

THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR: POST SOVIET ADAPTATIONS  
IN THE RUSSIAN MILITARY

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Military History

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR: POST SOVIET ADAPTATIONS IN THE RUSSIAN MILITARY, by Major James A. Copp, 141 pages.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian federation has deployed forces for three different large-scale combat operations. These three operations—Chechnya 1994, Chechnya 1999, and Georgia 2008—were conducted facing in each operation, a differently structured opponent. As a result of these different structures, Russian forces were required to conduct both Combat Arms Maneuver and Counter Insurgency. This full spectrum of combat operations provides sufficient material to determine if the military of the Russian Federation has developed a new Russian way of warfare, or if Russian forces are still conducting operations utilizing the same methods as their Soviet predecessors. The determination of a new Russian way of war will be made at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of warfare. As Russia continues to gain wealth from the sale of energy and attempts to expand influence globally, understanding the capabilities and weaknesses of the Russian military will become more important.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Importance and Scope of the Study

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation involved itself in three major ground operations. This thesis will identify from these three events, (1994-1996 Chechen War, 1999-2009 Chechen War, and the 2008 Georgia War) the commonalities in post Soviet military operations of the Russian Federation and determine if there is a new post Soviet Russian way of war.

Since the 1999 assumption to the presidency by Vladimir Putin, Russia has again attempted to assert itself on the international scene. The ability of the Russians to play an important role in negotiations throughout the Syrian civil war highlights this point.<sup>1</sup> The Russian Federation is no longer the new sick man of Europe.<sup>2</sup> With their abundance of energy and the willingness to flex diplomatic and military muscle, the Russians are again an important actor in regional and international politics. The development of a capable military is crucial to maintaining this rebuilt international influence. With continual development, the decline of American prestige worldwide, and an increase in defense funds available as a result of energy sales, Russia stands poised to exert its growing

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<sup>1</sup>Amy Woods, "Rogers: Syrian Deal 'Big Win' for Putin, 'Dangerous' for US," *Newsmax*, 15 September 2013, [www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/rogers-syria-putin-dangerous/2013/09/15/id525743](http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/rogers-syria-putin-dangerous/2013/09/15/id525743) (accessed 25 November 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Nicholas Eberstadt, "Russia the Sick Man of Europe," *National Affairs* no. 158 (Winter 2005), [www.nationalaffairs.com/public\\_interest/detail/russia-the-sick-man-of-europe](http://www.nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/russia-the-sick-man-of-europe) (accessed 25 November 2013).

influence.<sup>3</sup> The ability to meet success in diplomatic expansion will likely rest on the threat of the Russian military and its ability to conduct effective campaigns that support Russia's national strategy. This effectiveness will likely be determined by how Russia builds its force.

The old Soviet model is rapidly losing its effectiveness. As a result, the Russian military must revolutionize and develop a new Russian way of war, or the potential for increased global influence will be wasted under an inefficient and incapable Russian military clinging to Soviet methods.

To identify an emerging Russian way of war, this thesis will study three conflicts and identify distinct traits from each. Identifying the Russian way of war will provide insight into capability and potential for future deployment of Russian forces. As the world's political and military policy continues to develop with relation to the Russian Federation, identifying this may prove extremely important.

In order to determine the capability and effectiveness of the Russian forces, the three largest conventional military operations that the Russian Federation conducted will be examined. Although smaller Russian incursions in Kosovo and the Tajik civil war influenced Russian military thought and development, they are outside of the scope of this study. The three identified conflicts encompass a full range of military operations as the Russians faced traditional military forces, militias, and in the case of the first Chechen war a hybrid force. By dissecting these actions, a determination of a new Russian way of war will be identified.

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<sup>3</sup>Corey Flintoff, "Russia May Be Poised to Regain Influence in Region," npr.org, 2 October 2012, [www.npr.org/2012/10/02/162164918/should-the-u-s-still-fear-russia](http://www.npr.org/2012/10/02/162164918/should-the-u-s-still-fear-russia) (accessed 25 November 2013).

### Primary and Secondary Research Questions

The primary research question for this thesis asked, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, what identifiable traits of a Russian way of war emerged? Additionally within this question, what other elements of national power including diplomatic, informational and economic, has the Russian Federation used to create a new Russian way of war. Finally, an all encompassing Russian way of war will be determined by examining the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare. By examining all three levels, a complete picture emerges about the strengths and weaknesses of the Russian military and how competent civil leaders maximize Russia's military strengths while minimizing weaknesses.

