



## Syria and the Russian General Staff Academy

**OE Watch Commentary:** While many in the West regard the Syrian conflict as an ongoing nightmare, Russians tend to hold a more sanguine view. The Russian media has portrayed the past three years of their military involvement as a success. Their reports stress that besides helping to defeat terrorists, Russian military personnel have helped the Assad government regain control over 60 percent of Syrian territory. Russian military losses have been minor and their involvement has allowed them to both test various weapon systems and gain valuable combat experience. Most importantly, the military's accomplishments in Syria have helped to raise Russia's status within the region and globally.

In the accompanying brief excerpt from the country's primary military news source, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the deputy head of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff Military Academy, Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim, discusses how the Syrian operation has affected both the class composition and the curriculum. He points out that "more than half of the students who enrolled this year gained combat experience in Syria," and that "many officers and generals of the academy successfully performed assignments in Syria as military advisers." General Kim asserts that academy personnel were not merely observing operations in Syria, but "made a unique contribution to the creation and organization of the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria." He stresses that "learning without practice is dead," explaining that their experience in helping "to eliminate international terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic," has been incorporated into the "latest approaches to teaching and research."

Not surprisingly, General Kim never once uses the term "Ukraine" in the interview, only obliquely commenting that the Academy uses "the experience of the performance of assignments in 'special regions.'" Such an indirect reference may be code language for the Russian military's ongoing involvement in Ukraine. Regardless, while the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine appear far from over, the Russians believe their armed forces have performed well and are incorporating the lessons-learned into current curriculum. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim (left) with cadets during Open Door ceremony at the General Staff Academy.  
Source: [http://mil.ru/conference\\_of\\_pro/news/more.htm?id=12111781@egNews](http://mil.ru/conference_of_pro/news/more.htm?id=12111781@egNews) CC BY 4.0.

**Source:** Dmitriy Semenov, "В приоритете – сирийский опыт (Priority Given to Syrian Experience)," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 6 July 2018. <http://redstar.ru/v-prioritete-sirijskij-opyt/>

*Interview with Professor Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim, candidate of military sciences and deputy head of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff Military Academy.*

*...Despite its impressive age and distinguished status, this higher educational institution is not resting on its laurels. The latest approaches to teaching and research are being actively implemented here; for instance, broad use is being made of the experience of the performance of assignments in "special regions" -- above all as part of the effort to eliminate international terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic.*

*The academy has now completed work to select students in 2018.... Our current students are commanders of formations, their deputies, and also representatives of military management organs at various levels, specialists from military higher educational institutions and scientific research organizations. More than half of the students who enrolled this year gained combat experience in Syria, and many have been awarded major state honors. All in all, it's a strong cohort.*

*...Many officers and generals of the academy successfully performed assignments in Syria as military advisers, worked on research and other tasks. Our academy made a unique contribution to the creation and organization of the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria. Assignments as part of this structure were performed by department heads and their deputies, and by a number of teachers. The Center conducted several significant humanitarian operations, in particular it secured the withdrawal of militants from areas of Aleppo, Homs, Eastern Ghouta, and others. Similar work continues to this day.*

*Certainly, the experience of the Syrian events is currently being used everywhere, not only in our academy. As for representatives of the General Staff Military Academy who have returned from the Middle East, they are actively passing on their experience to students and using it in research work.... The experience acquired by our teachers while performing assignments as part of the Reconciliation Center for Syria is fully included in the teaching process and transposed into educational activity. It is well known that learning without practice is dead, so the fact that representatives of the General Staff Military Academy obtain practical skills at the frontline is invaluable in every respect.*