of defense instead of on well-defined fronts, as was usually the case in the 1st and 2nd World Wars. Conflict, in this sense, could manifest in terms of heavy armored formations on the country's borders, but also through precision rear area strikes, special operations forces, and hostile information operations (exploitative media and social media) used to rile up disaffected elements of the population and unnerve the population as a whole.

This thinking is in tune with the Russian General Staff's public views on the nature of current and future warfare, and is in line with recent reforms that have focused on controlling media and social media narratives, and increasing rear area security capabilities. This is likely the impetus for current discussions about creating smaller military districts that would function as front-level commands in the event of large-scale warfare. (Discussions of front-level activities had fallen out of favor after the Cold War.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, Commander of the Western Military District.  
Source: Mil.ru, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander\\_Zhuravlyov\\_\(2017-02-28\)\\_-1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Zhuravlyov_(2017-02-28)_-1.jpg), CC BY 4.0

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*“It is hard to overestimate the significance of the experience acquired in Syria. The skills and abilities obtained there are being systematically developed into special methodological guides.” -Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, Commander of the Western Military District*

*“We are training the troops to counter the enemy under the conditions of a so-called inverted front [перевернутый фронт] or when the front is everywhere. This concept for the conduct of combat operations continues to be studied by military specialists taking account of the emergence of new means of armed combat and the effective monitoring of modern reconnaissance systems and instruments.” -Major General Yakov Reztantsev, Commander of the 41st Combined Arms Army*



## Continued: Russian Senior Leaders on the Lessons Learned from Syria

**Source:** Oleg Pochinok, “С учётом сирийского опыта (Taking Account of Syrian Experience),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 27 May 2019. <http://redstar.ru/s-uchyotom-sirijskogo-opyta-2>

*Saint Petersburg -- The Western Military District winter training period, which has now ended, showed that considerable attention is being devoted within the troops to implementing the experience acquired while performing missions in the Syrian Arab Republic. This experience, as practice shows, plays an important role in enhancing the proficiency both of individual servicemen and of units and subunits. Hero of Russia Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlev, commander of the Western Military District, talked to Krasnaya Zvezda about the work being done in this area.*

***Alexander Alexanderovich, the concept of “Syrian experience” is rather generalized. What does it entail, first and foremost?***

*Above all, this is not a separate area of intensive combat training, but an organic component of it.*

*During practical performance of combat training assignments we strive to make as much use as possible of the experience of conducting hostilities in modern armed conflicts, including in the Syrian Arab Republic. When conducting tactical, special tactical, and command-staff exercises, we devote particular attention to unorthodox thinking, departing from established stereotypes, and using nonstandard methods when assignments are being tackled by generals and officers. To this end, they make active use of procedures such as turning movements, envelopment, infiltration, and covertly moving to the attack transition line. Modern combat -- and this has been confirmed by Syrian experience -- requires commanders at all levels to display military keen-wittedness and to seek out opportunities to mislead the enemy and force him to act in a way that is advantageous to us. Heightened attention is therefore paid to the utmost readiness of command and control and comprehensive support systems, and also to the covert deployment of the necessary forces.*

***Is account taken of the particularities of hostilities conducted by terrorist forces? How well studied are they?***

*A particular feature of the Middle East conflict is that the main hostilities are conducted in population centers. Moreover, the terrorists do not only strive to maintain their positions but also make attempts to expand the territory under their control. They use simple and on the whole effective tactics and methods of combat. In particular, they use the civilian population as a living shield, thereby depriving the pro-government forces of their superiority in firepower. In addition, in the Middle East conflict the terrorists for the first time began using state-of-the-art means of armed combat -- strike UAVs and means of electronic reconnaissance and electronic warfare...When holding a seized population center, the terrorists generally organize a system of fragmented defense [очаговая оборона]. Its stability derives from a robust system of firepower, high density of firepower, and also the ability to rapidly concentrate forces in the necessary place. For this purpose, buildings are linked by tunnels and underground communication passages, making it possible to covertly regroup and transfer reserves to the most threatened areas. Approaches to positions and tank danger areas are mined. The lower stories of buildings in key areas are turned into long-term fire positions. Armor and artillery are placed in residential districts close to socially significant assets (hospitals, schools, mosques) in order to avoid being destroyed by airstrikes. At crossroads, barricades are erected and permanent emplacements constructed, linked by communication passages for covert maneuvers.*

