

Military Thought

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Adaptive Approach to the Use of Antiterrorist Forces and Assets Based on the Practice of Armed Conflicts outside Russia

*Col. A.V. VDOVIN,
Candidate of Military Sciences*

Abstract. This paper generalizes and systematizes characteristic features of armed conflicts outside Russia considering external and internal factors, as well as the typical composition and peculiarities of armed confrontation between the combat systems of the sides involving indirect actions in attendant activity areas. On this basis, the author defines the principal trends in military art and characteristic features of modern combined arms engagement.

Keywords: opposition (illegal) armed formations, terrorist organizations, private military companies, sleeping cells, shahid-mobile, countertunnel warfare.

Analysis of the contemporary military-political situation suggests that military might is still regarded by the leading states of the world as a major constituent of ensuring one's national interests, and achieving economic and political objectives. Moreover, no country taken individually can any longer achieve military security merely by using its own resources, and has to seek potential allies, provided their geopolitical and economic interests are similar.

One of the clearly observable trends in the confrontation of combat systems is the determination of the world's leading states to defend their national interests outside their own territories deploying limited contingents of armed forces in pariah states where an armed conflict has been unleashed or provoked, and relying on progovernment or opposition (illegal) armed formations, private military companies, and also the local population. The catalyst of armed conflict eruption is typically aggravation of national, ethnic, and religious conflicts between various population strata in the country.

At the same time, the causes and goals of armed struggle increasingly

move away from the traditional desire to control the oil-and-gas industry toward opportunities of taking charge of exhaustible and renewable multipurpose resources (water, land, timber), agricultural resources (animals, soil), and also industrial (hydroelectric power) natural resources and overseeing the routes of their transportation, above all to potentially significant but economically vulnerable regions; maintaining influence over all these guarantees successful development of own economies, and also dominance in the international arena.

Concentrating vast masses of people in urbanized areas while there is an imbalance of forces and assets of the warring sides in the armed conflict predetermined the formation of tension hotbeds in major cities and populated localities where civilians have to be involved in fighting on one or another side, and also the need to ensure safe operation of major infrastructure facilities. As for the quantitative and qualitative imbalance of the warring sides, both in the armed formations proper and in renewable human resources (the so-called sleeping cells), especially in countries of the Moslem world, this makes even more topical extensive use of information resources for shaping the desired way of thinking and perception of the outside reality among the broad sections of the population.

As analysis shows, **modern armed conflicts outside Russia, in particular in the Middle East and in Africa, share the following typical features.**

In terms of internal factors:

- *imbalance* of the quantitative and qualitative *ratio between opposing sides* and expansion of the makeup of armed conflicts participants by involving therein large portions of the local population and terrorist organizations, including international;
- *a shift of armed struggle centers to urbanized areas*, which are densely populated and where complex life supporting systems are in operation;
- *irreconcilable views* of antigovernment forces on the situation development in the region, and consequently, the situation developing according to the territorial or religious characteristics, clan affiliation, terrorist persuasion, etc.;

in terms of external factors:

- *across-the-board assistance to opposition* groupings and terrorist organizations from foreign states;
- *open land (sea) borders* in the states subjected to aggression, which facilitates unimpeded supplies of weapons and material resources, and also movement of militants;
- *presence of foreign experts* on either side of the conflict, first and foremost in intelligence and information warfare areas, and also of consultative bodies (advisers) for operation planning.

At the same time, the very approaches to confrontation between the government forces, on the one hand, and the armed opposition, frequently acting under the patronage of international terrorist organizations, on the other, have undergone a series of significant transformations. The essence of these changes consists in a stable set of confrontations coordinated and interconnected in time and space between combat systems and indirect actions in the cognitive (human consciousness), information (creation, development, and distribution of data), and sociocultural (interaction between people) spheres aimed at predetermining actions by the adversary, and forming the behavior of allies and neutral forces, both in peacetime and after the crisis and hostilities have broken out. There is clear evidence of erasing boundaries between the basic effects of group behavior of the conflict participants, which predetermines the need to create a reserve resource potential for all occasions and form a rational perception and understanding of dangers and threats to individual, community, and national security. Besides, the course of combat actions is tangibly influenced by the limited scope of the available forces and assets operating on unequipped territories in various climate zones.

