

BATTALION TACTICAL GROUPS OF THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE ALTERED PHYSIOGNOMY OF MODERN CONFLICTS*

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The altered setting of current conflicts, its hybridity and nonlinearity affect the justification of the assumption that operations in several domains will become a new method of conducting operations of the Russian Armed Forces. The Russian Armed Forces battle groups are in practice known as battalion tactical groups (BTG). They have arisen in response to the problems regarding the deployment of the Russian Armed Forces units in local and small wars, and within the general transformation of the Russian Armed Forces, based on altered geopolitical and strategic circumstances. The basis of BTG consists of units from active brigades of the Russian Armed Forces, which are established modularly in accordance with the expressed needs and expected characteristics of operations. The first deployment of the Russian Armed Forces BTG was in the conflict in Ukraine, which has significantly improved their organization and deployment following the experiences from the mentioned conflict. The current deployment in the conflict in Syria greatly contributes to the maturing of the concept of BTG implementation in the expeditionary operations of the Russian Armed Forces. It can be expected that the Russian Armed Forces BTG will also play an increasingly important role in the future hotspots, in response to practical demands of modern hybrid wars.

Key words: *physiognomy of modern conflicts, hybrid warfare, BTG, non-state actors*

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Introduction

An analysis of the physiognomy of modern conflicts in recent decades shows that the rapid development of science and technology brings significant changes in the nature of armed struggle. International actors, participants in these conflicts (FR Yugoslavia, Iraq in 2003, Georgia, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Ukraine), actively promote new methods of wars, or the so-called hybrid wars, which are based on non-military means. At the same time, the boundaries between the state of war and peace are being erased. Robert O. Work, the former US Deputy Secretary of Defense, speaks in favour of this. In his speech at the US War College Strategic Conference in April 2015, he expressed the following opinion on the perspective of the Army development: "If the streets of Baghdad and valleys of Afghanistan represent the laboratory for irregular warfare, I believe that the Army will increasingly have to prepare for a future hybrid war."¹ Two years before him, the Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, in his many times quoted article "The value of science in foresight", considering new challenges that require rethinking the forms and methods of warfare, sets the following questions: "What is modern warfare, what should the armed forces be ready for, what should they be armed with? Only by answering them we will be able to determine the perspective of development and improvement of the armed forces in the long run. To do this, it is necessary to clearly understand what forms and methods of their implementation we will use?"² Accordingly, at the operational and tactical level, the characteristics of military operations of the Russian Armed Forces have proven progress in terms of the military organization, the implementation of new technology, the improvement of command and control system, the use of modular units of military formations and various non-military contents to meet strategic goals. Finally, the result of numerous changes indicates the dynamics of the development of strategic thought, which take place at the tactical, operational and strategic level, moving "the centre of gravity" by Clausewitz to a lower operational level. The experiences from Syria, cited by Colonel Trotsenko Konstantin Aleksandrovich, speak in favour of this: "Today it is necessary to descend from the high operational and strategic level to the ground and open comprehensive research and development work at the operational and tactical level."³

¹ Robert Work in the article by Frank Hoffman, „Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges“ *PRISM*, 7(4). pp. 31-47, The Journal of Complex Operations, 2018, <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1680696/examining-complex-forms-of-conflict-gray-zone-and-hybrid-challenges/>

² Валерий Герасимов, „Ценность науки в предвидении“, *Газета Военно-промышленный курьер*, Опубликовано в выпуске № 8 (725) 26 февраля 2013, <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>

³ Константин Троценко, Боевые действия в Сирии — развитие способов ведения общевойскового боя и операции или частный случай? *Военная Мысль*. 2020. № 11. стр. 6-24. <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/2DBPrWyV13.pdf>

The organization, planning and use of the Russian Armed Forces battle groups have arisen as a result of internal reforms, based on the expressed needs and perceived problems within the execution of combat actions in Chechnya and Georgia. The reform of the defence concept, in terms of changing strategic documents and their implementation, is based on the National Security Strategy from 2015⁴, and harmonized with the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation from 2016.⁵ Armed actions are defined by the Military doctrine of the Russian Federation.⁶ By analyzing these documents, it can be concluded that the factors that define the current Russian military force are political and military requirements that are placed before the Russian Armed Forces, such as: 1) strategic deterrence from external attacks, 2) regional dominance, including an active response to instabilities, terrorism or conflicts in its immediate environment, 3) expeditionary operations, 4) preparation for conventional warfare on its territory and 5) internal stability. All key factors related to the economy, energy, human potential and technological development, affect the development of the Russian Armed Forces in a favourable manner. In addition, there is strong public opinion support to the Russian foreign policy, state leadership and armed forces.⁷

In his speech at the scientific conference of the Academy of Military Science dedicated to the development of military strategy in modern conditions, the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, as one of the main perspective of military strategy development, pointed out the execution of tasks on protection and promotion of national interests outside the territory of the Russian Federation within the "limited actions strategy".⁸ The basis for the implementation of this strategy is the establishment of a self-sufficient group of forces based on the formation of one of the branches of the Armed Forces, which has high mobility and is capable of making the greatest contribution to solving the set tasks.

