

Russian RTF Short Paper

Russian Way of War

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Russia's new way of war is riddled with oversights and assumptions of easy victories based on a history of military actions. Russians fought conflicts for defensive purposes throughout history, yet most of their recent efforts have been offensive. Historic lessons have molded Russian strategy into using land forces for speed and surprise. I will argue that Russia's focus on rapidly seizing land lacks an appreciation for the suppression of enemy air defenses and the role logistics play in maintaining a sizable land army.

Russian war history is thick with lessons learned during defensive and offensive campaigns. During both World Wars, the Soviet Union maintained defensive postures against Germany until the time was right to enact offensive measures to protect their homeland. Defense offers the advantage of position and is intrinsically stronger than offense.¹ During WWII, the Soviet Union entered the war in a defensive position by opposing Germany's invasion. Still, the war ended with a directed offensive that pushed the 3rd Reich back to Germany. The Soviet Union's initial offensive during the 1980s Afghanistan invasion used an overwhelming force and gave the local resistance little time to respond.² As the Soviet Union began defending territory gained in Afghanistan, they could no longer rely on the speed and surprise, contributing to their eventual failed operation. In more recent operations during the invasions of both Georgia and Crimea, Russia began to rely heavily on elite forces that could perform a "lightning campaign" to take down an overmatched opponent quickly.³ Russia learned that offensive campaigns require speed to succeed, but the defense of gained territory outside the homeland is much more difficult.

As Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine, it has become clear that Russian strategy lacks the effectiveness it once had with surprise and speed. This deficiency relates to Russia's evolution of land-based warfare and its lack of logistical planning to support the speed required

to succeed in this newer strategy. The historical experience of repeated invasions over the centuries has created a powerful legacy that shaped Russia's defense and foreign policy.⁴ For example, Russia has increased the size and readiness of its land components so it could quickly employ combat power in response to a crisis.⁵ Even though Russia has a formidable Air Force, their failure to take out Ukrainian air defenses early in the conflict had diminished their hopes for air superiority against an arguably weaker opponent.⁶ Contested Ukrainian skies limit close air support for Russia's land strategy, slowing down their offensive goals.

Russia's plan for surprise and speed in Ukraine was built upon the old way of conducting a Russian invasion. During Georgia and Crimea, Russia sent in limited forces that did not require a heavy logistical supply line. Russia amassed a sizeable force on Ukraine's Eastern flank and claimed it was for a military exercise.⁷ One could assume that supplies for that exercise were not intended to be used in a prolonged conflict like Russia currently faces. Russian forces have been seen in stalled convoys and forced to loot local grocery stores to supply their troops while waiting for logistics to catch up.⁸ Speed is severely degraded if resupply can't match the pace of the advancing forces, and it has caused Russia to come to a halt in some instances.

In conclusion, Russia's new way of war is becoming less successful by the day due to planning missteps with air and logistics. Airpower must suppress enemy forces ahead of the land component, but Russia's air force has failed to gain air superiority. Russia's history of offensive action with a large force was a success during both World Wars, but their recent shift to rapid land force deployment came with the assumption that air and logistics would not be a problem; they were wrong.

¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Indexed (Princeton University Press, 1984).

² Scott Boston, and Dara Massicot. "The Russian Way of Warfare: A Primer." RAND Corporation, December 7, 2017. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE231.html>.

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ "The Curious Case of Russia's Missing Air Force." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, March 8, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/interactive/2022/03/08/curious-case-russias-missing-air-force>.

⁷ Ann Marie Dailey. "What's behind Russia's Logistical Mess in Ukraine? A US Army Engineer Looks at the Tactical Level." Atlantic Council, March 21, 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/whats-behind-russias-logistical-mess-in-ukraine-a-us-army-engineer-looks-at-the-tactical-level/>

⁸ Ibid.