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**Editorial to open a debate: VOSTOK 2018: are Russian armed forces experimenting with mission command**

Young, Thomas Durell

Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group

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## Editorial to open a debate: VOSTOK 2018: are Russian armed forces experimenting with mission-command?

The press, analysts, and officials took close notice of the Russian strategic-level field-exercise (FTX) organized in mid-September 2018. Of note was its immense geographic size. It ranged from the Southern Military District, across nine distinct training ranges, with naval operations in the Sea of Okhotsk, the Bering Sea, and in the Avacha, and Kronotsky bays in Kamchatka. Whilst many commentators focused on the challenge of effecting span-of-control over the exercise; or debated the actual number of troops, *Defense & Security Analysis* asked a number of experts of the Russian army whether they detected any hint of experimentation in the areas of mission-command and free-play in the FTX-phase of the exercise. Five experts contributed short analytical essays on whether such approaches were detected, let alone actually used. Clearly, a Russian army that uses free-play FTXs and allows commanders to exercise mission-command is qualitatively different from its legacy Red Army ancestor. Given that the Russian army continues to use conscription, such developments would be more than merely ambitious. The writers support their views from a variety of original Russian sources, history, military and political culture, as well as quoting the views of other analysts. The views range from not possible, to a highly qualified yes, with caveats.

*Defense & Security Analysis* is pleased to offer this debate amongst experts to the readers of the journal. Your views and impressions of this debate are more than welcome by the editorial team. Indeed, we are keen to receive ideas of other short debate topics that could be showcased in the journal. Please direct your ideas, critiques, or suggestions of this format directly to the editor-in-chief: [tdyoung@nps.edu](mailto:tdyoung@nps.edu).

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