



New Russian Armor Tactics from the Syrian Experience

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles from *Sputnik* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* discuss new armor tactics that have been developed or refined due to Russia's experience in the Syrian campaign. The new tactics include such interesting names as the "Tank Carousel" (rotating tanks through firing positions so continuous fire is maintained for an extended duration) and "Tank Trousers" (rapidly alternating fire between two trenches). In addition to new tactics, Russian technological advancements are allowing old tactics to be refined. For instance, Russian tankers have long practiced using tanks to deliver indirect fire (like a howitzer or a mortar), but new sensors for environmental conditions and new ballistics computers (such as the Sosna-U) reportedly now allow indirect fire to be delivered at a range of up to 8 kilometers, with shells hitting within 15-20 meters of their target. As can be seen in both articles, these tactics, developed and honed in Syria, are now being brought home and implemented throughout the rest of the force. Although these articles only discuss how Russian armor tactics are being developed, it is almost certain that many other new tactics and procedures are also being adopted throughout the Russian Armed Forces based upon the Syrian campaign. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Syrian combat experience is being introduced through training, exercises and hands-on sessions during tactical and fire events.”

Source: “‘Armored Carousels’ & ‘Tank Trousers’: Look Inside Russia’s Modern Tank Tactics,” *Sputnik*, 4 July 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/military/201807041066049372-russian-armor-tactics/>

In an era of localized conflicts without clear front lines, jihad-mobiles equipped with anti-tank guns and IEDs, the idea of large tank armies facing off along vast fronts has become a thing of the past...

“This maneuver is called the ‘tank carousel’, “ tank company commander Captain Roman Schegolev told the journalist amid the tanks’ movements. “It allows us to fire over an unlimited time period. There can be three, six, nine or more machines. They move uninterrupted in a circular motion, one pummeling the enemy, the other moving to the rear and reloading, the third preparing to enter firing position, and so on. Non-stop shooting; just make sure to feed the shells,” the officer explained...

“The carousel could be compared to the rotating drum of a revolver,” Stanavov explained. “Only instead of cartridges there are tanks, and instead of bullets – powerful 125-mm shells. The scheme is used when it is unknown what kind of armament the enemy has at his disposal – tanks, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) or grenade launchers.”...“Imagine tanks shooting for ten, twenty, thirty minutes at a time without a break,” the officer said. “On the other side they will break down and open return fire, revealing their armament. Then our disguised sniper tanks with specially trained crews step into action. They quickly and efficiently strike the identified targets.”..

Localized conflicts, including the war in Syria, demonstrate that the classical tank warfare idea of positional defense and offensives are irrelevant in conditions of irregular warfare, Stanavov noted. “In Syria, militants don’t bother with planning strategic offensives and drawing arrows on operational maps, but rather adhere to the mobile tactics of guerrilla warfare – guessing the strength of government positions, rushing in on high-speed jihad-mobiles, making precise strikes and quickly disappearing.”...In Syria, the journalist explained, the tank carousel has been a particularly effective tactic during the Syrian Army’s operations in the country’s geographic conditions of earthen and sand parapets. Here, tanks can move along the parapet and, when they reach an opening, shoot, quickly concealing themselves back behind the embankment. So long as they remain in constant motion, it becomes almost impossible to aim at or hit them. Furthermore, to deceive the enemy, the commander can choose which opening to fire from at random, giving the impression there are more tanks deployed than in reality. Openings can be created using engineering equipment, and if necessary, by the crew itself...

Another tactic explained by Schegolev is the idea of ‘tank trousers’, which involves tanks alternating fire between two trenches, without staying in one position for more than a few seconds. The tank enters the trench, fires, kicks into reverse and moves to the next. Enemy anti-tank weapons don’t have time to react...Along with the carousel, tanks can operate in pairs, crosswise, or according to seemingly completely random patterns. “These operations are rather complicated, and require a high level of crew training, Senior Lieutenant Vladislav Seliverstov said. “We are constantly training, with at least two shooting drills and one driving one each week.”...