The experience of armed conflicts outside the Russian Federation suggests that there are the following **major features of activity by illegal armed formations** (IAF), which term refers to groups of opposition militants, international terrorist organizations and private military companies siding with the former.

In the course of hostilities:

- *seizing and holding dominant heights* and populated localities;
- *raids* by mobile groups in 4WD automobiles reequipped for use of weapons against checkpoints (CP), block posts, and defenses;
- *making fire ambushes* to destroy weapons and military hardware (WMH) by launching antitank guided missiles from maximum distances;
- *mining the terrain* (setting groups of mines and individual demolition bombs) in advance sectors, routes of government troops' (military leadership's) movement, and also positions abandoned by the gunmen;
- *random fire* on populated localities from various types of weapons, including home-made kinds, in order to inflict losses, destroy life supporting facilities and uncover the firing positions of the troops on the defensive when the latter open retaliatory fire;
- *use of roving fire assets* in defense changing prepared positions and fire ranges, and when advancing, use of *suicide bombers* and the so-called *shahid-mobiles* (on tanks, infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), and cars) to create breach areas, destroy critically important facilities and kill personnel;

- *use of smaller unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)* to conduct reconnaissance and carry out some firing missions;
- *terrorist acts* involving engineering munitions, including via underground communications (tunnels);

in terms of support activity:

- *radio intercept of information* from data exchange channels, constant terrain monitoring (up to 20 km of direct visibility) to adjust artillery fire, and reconnoiter the ground before nocturnal activity phases;
- extensive development and *use of underground space* (tunnels) as routes for supplying reserves of material resources, evacuate the injured and sick, and also maneuver into the rear of the progovernment forces;
- *creation of flooded areas* and swampy ground (soil softening) in the sectors of the government forces' advance, destruction of infrastructure, life support facilities, cultural and historical heritage;
- home-based *manufacturing of weapons and ammunition* in primitive conditions, *recruitment and training* of militants at training centers on the territory of neighboring states and at own training camps;
- *agitation and propaganda of sharia standards* and ideas of jihad holy war through websites, Internet social networks, media centers, and mass media, preparing children and youngsters for jihad;
- *demonstration executions*, legalized slavery and oppression of religious minorities;

in terms of finance and economic activity:

- *seizure and holding of energy infrastructure*, water supply facilities, granaries, and other profitable items of economic activity;
- *takeover of oil and gas deposits*, their development and smuggling of crude oil, weapons, ammunition, and historical artifacts;
- *human trafficking* and ransom for captured hostages, robbery and extortion of money from big and medium business owners, collecting fines and duties from the locals.

The distinctive feature of modern armed conflicts is the presence of ramified networks of the so-called sleeper cells* on the territories controlled by the government forces that consist of IAF fans, conduct reconnaissance, and also engage in preparing and committing terrorist acts. They account for some 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent of active males in the given area of

* Sleeper cells are well trained groups of militants in varying degrees of readiness to be used and infiltrated into the local population and infrastructure.

