



Russia Adds Heavy Flamethrower Battalions

OE Watch Commentary: In the Russian Armed Forces, The Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) Defense Troops operate both shoulder-fired and vehicle-launched thermobaric flamethrowers. As the accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* explains, these thermobaric weapons are particularly useful for dislodging personnel from fixed and/or fortified positions in field and particularly urban environments. In the current structure of the Russian Ground Forces, shoulder-fired flamethrower squads and platoons may be found in the NBC Defense companies of Russian maneuver brigades. Company-sized flamethrower units can only be found in the flamethrower battalions in the NBC Defense regiments of the Combined Arms Armies, Tank Army, and Army Corps. The typical Russian flamethrower battalion consists of two companies of shoulder-launched flamethrowers, and one company of vehicle-launched “heavy” flamethrowers. The typical shoulder-fired flamethrower company has 71 personnel and nine BMO-T ‘Terminators’ (the BMO-T is a modified T-72 chassis for the transportation of 20-30 of the highly volatile shoulder-fired disposable RPO-A Shmel series flamethrowers). The typical vehicle-launched “heavy” flamethrower company has 35 personnel, three TOS-1A ‘Solntsepek’ heavy flamethrowers, each with 24 220mm thermobaric rockets mounted on a T-72 chassis, and six TZM-T transporter/loader vehicles that are also mounted on a T-72 chassis.

As the accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* explains, the Russian Ground Forces are now planning to create battalion-sized units of heavy flamethrowers. These heavy flamethrowers battalions will likely consist of three or four heavy (vehicle-launched) flamethrower companies and a motorized rifle platoon (possibly a company) to escort the TOS-1As to the launch area. Due to the nature of the thermobaric rockets, the system’s maximum range is only 5-6 km, so the TOS-1A must get relatively close to its intended target (compared to most indirect weapons) to deliver its payload, making the motorized rifle platoon a sensible addition. Although not discussed in the article, these battalions could be assigned to the NBC Defense brigades that report directly to their respective Military Districts. The need for these heavy flamethrower battalions can be seen as a direct consequence of Russian activities in Syria and Eastern Ukraine, as the TOS-1As have reportedly been quite useful for combatting enemies in field fortifications, urban, and subterranean environments that have characterized these conflicts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“A well-fortified stronghold can be held for a long time. Much time and many forces are needed to eliminate a subunit burrowed into the earth. Infantry, tanks, artillery and aviation must be engaged. A hostile “mini-fortress” with a garrison of at least several dozen men can become a cunning snare for an offensive as it gains speed. However, this is only the case when the arsenal of the attacking forces does not include flamethrower units.”

“Solntsepek heavy flamethrowers will clear the road for “Armata” tanks and motorized riflemen. They will form battalions, which are armed with those powerful systems, in each military district, sources in the Ministry of Defense told Izvestiya. Their primary mission – is to dislodge the enemy from fortifications.”



Continued: Russia Adds Heavy Flamethrower Battalions

Source: Yuriy Borodin, Королевская свита «Солнцепёков» (The Palace Guard- ‘the Solntsepeks’),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 9 September 2019. <http://redstar.ru/korolevskaya-svita-solntsepyokov/>

The Palace Guard- ‘the Solntsepeks’

A well-fortified stronghold can be held for a long time. Much time and many forces are needed to eliminate a subunit burrowed into the earth. Infantry, tanks, artillery and aviation must be engaged. A hostile “mini-fortress” with a garrison of at least several dozen men can become a cunning snare for an offensive as it gains speed.

However, this is only the case when the arsenal of the attacking forces does not include flamethrower units. Even the hand-held rocket-propelled infantry flamethrower (for example, the RPO-A Shmel) is a powerful asset for destroying a fortified enemy. And this does not begin to compare to the TOS-1A Solntsepek heavy flamethrower systems, which replaced the TOS-1 Buratino system! The Buratino performed excellently in Afghanistan and in the North Caucasus.

Mounted on the T-72 tank base the salvo fire system is able to dispatch unguided rocket rounds with a special thermobaric warhead to a great distance. After the munition arrives at the “designated site” a fuel-air mixture ignites destroying both the personnel and the equipment of the enemy, and his fortifications. Even a single round is able to destroy the platoon stronghold of the enemy. And there are 24 of them in the launcher.