In order to address the existence of a Russian way of war, it is helpful to define and provide context that frames the meaning of the term "way of war." The United States Army's Command and General Staff College definition of a "western way" of warfare is based on of five fundamentals. These are innovation, technology, discipline, aggressive military traditions, and unique war financing. These basic fundamentals separate western armies from their non-western enemies. No identification of a way of war is complete without also examining the theories of Carl von Clausewitz. It is by using these combined theoretical measures to study Russia's military that recognition of an emerging or existing Russian way of war is identified. Identifying if Russia has adapted to meet the myriad of political and military challenges it has faced since the Soviet collapse will make the determination of a new Russian way of war. If the Russian military has not changed, and continues to rely on a one size fits all conventional Soviet model, then

questions concerning relevance, efficiency and civil military relationships will certainly surface.

### Soviet Way of War

#### Doctrine

Soviet military planning and doctrine framed potential fights as an all-encompassing world conflict between two diametrically opposed combatants. Smaller nations would join as members in a coalition of one of these two groups (communist or capitalist). As a result,

Soviet doctrine envisions a future world war of wide scope waged over vast territories. Such a war would be characterized by an absence of continuous fronts, rapid and sharp changes in the strategic situation, and deep penetrations into the rear areas of the forces involved. Forces would rely on mobility and maneuver to wage an intense struggle to seize and maintain the initiative. The Soviets emphasize the primacy of the offensive, stating that military and political objectives are ultimately achieved only through aggression and continuous offensive actions. Although defensive actions occasionally would be necessary, they would be active in innovative operations undertaken with the purpose of either supporting nearby offensive operations or creating favorable conditions for resuming the offensive.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, Soviet forces relied on the integration of nuclear capability in their battle formations. The use of nuclear deterrence served the Soviet military in a multifaceted role. Primarily as a means to avoid conflict, break up the opposing coalition, or also as an area denial weapon. As a result of the multiple uses of these weapons systems, the USSR spent a considerable amount in development and fielding of a nuclear force.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1985), 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 26.

## Manning

Almost from the inception of the Soviet Union, the source of the military strength was an overwhelming number of proletariat soldiers that could be called upon in times of need. Mikhail Frunze an early leader in the Red Army successfully “argued for mass warfare—the total mobilization of the state.”<sup>6</sup> In the height of revolution, Soviet leaders agreed that “the small professional army characteristic of bourgeois states could not win future war.”<sup>7</sup> Frunze was proven correct when a massive number of Soviet soldiers attrited, and then overwhelmed the Nazi Wehrmacht. The utilization of an efficiently, but minimally trained conscript force became a staple of Soviet military doctrine and impacted the way Soviet planners undertook military operations.

Soviet planners again demonstrated the preferred massing of forces during the 1956 Hungarian uprising and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Even with the Soviets possessing both artillery and air assets, the Soviet military was unable to mass against and subsequently defeat the Afghans armed with rifles dating back to World War One. Although the USSR supported insurgencies in Asia and Central America, Soviet doctrine focused on massing forces against a near peer and could not adequately address the subtleties of counter insurgency operations.

Another key to ensuring that the Red Army would remain effective as a mass focused force, was the establishment of a cadre of trained officers who during times of

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<sup>6</sup>Condoleeza Rice, “The Making of Soviet Strategy,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 655.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

crisis like the Great Patriotic War, would lead the rapidly expanded military.<sup>8</sup>

Approximately 75 percent of the Soviet standing army was made up of conscripted personnel.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet soldiers progressed through a very standardized training regime and then replaced conscripts whose term of service was completed.<sup>10</sup> This manning system enabled the Soviet Union to maintain an adequately trained force with the capability of calling up former conscripts and rapidly increase the force size should another large-scale conflict arise.

### Policy

The Bolshevik and later Soviet political leaders from the time of the Brest-Litovsk treaty (1918) looked at the survival of the communist state as the countries' primary objective. As long as the Soviet state remained strong, goals of communist expansion could be achieved deliberately and effectively. However, if outside bourgeois forces disrupted the Soviet state, expansion would never occur. Stalin codified this belief in the need to protect the state with "his dictum of 'socialism in one country.'"<sup>11</sup> This protection was as much from internal threats and the consolidation of political and economic power as it was from external threats. As George Kennan pointed out, "the obvious fact that the Communists represented only a tiny minority of the Russian people—made the

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<sup>8</sup>The Great Patriotic War is a term used in Russia for World War Two.