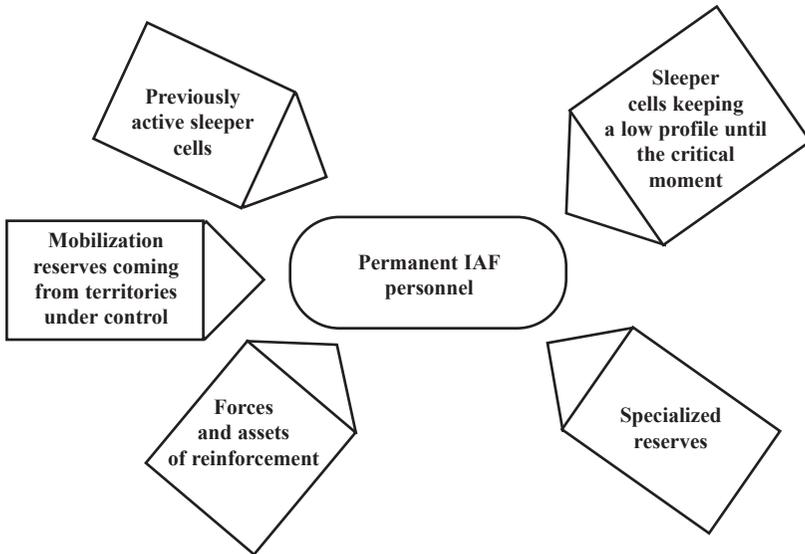


Fig. Makeup of illegal armed formations

the country and can reveal or conceal their presence until the critical moment arrives.

Counting in the sleeper cells, the IAF makeup is typically represented by six categories of militants (*see* Figure). Also, the *mobilization reserves* keep coming from the areas that have been under IAF control for a long time and in fact are recruited persons with initial military training, as well as personnel of government troop units and formations that went over to their side. *Foreign mercenaries* normally arrive in the combat area to carry out some specific assignment. Among the *reinforcement forces and assets* are included heavy hardware, pickups with large-caliber and AA machine guns, specialized equipment, jihad-mobiles, etc. *Specialized reserves* consist of subversive and sharpshooter groups, information warfare units, and others.

The IAF forces and assets concentrate in the area of combat deployment right before the combat mission is to be carried out, which conforms to the network centric principles. The militant groups elements are typically used in full, not split into subgroups. In order to carry out some tasks and measures of comprehensive support that do not require special training, among other things to restore and equip water sources, data transmission and information relay networks, reequip and camouflage deserted mine galleries and excavations, set up caches and weapon and ammunition depots, they also recruit locals, which, given the limited possibilities of isolating the combat area, allows the IAF to use free territories fairly extensively.

The presence of a ramified IAF network spatially distributed, induces the government troops to scatter their forces so as to ensure safe functioning of major infrastructure facilities and elements of operational equipment on the territory; to this end, it is sometimes necessary to involve up to two-thirds of the available forces and assets. This, in turn, results in a balance of forces between the conflict parties in certain territories, insufficient activity of the government troops trying to defeat the IAF, or engaged merely in local offensive actions at the tactical level.

At the same time, the **IAF approaches to armed struggle have the so-called vulnerability areas, which allow the progovernment forces to maintain a balance of interests in the areas of potential and actual danger.** Among the main ones are lack of a single objective and leadership; religious contradictions between groupings; squabbling over sources of funding, control of oil deposits, smuggling routes, arable lands, main highways and populated localities; lack of coordination between IAF actions at the operational level; use of open radio communication channels to exchange operational information; shortage of industrially made artillery and engineering munitions; desire of some locals on the territory under IAF control to live in peace and negotiate with the authorities.

The presence of similar vulnerability zones predetermines an **adaptive approach to settling modern armed conflicts, which is a mutually conditioned conglomeration of the following direct and indirect measures of impacting the IAF:**

- *classical offensive and defensive actions* by combined arms formations, including in conditions of limited visibility, deceiving the adversary in advance or simultaneously;
- *actions by assault groups and detachments* widely using underground communications and tunnels in populated localities in concert with mobile reconnaissance-and-strike parties supported by various fire damage assets;
- *reconnaissance-and-search actions* by composite (specialized) detachments in the so-called free zones or interposition space at the maximum range of fire support by main forces to look for and destroy IAF depots, caches, and bases;
- *reconnaissance-ambush activity* by fire (assault) groups to look for and destroy IAF militants and transport;
- *combat duty* at check points and block posts on transport communications;
- *activity by mobile sniper groups* at the front line, especially in conditions of limited visibility, destruction of IAF leaders by various methods;
- *countertunnel warfare*; constructing countertunnels, drilling prospect-holes, equipping countertunnel ditches, etc.