“Our flamethrower platoon is able to destroy the platoon stronghold of the enemy very quickly. This will now be practiced,” Sergeant Maksim Mekhtiyev, commander of the flamethrower section, described the operations of his fellow soldiers.

The combat vehicles pay no heed to natural barriers of broken terrain, and easily surmount ravines, dirty “swamps,” and sand dunes. The designers of the TOS systems were careful that their offspring would be powerful not only in the execution of fire missions, but also in occupying and leaving firing positions. Modern warfare requires great maneuverability. Under such conditions staying in one place not just for hours, but for minutes is tantamount to suicide. The flamethrower troops operate according to a plan: deploy to the firing position – launch – change position. Another way of characterizing the latter is “withdrawing under a retaliatory strike.”...



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TOS-1A heavy flamethrower systems firing.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, vitalykuzmin.net, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/RKhBZ-Troops/i-fjBmwFp/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



Continued: Russia Adds Heavy Flamethrower Battalions



Combat vehicle BM-1 from TOS-1A heavy flamethrower system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, [vitalykuzmin.net](https://www.vitalykuzmin.net), <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/RKhBZ-Troops/i-9bcZqfv/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, Система выжигания: в армии создадут батальоны тяжелых огнеметов (Fire System: They Will Create Heavy Flamethrower Battalions in the Army),” *Izvestia Online*, 22 October 2019. <https://iz.ru/928820/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/sistema-vyzhiganiia-v-armii-sozhdadut-batalony-tiazhelykh-ognemetov>

Fire System: They Will Create Heavy Flamethrower Battalions in the Army

“Solntsepek heavy flamethrowers will clear the road for Armata tanks and motorized riflemen. They will form battalions, which are armed with those powerful systems, in each military district, sources in the Ministry of Defense told *Izvestiya*. Their primary mission – is to dislodge the enemy from fortifications. Russian military personnel were unable to define the concept of the employment of these launchers for a long time, although they have been exporting them for several years now. The “Solntsepek” systems have found a place in the combat formations only right now: they will have to literally scorch the earth with thermobaric charges prior to the attack.

Several companies of heavy flamethrower systems and a subunit of motorized riflemen, which will provide the security of the launchers during a march and on the front line, will be part of the battalion. Each new unit will receive more than 10 TOS-1A “Solntsepek” combat systems and transporter-loader vehicles, sources in the Defense Department told *Izvestiya*...

The new flamethrower units are capable of breaching any enemy field defense and of effectively operating against terrorists’ bunkers, Arsenal of the Fatherland Magazine Editor-in-Chief Viktor Murakhovskiy thinks. “The ‘Solntsepek’ systems provide complete destruction on a large area”, the Military Expert told *Izvestiya*. “They are good during the breach of heavily defended fortified areas. Ordinary tube or rocket-propelled artillery will require much more time and ammunition to accomplish a similar mission. Moreover, the result will not be ensured in the end. But the heavy flamethrowers using fuel-air explosive munitions will destroy that defense with one salvo. Later tanks and motorized riflemen should enter the engagement and, essentially, there will already be no one to offer resistance to them...”

The “Solntsepeks” – are unique combat systems, the equivalents to which do not exist in the world’s other armies. For example, similar weapons are not manufactured in the NATO countries: it is not spelled out in the concept for the conduct of combat operations, in which the North Atlantic Alliance participated in recent decades. In the 1980s, precisely when the TOS were being developed and tested in the USSR, the American command authorities were developing the AirLand Battle Concept. It assumes the employment of long-range and precision-guided weapons – aircraft, cruise missiles, and rocket-propelled artillery. Those combat operations are fleeting and have a cellular nature. A precisely fixed front line is absent during them. The Americans assumed that wars will become contactless – light mobile infantry will conduct in-depth raids under the cover of aircraft. They considered assault operations to have receded into the past. As a result, in Viktor Murakhovskiy’s words, they spent a year for the seizure of Iraq’s Mosul and the storming of Syria’s Raqqa was dragged out for four months. In the process, the cities were completely destroyed by aircraft. Right now, American military personnel and experts are discussing the overdue reform of the Army and Marines. It is assumed that they should be capable of conducting a combined-arms engagement...