In regard to the deployment of the Armed Forces in the conditions of greatly altered concept and physiognomy of modern conflicts, this paper will consider the development of expeditionary forces, which are mainly based on battalion tactical groups, which are known in the Russian and Western sources as BTG.

⁴ Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, Президент РФ, 2015, available at: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/docs/document133/>, accessed 20.11.2019.

⁵ See more in: Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации, Президент РФ, 2016, available at: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/international/document25/>, accessed 20.11.2019.

⁶ See more in: Военная доктрина Российской Федерации, Президент РФ, 2014, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>, accessed 20.11.2019.

⁷ Radin A., Lynn E. D., Edward G., Eugeniu H., Massicot D., Povlock M., Reach C., Boston S., Charap S., Mackenzie W., Migacheva K., Johnston T. and Long A. (2019) *The future of the Russian Military*. Santa Monica: RAND.

⁸ Валерий Герасимов, Векторы развития военной стратегии, *Газета „Красная звезда”*, 2019. <http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/>

The impact of the experiences of the Great Patriotic War on the Russian Armed Forces

The implementation of the reforms of the Russian Armed Forces is based on the continuity of previous reforms and can be viewed as a form of "Russian tradition", and represents the fulfillment of the vision of an earlier military thinker, the ancestor of the idea of reforming the Soviet and Russian Armed Forces. The current form of the modern Russian Armed Forces owes much to the current generation of military leadership, which has disbanded the rest of the Soviet mass mobilization army. However, the intellectual legacy of the late 70s until mid 80s contributed much more to this, when Marshal Nikolai Vasilyevich Ogarkov served as the Chief of the General Staff.⁹

The current military transformation could be called "the legacy of the Ogarkov reform" because they represent the successful fulfillment of the vision that he had for the Soviet Armed Forces in the early 80s. If we consider the changes in the Russian Armed Forces, from high precision non-nuclear weapons, modern communication systems and automated command and control systems, long-range force manoeuvres to the integration of battle groups at the operational level and emphasis on non-nuclear strategic deterrence, it can be concluded that Ogarkov's visions are fulfilled.¹⁰

Ogarkov's idea was to establish high readiness battle groups of mixed forces, capable of conducting defensive and offensive strategic operations. This was a model for large-scale combat operations that strongly influenced the Russian planning of the Joint Strategic Commands, the combined armed forces, the operational level headquarters and the establishment of high readiness battle groups along strategic routes. Ogarkov sought the integration of the Air Defence and the Army, considering the Air Force decisive in the initial period of war, without which the Army could not advance effectively. He implemented his ideas during the West-81 exercise, which was one of the greatest exercises in the history of the Armed Forces of the USSR and the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries. After the end of the Cold War, Soviet military data became available to the Western experts, who were surprised and concluded that the "Ogarkov's doctrine" would give a decisive advantage to the Warsaw Pact forces over the NATO forces in Europe.¹¹ Accordingly, the types of weapons and methods of warfare used by the United States and NATO at the end of 20th and beginning of 21st century were successfully tested on the Soviet manoeuvres in 1981.¹²

⁹ Алексей Капустин, Великое наследие маршала Огаркова, *Русская планета*, 2020, <https://rusplt.ru/policy/velikoe-nasledie-marshala-37414.html>

¹⁰ Кирилл Рябов, Доктрина Огаркова в прошлом и настоящем, *Военное обозрение*, 2020, <https://topwar.ru/165683-doktrina-ogarkova-v-proshlom-i-nastojaschem.html>

¹¹ Виктор Баранц, Американцы украли „Доктрину маршала Огаркова“?, *Комсомольская правда*, 2010, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/24520/668495/>

¹² See more: How Ogarkov's ideas influenced the leading world armies, in: Сергей Птичкин, Как идеи Огаркова повлияли на передовые армии мира, *Российской газеты*, 2019, <https://rg.ru/2019/11/03/kak-kitaj-reformiruet-armiiu-s-pomoshchiu-doktriny-ogarkova.html>

The experiences from the Great Patriotic War in modern Russian defence and security thinking are presented in Gerasimov's speech in 2015, in which he talks about strategic leadership and the organization of single management of the country in modern conditions.¹³ He emphasized the following lessons learned: 1. Prepare the Supreme Command and bodies of the military-strategic and operational-tactical level in advance as a single system, before the start of hostilities, 2. Technically equip strategic communication and command post system, 3. Establish groups of forces on strategic routes, under single command in peace, which was the idea of the "Ogarkov's doctrine".

Gerasimov's conclusions point to the altered character of the future conflicts, and to the increased influence of information and technology on the conduct of combat actions in a changing balance of power.^{14, 15} Today, military actions are becoming more dynamic, and the role of mobile mixed groups, which operate in a single intelligence space due to new command capabilities, is obvious.¹⁶

Although the Russian Federation maintains the focus of its traditional military force on firepower, mass and warfare at the operational level, the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces has come a long way to implementing Ogarkov's vision of conventional information-led warfare, by integrating fire and real-time strike systems with intelligence and reconnaissance devices. This is an example of the evolution of manoeuvre with combined weapons, which enabled actions by controlled strikes, fire and the increasing participation of precision-guided weapons.