In addition to move and shoot maneuvers, the 20th Guards Combined Arms Army trains to hone their skills in firing from a closed firing position – a tactic invented during the Great Patriotic War. “With the advent of new long-range tank guns and stable in-flight ammunition, this tactic has acquired particular urgency,” Stanavov explained. It allows for plunging fire by tanks, effectively turning them into a sort of howitzer.

“Our shells are very stable in flight, so this technique allows us to inflict maximum damage on the enemy at a very long range,” Senior Lieutenant Seliverstov explained. “The enemy does not actually see the tanks, which means he cannot suppress them with traditional means – recoilless guns, ATGMS and grenade launchers. Only long-range artillery and aviation, which need time to deploy, will do any good. But time is not something the enemy will get; the tanks come in, shoot and leave.”

Russian tankmen have honed the skill of their plunging fire considerably; at a distance of 8 kilometers, high explosive shells hit within 15-20 meters of their target. Accuracy is further improved by modern equipment present on the T-72B3s, including the Sosna-U sight, digital ballistics computer, sensors for wind and temperature conditions and an automatic target tracking system which takes account of the movement of the target and the tank itself. At night, guidance devices operate using the main sight’s thermal imaging system.

(continued)



Continued: New Russian Armor Tactics from the Syrian Experience

Source: Yuriy Belousov, “Готовы к будущим учебным сражениям: Войска Центрального военного округа нацелены на дальнейшее усиление своего боевого потенциала (Ready for Future Mock Engagements: Troops of the Central Military District Are Eyeing the Continued Reinforcement of Their Potential),” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 30 May 2018. <http://redstar.ru/gotovy-k-budushhim-uchebnym-srazheniyam/>

At the end of the winter period of instruction Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Lapin, commander of the Central Military District, observed: “The current environment is forcing us to focus our main efforts on raising and maintaining the troops’ permanent readiness and the reliability of the command and control of units and subunits, perfecting their composition and structure, and on re-equipment with modern specimens of arms and military equipment.”...

Even under the increased workloads specialists of the Central MD continue to aggressively master the new modes of the conduct of combat operations with regard to the Syrian experience. Led by the advocates of the process – the servicemen of the Central MD who in the period of the fight against international terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic acquired, without exaggeration, invaluable combat experience. Today the experience they have gained is with their participation in the subunits being passed on to the personnel. Originating with them, more than a dozen procedural recommendations and aids have been introduced in the plan-based instructional process.

The Syrian combat experience is being introduced through training, exercises and hands-on sessions during tactical and fire events. A demonstration training session with ranking personnel of the Central MD, at which the topic “Creation of a Reconnaissance-Strike (Fire) Loop in a Combined Unit, Formation, and Subunit. Procedure of its Employment” was examined and ways of combating “jihad-mobiles” were shown in practice, was conducted in December 2017 at the Chebarkul’ range under the direction of the commander of the military district. A series of demonstration force-on-force battalion tactical exercises, at which combat against unmanned aerial vehicles of the adversary and the employment of attached tank elements in the role of mobile artillery were demonstrated and episodes of the employment of reconnaissance-fire loops and “tank carousels” were rehearsed, was held at formation and subunit level.

As an example, in respect to the latter, a session at the Totskiy range, where during a battalion tactical exercise the officer commanding the tank battalion made the decision to take out the adversary with the mastered “tank carousel” method, merits attention. Specifically, in the course of the simulated combat company commanding officers were able with a barrage of fire from the weaponry of two tank pairs a whole series of exposed targets. How? Based on the Syrian method, when tanks leaving for the rear to restore the spent ammo load, are immediately replaced by the next pair of combat vehicles, maintaining the intensity of fire effect on the adversary...



“Results of Operation in Syria.”

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://eng.mil.ru/images/upload/2017/SAVX2207.jpg>, CC 4.0.