<sup>9</sup>Department of Defense, 73.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Rice, 660.

establishment of dictatorial power a necessity.”<sup>12</sup> This increasingly closed system heightened xenophobia within the country and eventually dictated the creation of a ring of Soviet sponsored states surrounding. This spawned the creation of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. As a result of foreign interventions and invasions, Russians including Bolshevik and later Soviet leadership simply did not feel safe. This necessitated a buffer between them and their likely enemies, the capitalist nations. This expansion of Soviet control began prior to the Soviet initiation of full-scale conflict in World War II with the invasion of Poland and the annexation of Polish territory. The initiation of Operation Barbarossa in 1941 confirmed Stalin’s belief in the need for buffer territories and led to the creation of what Churchill later described as the “Iron Curtain.” As the Soviet Union became stronger, the ability to spread communist ideals gained importance. The larger the sphere of Soviet influence, the safer the Russian communists felt. This expansionist policy remained the preferred policy up through the Afghan war. The three conflicts covered also demonstrate that although Russia may not be the imperial power of the Soviet Union, the same concerns about security remain.

#### Background: Turmoil of the Post Soviet Army

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and transformation into the Russian Federation was an especially turbulent time for the Russian military. As a result of the transitional difficulties:

[T]he military that Russia inherited, in short, reflected no reasoned military judgment, no coherent strategic design, no considered calculation of Russia’s

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<sup>12</sup>George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 566-582.

needs and interests. Rather, it was left with large shards of military capability extracted from the wreckage of the Soviet Union, the misshapen residue of a superpower that no longer existed.<sup>13</sup>

Further compounding the operational and strategic difficulties that the military faced, was the ambiguity surrounding the chain of command. In the months between the election of Yeltsin as the nation's president and the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, there was considerable uncertainty at all echelons about who was actually in command. This lack of unified command and a previous lack of oversight led to an almost total disintegration of military systems. This was demonstrated by the siphoning of state property and the improper use of Soviet soldiers. Soviet military leadership always accepted that some level of corruption occurred within the military, however, with the lack of any oversight, the levels of corruption achieved new heights.

The dissolution of the USSR and the fragmentation of the Soviet Armed Forces fundamentally transformed the petty criminal activities--and the more systematized abuses of authority and power by the officer corps and military leadership--that had characterized Soviet military garrison life for decades. The frequent pilfering of unit equipment and supplies by military personnel of all ranks, and the routine misuse of manpower and material resources by officers, rapidly became a sophisticated, multi-dimensional, ubiquitous series of criminal enterprises fostered and sustained by systemic corruption.<sup>14</sup>

This corruption and pilfering of equipment made it difficult, if not impossible to achieve even the most basic of military tasks.

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<sup>13</sup>Steven Miller, *Moscow's Military Power: Russia's Search for Security in an Age of Transition*, 2004, [www.amacad.org/publications/russian\\_mil\\_intro.pdf](http://www.amacad.org/publications/russian_mil_intro.pdf) (accessed 14 November 2013), 7.

<sup>14</sup>Graham Turbiville, *Mafia in Uniform: The Criminalization of the Russian Armed Forces*, 1995, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/mafia.htm> (accessed 15 November 2013).



The political turmoil surrounding the dissolution of the Soviet Union made the difficulties within the Russian armed forces all the more acute. When President Yeltsin called on the military to pressure the Chechens in November 1991, the problems listed above directly led to failure.<sup>15</sup> As the early 1990s continued, insufficient leadership, pay, and equipment, became the norm. Although the military was a shell of its former self, in December 1994, President Yeltsin ordered the deployment of the Russian military into Chechnya to bring the rouge republic firmly back into the Russian Federation.

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<sup>15</sup>See Chapter 2, "Prelude to War," 12.

## CHAPTER 2

### FIRST CHECHEN WAR

#### Prelude to War: Political Maneuvers and Buildup

In November 1990 over 1000 delegates from around Chechnya gathered in Grozny. “The stated purpose of this gathering was to speed the development of democratic change and to celebrate Chechen culture, history and heritage,” previously repressed by the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> It was during this historic event that Dzhokhar Dudayev, the first ethnic Chechen to become a Soviet General Officer addressed the committee in a stirring speech. “He effectively said then that declaring an independent state was an act of great responsibility, something very difficult, but once we had declared it, we should go to the end.”<sup>17</sup> This dedication to an independent Chechnya and the Chechen psyche in general was not considered by the Russians to be significant. Russians at that time were more concerned with the decaying state of the Soviet Union than they were with the aspirations of a small republic on the fringe of the empire. But this dedication to a Chechen identity was embedded in the Chechen psyche. It was something that Russian politicians failed to understand and something that would cost them dearly. It was widely accepted by the Chechens that “those who fight against invaders, even the worst

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<sup>16</sup>Carlotta Gall and Thomas deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 76.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

criminals are defenders, and this status justifies the use of any means, including terrorism.”<sup>18</sup> The fight for Chechnya would be bloody and it would be without bounds.