***In other words, the importance of skillful organization of urban warfare is increasing?***

*Definitely. Cities, as natural fortified areas, are centers of resistance and constitute a goal of armed combat. In particular, fierce fighting was conducted for Palmyra and Aleppo in Syria, and also for Fallujah and Mosul in Iraq. Moreover, the cities of Aleppo and Mosul are, in fact, megalopolises with a population of more than 2 million. Incidentally, it can also be said that in Syria a new way of using Armed Forces formations was developed and tested in practice for the first time -- the humanitarian operation. Thus, in Aleppo and Eastern Ghouta, at the same time as performing combat assignments to rout the terrorists, it was necessary within a short space of time to plan and conduct measures to evacuate the civilian population from the conflict zone...Practice shows that the establishment of control over urbanized areas will, in the medium term, become one of the key conditions for achieving success in military operations. When conducting hostilities in a city (or population center), a number of particular features can be identified. These are the lack of a clear line of contact with the enemy and the extent of the line of contact both vertically (from underground passages to the upper stories of buildings) and in terms of depth. Another characteristic is the difficulty of maneuvering forces, and also of using armor because of the considerable number of obstacles. There is also the factor of the defending side's superior knowledge of the locality...*

***Do the gunmen's tactics and the various objective conditions for countering them require an appropriate adjustment to the organization of everyday combat training?***

*It is hard to overestimate the significance of the experience acquired in Syria. The skills and abilities obtained there are being systematically developed into special methodological guides. At training grounds, commanders of subunits are practicing constructing and overcoming “Syrian ramparts,” conducting “tunnel warfare” and “countertunnel measures,” and combatting “jihad-mobiles” and combat drones, including with the use of electronic warfare. During combat training, work is done on assignments as part of integrated reconnaissance and fire and reconnaissance and strike systems, with the use of various types of maneuver. Tactical exercises by motorized rifle and tank subunits are conducted in collaboration with aviation and the use of UAVs.*



## Continued: Russian Senior Leaders on the Lessons Learned from Syria

**Source:** Taras Rudyk, “Боевые приоритеты сибирских бригад (The Combat Priorities of the Siberian Brigades),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 15 May 2019. <http://redstar.ru/boevye-prioritety-sibirskih-brigad>

***You have served in various regions and taken part in troop operations -- not least in Syria. Given that fact, have you made any changes or introduced any innovations into the tactical and weapons training of Siberian formations and units or into the professional career-area training of officers?***

*Virtually all formation and unit commanders -- as well as the bulk of Army command-and-control officers -- have performed missions in the Syrian Arab Republic or another armed conflict areas. We are, of course, introducing the combat experience they acquired there into the process of training the personnel in tactical field training, at gunnery ranges, and at troop firing ranges. This is the priority requirement from the Commander of the Central Military District, the Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, and the Russian Federation Defense Minister.*

*As regards the combat experience acquired in Syria both by our specialists and on the whole by the grouping of Russian troops in the Syrian Arab Republic, we have already repeatedly applied it and are applying it in practice in the course of tactical live firing exercises, and we are also demonstrating it for training purposes at methodological training camps with commanders at various levels. Thus, in the course of defensive exercises, engineer fortifications for defensive positions were produced covertly and in good time by utilizing bulldozers with cover provided by combat engineer and reconnaissance sections. When it came to preparing the “Syrian berm” [protective earthworks for maneuver in which a tank fires in motion], defense was conducted on a platoon-by-platoon basis. Each section appointed observers to monitor the aerial situation with a view to detecting enemy unmanned aerial vehicles -- quadcopters and drones. In order to combat “jihad mobiles” composite groups armed with heavy machine guns, antitank rocket launchers, and antitank guided missiles were set up. Snipers practiced elements of countersniper warfare and camouflage skills in both wooded, mountain, and desert terrain...*

***You said that during the winter period there were two two-sided battalion tactical exercises with live firing. In February one of those battalion tactical exercises was held with subunits of the 74th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade at the Yurga Combined-Arms Test Range -- a battalion tactical group with reinforcing and support subunits operated mobile defense. To what extent is that subject currently a topical one when training troops in this region? What are the features of combat training under Siberian conditions?***

*It cannot be said that we are entirely abandoning the classic static defense. It is defined by the field manual when troops are concentrated across a broad front and they have time to prepare for combat. But the questions of conducting maneuver defense are topical today, since they are dictated by the combat experience acquired in the armed conflict areas -- including Syria -- that I have mentioned. We are training the troops to counter the enemy under the conditions of a so-called inverted front [перевернутый фронт] or when the front is everywhere. This concept for the conduct of combat operations continues to be studied by military specialists taking account of the emergence of new means of armed combat and the effective monitoring of modern reconnaissance systems and instruments. We are training subunits to conduct mobile operations under enemy fire, because the troops must be prepared to repel an attack from any direction at any time...*

*Given the modern development of weaponry and unmanned aerial vehicles -- including unmanned combat aerial vehicles -- we must rule out the static performance of missions and operate in a creative fashion. When planning combat operations and accomplishing missions, commanders must think about how to protect the lives and well-being of their subordinates. That is why we are training the troops at test ranges to be able to change their location as quickly as possible once their combat training missions have been accomplished. That was the case with the two-sided live-fire battalion tactical exercise in the 74th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, during which the troops successfully rehearsed more than 15 firing and tactical missions, and the commanders acquired skills relating to the command and control of subunits and organizing collaboration between them in a complex and rapidly changing environment.*