The hybrid character of modern conflicts and its impact on the Armed Forces reform

The current setting for the development of geopolitical relations is completely marked by globalization and all its positive and negative effects. The negative effects are: economic and financial instability and crises, disrupted energy security, legal and illegal migration, competition for natural resources, humanitarian and environmental crises, extremism, terrorism, drug and arms trafficking, regional conflicts and threats in cyberspace.¹⁷

¹³ The power of great victory. The commanders of the modern Russian Army and Navy should know the lessons from the past war. Валери Герасимов, Сила Великой Победы, Газета Военно-промышленный курьер, Опубликовано в выпуске №17 (583), 13.05.2015. <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/25167>

¹⁴ Александр Александрович Бартош „Серые зоны” как ключевой элемент современного операционного пространства гибридно йвойны, *Военная Мысль*. 2021. № 2., <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/MAqTM7pX10.pdf>

¹⁵ Mark T. Esper, Winning the Future with Artificial Intelligence, Modern War Institute at West Point, 2021 <https://mwi.usma.edu/winning-the-future-with-artificial-intelligence/>

¹⁶ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, The Operational Environment and the Changing Character of Future Warfare, 2018, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/m/sgm-academy-document-library/269076>

¹⁷ Miroslav Mitrović, *Savremeni izazovi upravljanja nacionalnom bezbednošću u hibridnom bezbednosnom okruženju*, Conference Proceedings – Economics & Management: Globalization Challenges, Conference EMAN 2017, Ljubljana, 2017, pp. 304-315.

The mentioned setting conditions destabilization in international relations, causing clashes and low-intensity conflicts of subversive character with limited use of direct military force. It can be said that social conflicts are not directed towards the political goal determined by the state, and therefore they are no longer of "Clausewitz type". The Prussian war theorist claimed that war was an interactive phenomenon that was constantly evolving.¹⁸ The focus has shifted to non-state actors as direct participants in conflict, while political interest in the case of new conflicts has become a marginalized phenomenon. Therefore, it can be concluded that Edward Newman rightly noticed in 2004 in his debate on new wars that armed conflicts in the altered structure of international relations create their own economies in regions, where there is clear absence of state power, whereas the entire nature of conflict acquires a "self-sustaining" character.¹⁹ Such conflicts are also called hybrid wars and represent the expression of the evolution of conflicts, conditioned by globalization and the dominance of the neoliberal order of international relations. Namely, it can be said that hybrid war in the classical sense of war interpretation does not exist, and is determined by implementing a concept that is a flexible form of synergistic action of an entity (state or non-state), with the task of disrupting consciousness and organization of the other entity, its destabilization and weakening, with the aim of achieving its own strategic advantage and interest, predominantly by unarmed methods. Thus, Frank Hoffman, analyzing the conflicts after 2010, expands the initial idea of hybrid conflict, where he has separated the concept of hybrid war from the so-called *measures short of armed conflict*, and presented it as a continuous sequence in which the neighbouring elements unnoticeably differ from each other, although the extremes are quite different (Figure 1).²⁰

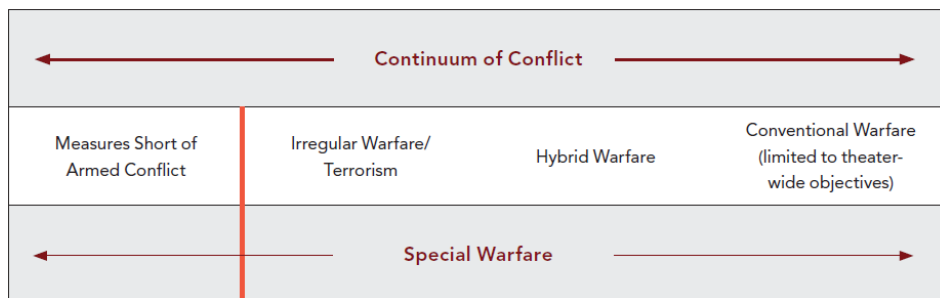


Figure 1 – Hoffman's Continuum of Conflict

¹⁸ Christopher Mewett, „Understanding War's Enduring Nature,” *War on the Rocks*, January 21, 2014. <https://warontherocks.com/2014/01/understanding-wars-enduring-nature-alongside-its-changing-character/>.

¹⁹ Edward Newman, „The 'New Wars' Debate: A Historical Perspective is Needed”, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2004, p. 177.

²⁰ Frank Hoffman, „Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges” *PRISM*, 7(4). pp. 31- 47, The Journal of Complex Operations, 2018, p. 32

According to Hoffman, understanding the complexity and differences of various manners of warfare, which are conducted during the continuum of conflict, is crucial, as well as understanding the opponents, their methods and understanding of victory. The problem with Hoffman's continuum of conflict is that it gives too wide a network, which involves almost every action, so everything can be considered a hybrid war. Therefore this concept is not understandable.