In the waning months of the Soviet Union, Estonia, Latvia, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kyrgystan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan all declared independence. The international community quickly recognized their independence and welcomed them into the community of nations. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December of 1991, Kazakhstan declared its independence. These states were primarily Soviet satellite states, but the action reduced the size of the Russian federation and depleted military capability.<sup>19</sup> It was in this period of uncertainty that the Chechens began their own push for independence.

In November 1990 a unique event occurred in Chechnya. The Congress of the Chechen People gathered more than 1000 Chechen Delegates together in Grozny. The congress was convened to put pressure on the local Soviet authorities to “speed up political change and to celebrate Chechen history and culture in a way that had never been possible before.”<sup>20</sup>

The Chechen people desired a say in the conduct of political affairs and longed for their chance to be Chechen. Russians again failed to understand that the Chechens assembled to celebrate and embrace a cultural identity long repressed by the Soviet Union. Repression was not the only issue in Chechnya. The standard of living in Chechnya was near the bottom of all countries in the Soviet Union. “Soviet official statistics showed

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<sup>18</sup>John Russell, *Chechnya: Russia's 'War on Terror'* (London: Routledge, 2007), 43.

<sup>19</sup>Pavel Felgenhauer, “Russian Military Reform: Ten Years of Failure” (Proceedings of a Conference held at the Naval Postgraduate School, 26-27 March 1997), Edited by Elizabeth Skinner and Mikhail Tsytkin, [www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/Felg.htm](http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/Felg.htm) (accessed 23 November 2013).

<sup>20</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 76.

Chechnya close to the bottom of the list of Russian autonomous republics and regions in most socio-economic and educational indicators.”<sup>21</sup> Economic difficulty, cultural repression and a general feeling of hopelessness developed into the seeds of revolution. It was during 1990 that these seeds of revolution finally germinated in Chechnya.

The following year, the Chechens conducted their first elections and elected Dzhokhar Dudayev who “won 85% of the vote.”<sup>22</sup> On 1 November 1991, Dudayev in his first act as the elected President of Chechnya declared Independence. Moscow renounced this attempt to follow other former Soviet republics, and one week later, Russian television announced a state of emergency in Chechnya. Following the declaration, “Russian Interior Ministry troops landed at the military airbase at Khankala outside of Grozny.”<sup>23</sup> As a result of shortages in the military, the number of soldiers was “far too few to do the job, but perhaps all the Russian government had available, given the chaos in the armed forces at the time.”<sup>24</sup> These forces were sent in to restore order in Chechnya and reestablish Russian domination. This was to be accomplished with the “arrest of Dudayev and the leading members of the (Chechen) Congress.”<sup>25</sup> The operation was however nothing short of an absolute debacle. The Russian forces never moved from the airfield. They lacked vehicles, arms, and specific guidance as to their mission. The failure

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<sup>21</sup>Anatol Lieven, *Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), 57.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>23</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 101.

<sup>24</sup>Lieven, 63.

<sup>25</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 100.

of this operation was accomplished by design of the Soviet ministers. “The Soviet ministers simply did not want to obey the orders of the new Russian President. So they punched Yeltsin’s nose from the side of Gorbachev.”<sup>26</sup> They delayed the flow of equipment and ensured that the force sent by Yeltsin would not be combat effective. By the following day, Chechen fighters had surrounded the Russian force at the airfield. Instead of quelling the Chechen support for independence, the operation steeled Chechen resolve. The operation’s failure to unseat Dudayev added to his public support in Chechnya. “It raised all the Chechens to their feet and immensely increased Dudayev’s popularity. This gave him additional leverage to strengthen his government and to undertake measures to solidify his country’s standing as independent.”<sup>27</sup> The following day, the Russian force loaded onto busses and departed from Chechnya. The first in a series of military blunders by the Russians was over, but it was not the most severe and it certainly would not be the last.