- *provoking conflicts between irreconcilable and moderate oppositionists*, and also the opposition of the country and international terrorist organization formations;
- *inducing the IAF to attack* in conditions unfavorable to them, enticing them into fire traps (pockets) and destroying them from prepared defensive and firing positions;
- *destroying (putting out of operation) critically important IAF facilities* by long-range assets based at long distances;
- *systemic fire impact* on the adversary with combined-arms (motorized rifle and tank) units by what is known as the carousel method, making use of the terrain features and constructed rampart-type fill covers;
- *activity by forces and assets united into a reconnaissance-assault (firing) contour* in designated zones of responsibility for reconnaissance and destruction with promptly changed/alternated firing positions;
- *mining the terrain along the IAF movement routes* and their facilities with landmines, booby traps, and target mines, both controlled and uncontrolled;
- *electronic information jamming (blocking) of IAF channels to control* and geo-fix reconnaissance and attack drones, radio-emitting assets, IAF radio navigation, including those operating within dual-purpose and general access systems (networks);
- *negotiating with moderate opposition spokespersons* to involve them in the fight against international terrorist organizations;
- *fetwabs and sermons by religious and public figures*, dissemination of propaganda leaflets, impacting the relatives, property and business of IAF leaders and chieftains;
- *settling the militants' status* and recruiting them into self-defense detachments in populated localities with regulation weapons;
- *controlling observance of the ceasefire regime*, monitoring movement of equipment and cargo with drones.

These changes in the conduct of armed struggle with IAF stem from the clearly traceable trends in military art.

- **One.** The old principle of concentrating forces and assets in the crucial sector in today's conditions is implemented primarily by efficient fire maneuvering and strikes by means of destruction in every sphere of armed struggle minus the traditionally used concentration of troops.
- **Two.** The correlation between strategy, operational art, and tactics has changed, although these military art categories have lost none of their sig-

nificance. Making use of the effect from attacks by strategic destruction assets and completing the rout of adversary troop groupings largely depend on highly mobile combat actions at the tactical level shifting the effort to the entire depth of armed confrontation.

- **Three.** A typical feature of contemporary tactical actions that will be here for some time to come is the increasingly important role of range and precision of the fire fight. At the same time, hitting critically important adversary's facilities guarantees future victories only if combined with control over crucial portions of the terrain and operational equipment facilities on the territory in the adversary rear in troop activity sectors.
- **Four.** The growing number of armed struggle assets displaying increasingly good quality, the ever more complicated processes of their combat use and destruction/protection system formation that involve the former, as well as the expanding numbers of armed confrontation participants, increasingly predetermine situation development on the battlefield under the impact of uncertainty factors. Accordingly, this requires increasingly prompt response from commanders at all levels to the changing situation by making highly mobile elements of combat formation and operational arrangement of troop groupings.

Given these trends, one can single out the following **characteristic features of combined arms operation and use of combined arms troop/force groupings in military conflicts of the 21st century.**

- Combat and noncombat action forms increasingly converging;
- combination of offensive, defensive, and support actions;
- seeking to forestall the adversary in terms of speed and intensity of combat actions thanks to improved mobility, target hitting precision and information superiority;
- mastering and using tactical methods of special operations forces by ground troop groupings;
- increasing spatial distribution of military formations over the battlefield along the front line and into the depth of order of battle (operational disposition);
- emergence of new elements of operational disposition, including anti-airdrop force helicopter reserves, groupings of the forces and assets of information warfare, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare, air-and-ground tactical groups, aeromobile landing parties, etc.;
- introducing new forms of using destruction means, above all precision-guided weapons coupled with electronic warfare assets, enhancing the role and importance of infantry support assets on the battlefield.

As follows from the essence and content of the military art trends and typical features of combined arms combat actions described above, coming to the fore is maneuver with forces, assets, fire and strikes, which is increasingly becoming the basis of achieving operational and strategic success. Thus the changing approaches of opposing sides to the conduct of armed struggle predetermines the current and future introduction of new forms and methods employed therein.

Translated by Margarita Kvartskhava