Nebojša Vuković views the altered structure of conflict as a concept of asymmetric warfare, used by inferior participants in international relations against the powerful, using a wide range of available armed and unarmed means to cause deeper consequences at all levels of war.²¹ It can be said that the main characteristics of hybrid warfare are comprehensiveness, flexibility and asymmetry.²² Regarding asymmetry and participation of non-state actors in conflict, the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, General of the Army Sergey Shoygu has drawn the attention of generals and officers to the importance of studying the experience gained during the actions in Syria. In particular, he noted: "Despite the enormous superiority of government troops of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) over illegal armed formations in the air, in artillery, high-precision weapons, in armoured vehicles, in reconnaissance and electronic warfare equipment, their rate of advance in the enemy's tactical defence zone did not exceed 1.5 to 2 km per day."²³

In the mentioned altered conditions in which conflicts with new characteristics arise, where the primary goal is not the complete devastation of the opponent, but his orientation towards fulfilling the goals of the aggressor, the perception of the role and tasks of the armed forces has changed. The newly emerging aspects that affect the need to redefine the role of the Armed Forces are: 1) urbanization of the battlefield; 2) political and social aspect; 3) organizational aspect; 4) technical and technological aspect; 5) growing dominance of quality over quantity; 6) diversity of development of weapons and military equipment.²⁴ Certainly, the current, altered conditions for conducting armed actions are present in the consciousness of the Russian military thinkers, and their response is expected and rational in the form of organizational and operational changes in the deployment of forces.

²¹ Nebojša Vuković, „Prilog pojmovnom određenju sintagme hibridni rat“, in: Nebojša Nikolić (ur.), *Hibridno ratovanje – dilema koncepta savremenih sukoba*, Institut za strategijska istraživanja, Univerzitet odbrane, Beograd, 2018, p. 18

²² Miroslav Mitrović, *Savremeni izazovi upravljanja nacionalnom bezbednošću u hibridnom bezbednosnom okruženju*, op. cit. p. 716.

²³ Константин Троценко, Боевые действия в Сирии — развитие способов ведения общевойскового боя и операции или частный случай? gen. quote p. 8.

²⁴ Radomir Janković i Nebojša Nikolić, *Primene simulacija u proučavanju fizionomije savremenog rata*. Institut za strategijska istraživanja, Beograd, 2009. i Nebojša Nikolić, *Consideration of innovation of hybrid warfare concept*, Vojno delo, 5/2017 pp. 325.

Conditions and reasons for the establishment of BTG in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation

According to Viktor Mikhaylov, the reform of the Army and Navy of the Russian Armed Forces is carried out primarily with reference to the "Western experience", and began after the parade in May 2009, with the disbandment of the Russian Army and the transition from divisional to brigade structure.²⁵ It is believed that BTG became a part of the organization of the Russian Armed Forces the same year, which some analysts consider to be the key year of reform of the Russian Armed Forces in the last 100 years.²⁶

Nowadays the Russian Armed Forces rewrite the implementation of the concept of the US network warfare, which was Ogarkov's vision in the eighties. This concept is based on the widespread use of precision weapons, allows simultaneous fire effect on the entire depth of the enemy operational formation and its background, the absence of a clearly defined line of contact, a high rate of combat actions using BTG, increasing the role of surprise factors and deceiving the enemy, as well as night actions and the destruction of enemy forces "across the horizon." According to the Western military experts, the most complete implementation of the basic principles of the new concept of combat actions at the tactical level is achieved by the use of armed subunits combined in BTG.²⁷ Mikhaylov also emphasizes that owing to BTG, the high combat capabilities of modern weapons systems - tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, self-propelled mortar and artillery systems, anti-tank missile systems, as well as heavy infantry weapons (weapons for infantry support) can be used most effectively. Having in mind that helicopters for direct support of the army units at the tactical and strategic level (in some cases) by aviation are quite present in the armies of the Western countries, BTG can successfully solve any combat mission in the offensive and defence, when it operates in an advance or raid detachment, in march and other types of combat actions.²⁸

In addition, the experiences from the wars in Chechnya and Georgia have shown that smaller, self-sustaining and independent units and tactical groups are more effective in modern, local conflicts, thus practically changing the concept of performance and abandoning the performance in the form of brigade.²⁹ In this way, practically, BTG enter the Russian model of planning the deployed forces for specific

²⁵ Виктор Михайлов, Российский военно-бригадный подряд, *Независимая газета*, 2009. https://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2009-05-22/1_podryad.html

²⁶ Charles Bartles and Lester W. Grau. *Russia's View of Mission Command of Battalion Tactical Groups in the Era of "Hybrid War"*, 2018, https://community.apan.org/cfs-file/__key/docpreview-s/00-00-05-56-50/2018_2D00_06_2D00_11-Russias-View-of-Mission-Command-of-Battalion-Tactical-Groups-_2800_Bartles-and-Grau_2900_.pdf.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

operational actions. According to General Yakov Rezantsev, the principles of establishing battalion tactical groups are directly related to the nature of their tasks. Of course, they also depend on the characteristics of the area in which such groups are established, and even on the specific geopolitical conditions in the region. The idea is that the main firepower, weapons and equipment of BTG are based on the potential of the brigade that forms them.³⁰ Furthermore, the organization of transport enables efficient transportation of BTG to the place of deployment (by train in Ukraine and by ships and air transport in Syria), which also enables fulfillment of the requirement for rotation, but also equipping and delivery of resources to BTG forces.³¹

