



Innovation in the Russian Military

OE Watch Commentary: There is an expression in the Russian military that goes “no good initiative goes unpunished.” It is always delivered in the context of that ironic foxhole humor shared by military members worldwide. However, things may be changing and in a particular general staff fashion. In a recent article in the Russian Ministry of Defense’s *Военная Мысль*, senior military theorist Dr. General-lieutenant V.V. Trushin exhorts a change in Russia’s military culture to develop more “creative approaches” and “innovation” in operational art and planning. In accordance with the practice of Russian military science—ultimately the framework for change and transformation in the armed forces—Trushin’s article provides a foundational historical analysis of Russian and non-Russian military events. His examples of successful innovations in operational planning and execution range from Suvorov in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-92 to Napoleon when he was still a captain at Toulon to Zhukov and Popov in the Second World War. He ends by praising the creativity of Syria’s General Suheil al-Hasan in the current conflict.



Emblem of the Russian Ministry of Defense.
Source: Public Domain

According to the article, the development of initiative and innovation is aimed at “commanding generals and commanders at all levels.” Unlike in the U.S. Army, which rotates individuals through many specialties, including command, Russian commanders stay close to their military track. Additionally, the purpose of initiative is noted to be specifically to “accomplish the combat mission with fewer forces, minimal losses, and short timelines,” not to accomplish the mission in a broader way that involves empowering the total force. The approach to develop this focused initiative is to master and apply “the requirements of regulations.” This last bit is not mere phraseology. The Russian outlook on tactics is a very deliberate and binding system. It is intended to be uniformly mastered by all at the tactical levels, which go through the division. This tactical reliability provides a common operational foundation and allows operational flexibility in planning and execution. Within that context and also the consolidating nature of command and control developments, Trushin’s notion of command initiative can be seen as an aspirational enhancement to command leadership in combat and not necessarily a revolution to the concept of mission command in army affairs overall. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**

“Each commander must be the enemy of the template, all the more so such templates and such plans that are well known to the enemy.”

Source: V.V. Trushin “О творческом подходе к управлению войсками (силам) (The Innovative Approach to Command and Control of Troops (Forces)),” *Военная Мысль* (The Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal of military theory), No. 8 2020, p. 6.

The nature of modern military conflicts requires from commanding generals and commanders at all levels an innovative approach toward the management of combat operations and the command and control troops (forces) during those operations. We must admit, however, that this requirement is not properly understood by some military leaders. In their opinion, the command and control of troops (forces) in combat is not conducive to the manifestation of creativity, and in modern combat they simply have no time to engage in it, since all efforts should be directed toward the execution of the task assigned, primarily using reliable and proven methods.