



Why Russians Fight in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The Kremlin recently celebrated its three-year anniversary of combat operations in Syria. Initially, Russia's armed involvement was framed as helping to crush international terrorism within Syria, but the Kremlin's motivation may have recently shifted since the bulk of the terrorist forces have been eliminated. In the accompanying excerpt from the pro-Kremlin weekly, *Military-Industrial Kurier*, General Andrei Kartapolov, Chief of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GVPU), and who once commanded Russian forces in Syria, describes the contours of a new rationale.

General Kartapolov begins by explaining the main goal of the GVPU "is to form a warrior-statist, a reliable and devoted defender of the Fatherland, a bearer of the traditional spiritual and moral values of Russian society: spirituality and patriotism." He goes on to compare Russia's current involvement in Syria with that of the Crimean War of the 1850s, suggesting that both conflicts represent an "act of war for the Manger of the Lord." To illustrate this concept, Kartapolov recounts the example of "Major Roman Filippov," who instead of being captured by militant forces in Syria after his plane was shot down in February 2018, chose sacrifice, by blowing himself up, taking with him a number of terrorists. Kartapolov rhetorically asks of this feat, "is this not an example of the spirit of the Russian army, the readiness for heroism and self-sacrifice for the sake of accomplishing a combat mission?"

General Kartapolov also describes the new military cathedral being built near Patriot Park outside of Moscow (For additional details on this new cathedral, see: "Constructing Military Ideology...and a Military Church," *OE Watch*, October 2018), pointing out that each of the "main branches of the armed forces [will have] their spiritual patron." He asserts that this new church will "become the center of spiritual education of servicemen and historical enlightenment," and a place to honor those "Russian leaders, our modern martyrs, and for those who have laid their heads on the biblical Syrian land." Finally, Kartapolov claims that "the revival of the Russian state, as we see, continues through the revival of the Orthodox faith. Therefore, the formation of a modern Russian warrior cannot take place without high spirituality."

As Russian military operations in Syria continue to evolve, not only do the objectives change, but also the justification for a continued Russian presence. This article suggests that the Kremlin leadership might be looking to the past for an appropriate ideology to support these new objectives. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"And what is happening now in Syria, can be considered another act of war for the Manger of the Lord."

Source: Andrei Kartapolov and Oleg Falichev, "Право первым подняться в атаку (The right to be the first to attack)," *Military-Industrial Kurier*, 11 September 2018. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/44913>

On July 30, the Presidential Decree established the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GVPU).... How the new structure will work, the Deputy Minister of Defense - the head of the Main Military-Political Department, Andrei Kartapolov, told the Military Industrial Courier about this.

...The main goal of the created military and political bodies is to form a warrior-statist, a reliable and devoted defender of the Fatherland, a bearer of the traditional spiritual and moral values of Russian society: spirituality and patriotism. And the main tasks will be the formation of an ideologically convinced, strong spirit of the individual, close-knit military collectives, capable of performing tasks for the purpose in any situation, the formation of patriotic consciousness of servicemen and civilian personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, as well as military patriotic work with all citizens of Russia, first of all youth....

- What role in this process is assigned to the military clergy and Orthodoxy? Is this connected with the recent opening of the main military church?

- The Minister of Defense stated that the main temple of the Armed Forces will be created in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. This is an absolutely unique structure in terms of size, capacity and applied construction technologies. There are five main chapels. The first is connected with the Resurrection of Christ itself. The remaining four are devoted to the types of the Armed Forces and the main branches of the armed forces, their spiritual patrons....

But we want the canonical things to be reflected in this temple, so that it becomes the center of spiritual education of servicemen, historical enlightenment. Therefore, there is a place for Russian commanders, for our modern martyrs, and for those who have laid their heads on the biblical Syrian land. Recall, the first Crimean War was also called the war for the Manger of the Lord, because the British, the French, the Turks decided to cut off access to the Mediterranean and Jerusalem. Every soldier on the Malakhov Hill knew clearly that he was also fighting for Bethlehem. And what is happening now in Syria, can be considered another act of war for the Manger of the Lord.

At the main temple of the Armed Forces there will be a whole complex of training military clergy. Historically, the role of the clergy has always been very high in the Russian army, and we must return it. The spirit of the soldier is also a weapon. We saw this on the example of our guys who are fighting in Syria. Take Major Roman Filippov. Is this not an example of the spirit of the Russian army, the readiness for heroism and self-sacrifice for the sake of accomplishing a combat mission? This has always been one of the distinguishing features... The temple will be an example of the unity of all our people around the idea of patriotism, love and devotion to our Motherland, Orthodoxy.

I repeat: the spiritual component is based on the faith of man. Attempts by our predecessors to replace the faith in God by believing in the Communist Party and its ideals, alas, were not crowned with success. The revival of the Russian state, as we see, continues through the revival of the Orthodox faith. Therefore, the formation of a modern Russian warrior cannot take place without high spirituality....