Characteristics and tasks of BTG

Battalion Tactical Groups are modular tactical organizational units, which are formed from permanent brigades of the Russian Armed Forces in order to be deployed and conduct tasks in the conflict zone. The BTG role is to establish control over a certain territory, as a part of the influence on the negotiations in the post-conflict phase. According to the development of the situation, BTG are deployed in strikes as a form of pressure on the opponent.³²

The main task of BTG is to control a certain area, terrain.³³ They are formed from the regular forces of the Russian Federation, from parts of certain brigades, which are engaged with their own resources in the establishment, equipping, preparation and execution of task, as well as the renewal of BTG resources in the field. Formations and military units of the Army, Navy and Air Force are formed on the principle of two

³⁰ Владимир Сосницкий, Потенциал боевого опыта успешно применяется в подготовке батальонных тактических групп 49-й общевойсковой армии, *Красная звезда*, 2021, <http://redstar.ru/potentsial-boevogo-opyta/>

³¹ The reforms proved very successful, as could be seen during the Ukrainian crisis, when the Russian Armed Forces managed to deploy about 40,000 troops in less than seven days on the border with Ukraine. The same action required more than twenty days in 1999. More about reforms in the Russian Armed Forces see in: Mark Galeotti, *The Modern Russian Army 1992–2016*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2017. On the presence in Ukraine see more in: *Ukrayinska Pravda Online* (2015). „Information Resistance Has Detected Russian Troops from More Than 10 Brigades in Donets Basin”, *Ukrayinska Pravda Online*, 20 Apr 2015, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/04/20/7065276/>.

³² Степанов Евгений Викторович, Корчмин Сергей Анатольевич, Костин, Кирилл Константинович Особенности подготовки и применения батальонных тактических групп в локальных войнах и вооруженных конфликтах, *Вестник сибирского государственного университета путей сообщения: гуманитарные исследования*, 2019, <https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=41388792>

³³ One of the tasks of BTG is to secure the military bases where the Russian Armed Forces are located. See more in: Игорь Кошаченков Батальонная группа морпехов охраняет авиабазу в Сирии, где развернуты силы ВКС РФ, *Первый русский*, 2015., https://tsargrad.tv/news/batalonnaja-gruppa-morpehov-ohranjaet-aviabazu-v-sirii-gde-razvernuty-sily-vks-rf_1471

battalions – soldiers employed on a contract basis, while the third consists of conscripts.³⁴ BTG consist of: one tank company, three mechanized infantry companies, an anti-tank company, two to three self-propelled artillery companies, a missile battery with multi-barrel launchers and two anti-aircraft batteries (Figure 2).³⁵

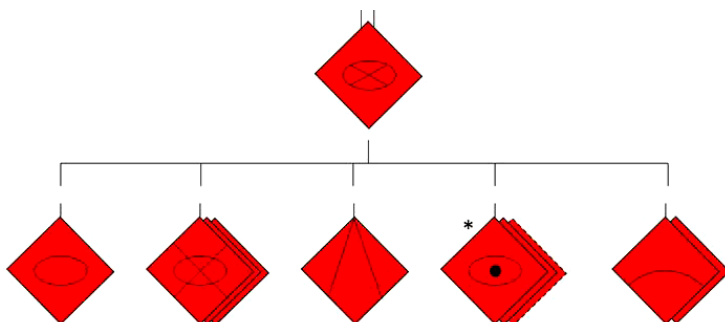


Figure 2 – Battalion Tactical Group

According to the Chief of the Russian General Staff Gerasimov, BTG consist of soldiers employed on a contract basis and a part of conscripts. These battalions have 800-900 men with reinforcement. The importance of BTG was also emphasized by the Chief of the Russian General Staff in the preparation for the annual exercise in 2018. He stated that the ground and airborne forces have 126 BTG which comprise soldiers employed on a contract basis and are in constant readiness to conduct combat tasks.³⁶ The identical data on the capacity to establish BTG at the brigade level have been expressed in the study by the Swedish Ministry of Defence, which recognized the efficiency of the Russian military power in transformation, both in organization and implementation of tactics and operational warfare in planning combat actions.³⁷ The rest of the brigade, which is not included

³⁴ Олег Фаличев, „Горячие точки науки”, *Газета Военно-промышленный курьер*, Опубликовано в выпуске № 12 (725), март 2018, <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/41870>

³⁵ Александр Федорченко, Александр Дюков, Сергей Дащенко, Состав и назначение батальонной тактической группы, Специальная техника и технологии транспорта, Сборник научных статей. Санкт-Петербург, 2020. <https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=42610402&selid=42610444>

³⁶ Министерство обороны Российской Федерации, Тезисы выступления начальника Генерального штаба Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации на брифинге, посвященном подготовке маневров войск (сил) „Восток-2018” <https://structure.mil.ru/mission/practice/all/more.htm?id=12194449@egNews>

