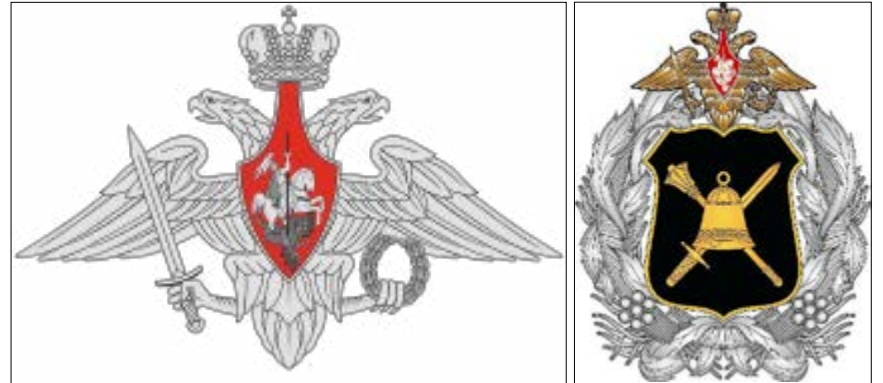




# Russian Military History: Victim and Weapon of Information Operations

**OE Watch Commentary:** Writing in the Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal, three military scholars observed that “The current environment, characterized by the sharp escalation of an information war led by the West against Russia, requires rapid and skillful countermeasures from our military-political leadership. Unfortunately, providing an adequate response to the actions of our information warfare adversaries has so far not always met with success.” The information warfare that the authors were writing about was an attack on their military history. In fact, this has been an escalating theme from the Russian General Staff for some time now. As the argument goes, for many in Russia today, history is not being learned correctly and ultimately this undermines the social cohesion necessary for military strength and sustainment. Using their Russian military science framework, competing historical concepts are laid out with regard the Second World War, which the Russian call the Great Patriotic War (GPW). The authors argue that the collective memory of the GPW is the “only thing that unites us all” and must be preserved. The authors also catalog “forms and methods”—another fingerprint of Russian military science—to identify five problems and a solution.



Emblems of the Russian Ministry of Defense and General Staff.  
Source: Public Domain

The first issue the authors note is that as Russian society embraced and was influenced by science during the Soviet period, state “propaganda,” which is a neutral or positive word from the Russian perspective, lagged and Russian citizens “fell for foreign programs” in the wake. The second issue is that current generations do not have much personal experience with GPW veterans and this paramount, unifying event has not become “their personal war.” The third cause of the problem, also aimed at Russian youth, is a noted decline in appreciation of military culture through a general degradation of education. Fourth is that there is no unified official view of the problem and alternative viewpoints of military history have emerged in Russian society: “a hellish mixture of truth, hearsay, and speculation.” According to the authors, the fifth problem is “insufficient control... over the artistic community.” This captures a range of critiques like movies depicting political officers as “hysterical,” soldiers with no “common idea” of why they are fighting, and generally “no passionate love for the Motherland.”

To address these issues, the authors propose to build “cadres of public teachers” that connect special training in Russian history with efforts of special faculty at the Military Academy of the General Staff and newly re-introduced political officers in Russian units. This “information pyramid” will not only ensure approved military history is developed and taught in a consistent and thorough way through society, but it will also be used as an “information campaign for a foreign audience.” In discussing this, the authors specifically use military doctrinal terms, including “information pushback,” “information attack,” and “information counteraction.” This signals a broader General Staff intent to develop and deploy their military history as part of Russian military activities, including information operations, going forward. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**

***“We constantly suffer ‘information defeats,’ not because we are in the wrong, but because we do not know how to timely and competently deliver the truth to people.”***

**Source:** A.Yu. Golubev, I.I. Zhelnov, N.M. Kirsanova, “Воспитание военнослужащих в условиях информационного противоборства” (Educating the Military in the Context of Information Confrontation), *Военная Мысль* (Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal of military theory), No. 11 2020.

*“Today it is not sufficient to defend your service members against the information aggression of the West. Now it is necessary to ‘fight on the territory of our information adversary,’ that is, to establish an effective information campaign for a foreign audience.”*

*Military Upbringing: “Instilling among service members the high moral, psychological, and fighting qualities necessary for successful military-operational activities.” -- Russian Military Encyclopedic Dictionary*