

## The Kremlin's Media Strategy

**OE Watch Commentary:** There was little doubt that Vladimir Putin would be re-elected as Russia's Commander-in-Chief on 18 March, with official results stating that he received over 75 percent of the votes. His wide popularity can be attributed to many factors, but one of the most important has been the Kremlin's skillful exploitation of the country's mass media. For a good example of this expertise, consider the accompany excerpts from an interview given by Russian first deputy minister of defense, Ruslan Tsalikov, on the evening talk-show program "Right to Know," portions of which were subsequently reprinted in the official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, *Krasnaya Zvezda*. (Tsalikov's complete interview can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laXErjQrZE>)

Tsalikov appeared on this popular talk-show program two days prior to the presidential election, and his comments center upon the skillful leadership of President Putin in strengthening Russia's armed forces. He gives countless examples of how "the combat readiness of the Russian Federation Armed Forces has improved," particularly since the "decision of the Supreme Commander in Chief to appoint Sergey Kuzhugetovich Shoygu as Defense Minister." The host of the program, Dmitry Kulikov, known for a deep devotion to the Kremlin leadership, competed with his guest in praising the country's political and military leadership. They both echoed the sentiment that "the Russian Federation Armed Forces are today stronger than any potential aggressor."

The format for this type of media manipulation follows a simple rule: all achievements and successes are due to the bravery, wisdom and hard work of the Russian people (particularly the political and military leadership), while all failures and setbacks belong to the conniving West or domestic traitors. In their rendition, "Russia has never threatened anyone, but has itself often been the victim of aggression and has had to respond." Tsalikov repeated the warning "delivered recently by General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov" regarding "the inevitability of negative consequences for" the US should they dare "to carry out a strike against Damascus." Tsalikov used the TV program to assert that "We will stand up for ourselves! I hope they have heard us and I hope it will not be necessary to resort to this. We will not retreat from this position of ours, which was confirmed by the Supreme Commander in Chief."

A good portion of President Putin's popularity stems from the Kremlin's indirect control over the Russian media, where a key component of the narrative has been rebuilding and modernizing the country's armed forces to defend against perceived Western aggression. Now that Putin has been re-elected, it will be interesting to watch the degree to which the Kremlin will continue to foster anti-Western sentiments in the media. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

*"Russia has never threatened anyone, but has itself often been the victim of aggression and has had to respond...."*



First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Ruslan Tsalikov.  
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <https://structure.mil.ru/structure/forces/air/news/more.htm?id=12109797@egNews>, CCA By 4.0.

**Source:** Aleksandr Tikhonov, "Россия будет побеждать умом: Первый заместитель министра обороны Российской Федерации Руслан ЦАЛИКОВ принял участие в программе 'Право знать' на канале ТВ Центр (Russia will gain victory with its brain: First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Ruslan Tsalikov Took Part in the 'Right To Know' Program on Center TV)," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 19 Mar 2018. <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/syria/item/36539-rossiya-budet-pobezhdat-umom>

*Demonstrating once again the Army's openness to society, the first deputy head of the military department answered numerous questions from anchor Dmitriy Kulikov. They discussed the situation in Syria, the absolute confidence of Russian citizens in our Armed Forces and the basis for that high level of confidence, the results of the tackling of service members' social problems and improvements to the system of management of the defense of the Russian Federation, the innovative activities of the military department, and much else....*

*...In connection with recent provocative statements by the US authorities on their readiness to carry out a strike against Damascus and the warning, in response, of the inevitability of negative consequences for them that was delivered recently by General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov, chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff and first deputy minister of defense of the Russian Federation, Ruslan Tsalikov confirmed yet again the clear and firm position of the Russian Defense Ministry. "We will stand up for ourselves! I hope they have heard us and I hope it will not be necessary to resort to this. We will not retreat from this position of ours, which was confirmed by the Supreme Commander in Chief."*

*...History attests eloquently, Ruslan Khadzhismelovich [Tsalikov] noted: "Russia has never threatened anyone, but has itself often been the victim of aggression and has had to respond. ...*

*...What are the results of the work done since that time by the new Defense Minister and the team who arrived with him?*

*[Tsalikov] "First, the combat readiness of the Russian Federation Armed Forces has improved. This is our main task: to ensure the defense of the Motherland, the defense of our citizens.*

*"To quote, once again, our Supreme Commander in Chief, at the Defense Ministry Collegium he assessed this as meaning that the Russian Federation Armed Forces are today stronger than any potential aggressor."*