³⁷ According to this study, in 2019 the Army would form 110, the Naval infantry 12 and the Air Force 24 BTG. See more: ТАСС, информационное агентство, Количество батальонных тактических групп в российской армии возрастет почти вдвое, 2016, in: Fredrik Westerlund and Susanne Oxenstierna (ed.). *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective–2019*, FOI December 2019, <https://www.foi.se/rapportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI-R--4758--SE>

in BTG, remains at location in peace and is used for possible manning or rotation, depending on the period of deployment. Professional soldiers are the backbone of BTG and are selected from the best soldiers, who choose to be professional non-commissioned officers. They are primarily engaged for combat tasks, electronic warfare actions and fire preparation, while logistic formations are mostly manned by soldiers doing compulsory military service.^{38, 39}

Besides BTG, which are the basis of conventional forces, the hybrid forces include units for special operations, local forces loyal to the Russian Federation, forces from the region and beyond, deployed on a contract basis, as well as armed forces of local civilian structures (militia).⁴⁰ This is confirmed by the experiences from the deployment in Ukraine, where the lack of BTG forces was compensated by the engagement of members of the paramilitary forces of the local militia. The problems, which have been noticed, point to the conclusion that these assigned forces are difficult to coordinate, organize for manoeuvre and move or take a position, either in offensive or defensive actions.⁴¹ According to the Commander of the Southern Military District of the Russian Armed Forces, Colonel General Aleksandr Dvornikov, the establishment and use of "the integrated groups" in Syria was different. From the beginning of the special operation, the general planning and use of the troops was carried out by the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, and the detailed planning was conducted by the group commander.⁴² Moreover, General Dvornikov pointed out the great importance of using the integrated groups in conflicts of a new type.

The increasing speed of modern combat actions and the composition of combat formations in addition to modern technology, in fact, expand the operational level of war to the tactical and strategic level.⁴³ The importance of operational warfare in hybrid conflicts arises from the structure of modern conflicts, which essentially does not require great resources of states, and relies on: 1. methods and efficiency of using various military and non-military elements of conflict, 2. training and composition of combat formations, 3. the capability of units to manoeuvre in the field,

³⁸ Lester Grau and Charles Bartles, *The Russian way of war: force structure, tactics and modernization of the Russian ground forces*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2016. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Hot%20Spots/Documents/Russia/2017-07-The-Russian-Way-of-War-Grau-Bartles.pdf>

³⁹ Алексей Рамм, Проверка Украиной Новый облик Вооруженных Сил портят полевые кухни *Газета Военно-промышленный курьер*, Опубликовано в выпуске № 16 (582) за 29 апреля 2015, <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/25027>.

⁴⁰ Asymmetric Warfare Group, *Russian new generation warfare handbook, A handbook for U.S. army*, 2016, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/AWG-RussianNewWarfareHandbook.pdf>

⁴¹ Nicolas Fiore, *Defeating the Russian Battalion Tactical Group*, 2017, <https://www.benning.army.mil/armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2017/Spring/2Fiore17.pdf>

⁴² Александр Дворников, Штабы для новых войн, *Газета Военно-промышленный курьер*, Опубликовано в выпуске № 28. (741.) 07.2018. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/43971>

⁴³ Константин Троценко, Боевые действия в Сирии – развитие способов ведения общевойскового боя и операции или частный случай? *Военная Мысль*. 2020. № 11. С. 6–24. <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/2DBPrWyV13.pdf>

as well as 4. the capability to effectively command troops and forces in the battlefield. Grau Lester and Charles Bartles have expressed their opinion on the problems of the implementation of the Russian tactics in combat operations, from Afghanistan through Chechnya and Georgia to Ukraine. According to their observations, the Russian commanders had limited capacities to develop plans for the execution of their tasks: "Commanders had to choose from " the menu of well-known tactics", i.e. they did not have flexibility in decision-making, and implemented only what they practiced at training areas."⁴⁴ Today, although BTG have a common training programme, there are still problems with command and control and the corresponding tasks of the assigned units. The Russian Armed Forces view the tactical, operational and strategic level of warfare differently from the West.⁴⁵ In the Russian system, BTG are a tactical entity and, as such, are well subjected to mathematical precision and calculation. The science of command involves the commander to choose the best option for carrying out the mission and adjust the variables when necessary, which the Russian force reform builds on the experiences from the operation in Syria and practices in real-time field exercises.^{46, 47} The importance that the Russian Armed Forces attach to the training of BTG is pointed out by the Commander of the Southern Military District, Colonel General Aleksandr Dvornikov, who set the task to evaluate battalion commanders of all levels at each stage of the course. "The new BTG training programme includes entry, intermediate and exit control of the level of professional and official training of officers and professional skills of group personnel in all combat training subjects".⁴⁸ According to the new methodology, quarterly BTG training in the Southern Military District is organized on a rotational basis on combined weapons shooting ranges located at a considerable distance from the place of permanent deployment, which also represents the practice of the dislocation of unit. With the reform, Russia has introduced combat control systems that provide maximum automation of support and decision-making process, fire strikes, guaranteed delivery of orders and receipt of information on their execution. Achieving success in modern military operations is impossible without gaining superiority in command and control of troops and forces.

⁴⁴ Bartles C. and Grau W. L., Russia's View of Mission Command of Battalion Tactical Groups in the Era of "Hybrid War", 2018, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/w/o-e-watch-mobile-edition-v1/23746/russia-s-view-of-mission-command-of-battalion-tactical-groups-in-the-era-of-hybrid-war/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Министерство обороны Российской Федерации, Батальонные тактические группы в Северной Осетии учились уничтожать противника в горах, Пресс-служба Южного военного округа, 2018. <https://syria.mil.ru/news/more.htm?id=12202060@>

⁴⁷ Владимир Сосницкий, Потенциал боевого опыта успешно применяется в подготовке батальонных тактических групп 49-й общевойсковой армии, *Красная звезда*, 2021, <http://redstar.ru/potencial-boevogo-opyta/>

⁴⁸ Министерство обороны Российской Федерации, Батальонные тактические группы соединений ЮВО пройдут интенсивный курс боевой подготовки, Пресс-служба Южного военного округа, 19.11.2018. http://syria.mil.ru/syria/peacemaking_briefs/brief.htm?id=12204639@egNews

Review of experiences of BTG use in combat actions

The operation in Crimea in 2014 confirmed the Russian capability to plan, prepare and conduct an operation that will bring about initiative and surprise, that is, implement "hybrid" methods of warfare. The Russian regular units have been engaged in certain missions, and the manoeuvre and action of these units have been carried out with strong artillery support.⁴⁹ The Ukrainian conflict was a "hybrid war" only in the first phase, until the summer of 2014.⁵⁰ Later, the scale of the conflict increased, turning into an almost routine military operation when the Russian BTG openly clashed with the Ukrainian Armed Forces near Ilovaisk, with the great use of tank units and artillery (with the relatively limited use of the Air Force). The BTG actions in Ilovaisk were a siege operation, in which the siege was followed by artillery and missile systems actions, and then by tactical actions of drones (reconnaissance strike model) led by BTG and the cyber attack on the Ukrainian communications. The Ukrainian units tried, several times without success, to break through the positions that were blocked by BTG. The second battle for the airport in Donetsk was called "The Little Stalingrad", and it was fought with the same tactics. The integration of various devices and weapons (tanks, artillery, air defence devices) was exactly implemented in such actions, as a form of BTG engagement. The use of separate BTG in the Ukrainian conflict does not mean that the Russians could not deploy brigade-level units. Using BTG in this manner, Russia has ensured, first of all, the rotation of units during the conflict, and secondly, that BTG participate as tactical formations, which have the firepower of an operational unit. This can only mean that BTG are the best combination of forces for a particular environment. Likewise, the self-sufficiency of BTG expands the capability of the Russian Armed Forces to fight a deep tactical battle. Thus, BTG, a model of reconnaissance strike and mass strikes by the Russian artillery are basically the methods of warfare, in which the environment is used as the most important instrument of operational and tactical actions of Russia.

The combat operations in Syria represent the first real combat engagement of the Russian Armed Forces outside the territory of the former Soviet Union, and also their greatest air operation since Afghanistan.⁵¹ The specificity of the military operation in Syria was reflected in special conditions: desert terrain, mountains, occupation of

⁴⁹ Fredrik Westerlund & Johan Norberg, Military Means for Non-Military Measures: The Russian Approach to the Use of Armed Force as Seen in Ukraine. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2016, pp: 576-601

⁵⁰ Сергей Минасян, Чему научил военных украинский конфликт, РБК газета № 226 2015, <https://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2015/12/08/56bc8a689a7947299f72b7cf>

⁵¹ Persson Gudrun (ed.), Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2016, Försvarsdepartementet p.55, FOI-R--4326--SE

populated areas, warfare in tunnels, the use of the Air Force strikes, reconnaissance and strikes, information space of the integrated force.⁵² BTG were used for the protection of the Russian bases, airports and training of local forces (establishment of integrated forces).^{53, 54} The sources of information have become, in fact, one of the most effective types of weapons. Because, as it was said: "Without conducting information operations, we would not be successful in Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and Ghouta."⁵⁵ Russia has shown flexibility, i.e. the capability to adapt to a certain situation, as well as the capability to achieve geopolitical, strategic goals without the widespread use of military force – by non-military measures and the use of integrated forces. Another characteristic BTG activity was the collection of intelligence data that are focused on its mission, by drones, eavesdropping and HUMINT⁵⁶ actions, primarily on the basis of paramilitary forces. The Russian attitude to conducting siege operations is obvious and characteristic not only of the Ukrainian conflict, while the integrated groups were used in Syria, with all the problems for their deployment and management. The methods used by the Russian Armed Forces in Syria are somewhat different from those used in Ukraine. In Syria, for example, military aviation was used instead of heavy artillery and missile fire.

Although retaining the ideas of its military theorists, after the operations in Ukraine and Syria, Russia endeavours to expand the doctrine of operations that is more in accordance with the US/NATO, due to the interest in new forms, methods and ways of waging a war.⁵⁷ In these conditions, the armed forces have to be ready to wage wars and armed conflicts of a new type, using classic and asymmetric methods of action. Therefore, the search for rational strategies of waging a war against different opponents is of the utmost importance for the development of the theory and practice of the military strategy. Thus, the Russian military scientists developed for the first time in Syria and tested in practice a new form of deploying units of the Armed Forces - a humanitarian operation.

⁵² Александр Дворников, Штабы для новых войн, *Газета Военно-промышленный курьер*, Опубликовано в выпуске № 28. (741.) 07.2018. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/43971>

⁵³ Игорь Конашенков, Батальонная группа морпехов охраняет авиабазу в Сирии, где развернуты силы ВКС РФ, *Первый русский*, 2015, https://tsargrad.tv/news/batalonnaja-gruppa-morpehov-ohranjaet-aviabazu-v-sirii-gde-razvernuty-sily-vks-rf_1471

⁵⁴ BTG of 810th Naval Brigade (Sevastopol) consists of 542nd Naval Assault Battalion and the command and control elements of the Brigade - approximately 580 people. See more about the contingent of the Russian forces in: Igor Sutyagin, *Detailing Russian Forces in Syria*, RUSI Defence Systems, Vol. 17, November 2015 <https://rusi.org/publication/rusi-defence-systems/detailing-russian-forces-syria>

⁵⁵ Игорь Конашенков, Батальонная группа морпехов охраняет авиабазу в Сирии, где развернуты силы ВКС РФ, *gen. quote.*

⁵⁶ Human intelligence (HUMINT) is information gathered by interpersonal contacts, the category of intelligence derived from information collected and provided from human sources.

⁵⁷ Александр Корабельников, Для дальнейшего роста боеспособности армии нужны новые уставные документы, *Военно-промышленный курьер*, 2014, Опубликовано в выпуске № 43, <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/22730>

Conclusion

The altered physiognomy of modern conflicts, conditioned by globalization, inevitably affects the aspects of both international relations and the functional reforms of the Armed Forces. The Russian General Staff has identified the need for Russia to prepare for complex wars using multiple domains, stating: "It is understood that each military conflict has its own characteristics... In addition to traditional spheres of armed struggle, the information sphere and space will be actively involved."⁵⁸ Russia implemented the BTG concept in Ukraine and Syria, and apparently the used force was effective when fighting a battle. The Russian BTG are flexible integrated systems, designed to absorb strike and strong fire, and at the same time are capable of delivering strong fire. They also have a local AD system that can neutralize enemy tactical air support. All of this indicates that the modernization and competence of personnel have the most important role in responding to the uncertainty brought about by conflicts today. Therefore, the intensive development of new methods of conducting combat actions makes the experience particularly sought after.⁵⁹ The development and implementation of the phases of the use of reconnaissance-fire and reconnaissance-strike complex in training, opposition to mobile battle groups and the fight against drones enabled the establishment of BTG of particularly high efficiency.

It can be expected that in the future BTG will play an increasingly important role in achieving the strategic security and foreign policy interests of the Russian Federation, with the development of all elements for their effective use, including preparation, organization and active use of integrated forces in the field.

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⁵⁸ See more: „Восток – 2018”: десять лет российских стратегических учений и подготовки к ведению военных действий, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/ru/articles/2018/12/20/vostok-2018-desyat-let-rossijskih-strategicheskikh-uchenij-i-podgotovki-k-vedeniyu-voennyh-dejstvij/index.html>, accessed 10.12.2019.

⁵⁹ Владимир Сосницкий, Потенциал боевого опыта успешно применяется в подготовке батальонных тактических групп 49-й общевойсковой армии, *Красная звезда*, 2021, <http://redstar.ru/potentsial-boevogo-opyta/>

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S u m m a r y

The altered setting of conducting current conflicts, its hybridity and nonlinearity affect the justification of the assumption that multi-domain operations will become a new method of executing operations of the Russian Armed Forces. The Battle Groups of the Russian AF are in practice known as Battalion Tactical Groups (BTG). They have been established in response to the stated problems in the engagement of the Russian Armed Forces in local and small wars, and within the framework of the general transformation of the Russian Armed Forces based on altered geopolitical and strategic circumstances. The basis of BTG is composed of active brigades of the Russian Armed Forces, which are established modularly in accordance with the expressed needs and expected performance characteristics. The first deployment of the Russian Armed Forces BTG was in the conflict in Ukraine, which has significantly improved their organization and deployment. The Syrian experience plays an important role in the development of the strategy and 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 grouping of troops (forces) on the basis of formations of one of the branches of the Armed Forces, which has high mobility and is able to make the greatest contribution to solving the assigned tasks. In Syria, this role is assigned to the formations of the Aerospace Forces. The most important conditions for the implementation of this strategy is the conquest and retention of information superiority, outstripping the readiness of control systems and all-round support, as well as the covert deployment of the necessary grouping. The new methods of troop (use of integrated groupings) actions during the operation

were substantiated. In Syria, for the first time, a new form of using the units of the Armed Forces was developed and tested in practice - a humanitarian operation. The current engagement in the conflict in Syria significantly contributes to the maturation of the concept of BTG deployment in the Russian Federation expeditionary operations. It is expected that in the future, the BTG of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will play an increasingly important role, in response to the practical demands of modern, hybrid wars.

Key words: hybrid warfare, battalion tactical groups, proxy forces, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation

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