As Soviet power continued to wane, Chechen autonomy increased. In addition to autonomy, Chechen forces in a style typical of the mafia, exerted influence over the Russian troops still stationed in Chechnya. Almost immediately, Chechens began buying and stealing the weapons of the former Soviet Union. The problem was so bad, that by May 1992, Pavel Grachev, the Russian Minister of Defense, signed a directive that split the Russian weapons in Chechnya fifty-fifty between the Chechens and the soon to be

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<sup>26</sup>Lieven, 64.

<sup>27</sup>Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 20.

departing Russian forces.<sup>28</sup> “It was actually an attempt at a dignified cover-up of the fact that almost all of the weapons had been lost.”<sup>29</sup> The corruption, or incompetence, of the Russian forces stationed in Chechnya supplied the Chechen forces with a significant number of weapons. These weapons would be used to great effect two years later.

In what would be a reoccurring problem throughout the Russian military, soldiers received only sporadic pay.<sup>30</sup> Compounding the problem, as the Soviet Union collapsed, organized crime flourished. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Chechnya, where close family ties and an already thriving black market led to an explosion in criminal organizations. “One bank fraud in Moscow in 1992 reportedly netted a staggering 700 million dollars, much of which was sent back to Chechnya.”<sup>31</sup> These criminal organizations sometimes working for Dudayev’s regime also directly defrauded the Russian government.

Whether for corrupt reasons or as part of a *quid pro quo* in return for maintenance of the oil pipeline from Baku, throughout this period the Russian authorities allowed Chechnya to go on importing Russian oil for processing at Chechen plants and re-exporting the refined product. At least 300 million dollars in profits from oil went to the Chechen government during this period but never showed up in the state budget.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Robert Seely, *The Russian-Chechen Conflict 1800-2000: A Deadly Embrace* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 151.

<sup>29</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 113.

<sup>30</sup>Marcel de Haas, *Russias Military Reformes: Victory After Twenty Years of Failure?* (Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’, November 2011), [www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20111129\\_clingendaelpaper\\_mdehaas.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20111129_clingendaelpaper_mdehaas.pdf) (accessed 22 November 2013).

<sup>31</sup>Lieven, 74.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 74-75.

“Stories of corruption, of Russian Army generals and Chechen field commanders working hand in glove . . . large scale criminal fraud are all so common as to give the impression that there remains no semblance of law-governed state in Chechnya.”<sup>33</sup> Between crime, Russian incompetence, and the inability of Dudayev’s government, the system in Chechnya broke. To compound matters, Moscow continued to denounce the Chechens.

### Russian Threats Prior to Armed Conflict

Russian forces departed Chechnya, Dudayev was in control, but Chechens continued to suffer. Basic services failed, public sector employees who showed up to work were not paid, and armed groups patrolled throughout the country. “Gunmen in camouflage who could have belonged to anyone, but appeared to be defending President Dudayev” were abundant.<sup>34</sup> It was in this effectively lawless environment that the Chechens, a people with a long cultural memory, began targeting ethnic Russians for the crimes of the Soviet Union.

Stalin viewed the Chechens as a potential threat. To neutralize that threat, they were uprooted from their ancestral homes and deported en masse to central Asia. These deportations were so widespread that by 1956 almost no ethnic Chechens remained in their native land.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, “the Stalinist program of complete cultural conversion

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<sup>33</sup>Russell, 45.

<sup>34</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 106.

<sup>35</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 13.

through migration directly and indirectly caused up to 500,000 deaths.”<sup>36</sup> Although a large number of Chechens returned to their homeland following Stalin’s death, the Chechen people never forgot what the Soviet Union did to them. With diminishing Russian influence, Chechens could now begin asserting themselves against their former occupiers.

The plight of the ethnic Russian population would be a stated reason given for the Russian intervention in Chechnya. Yeltsin expressed the desire to protect ethnic Russians. This however was just one of the many contradictions of the conflict. “According to studies of the conflict in Chechnya, the plight of ethnic Russians in Grozny had little influence on Yeltsin’s decision to take action in Chechnya.”<sup>37</sup> Yeltsin may have stated that for the press, but it was simply not the case.

It was not just ethnic Russians suffering under the lawlessness prevalent during the Dudayev regime. All Chechens regardless of ethnicity suffered. With a barely functioning government and no plan to rectify the myriad of issues surrounding the civil services and economic outlook, the opposition to Dudayev grew. This opposition culminated with the assembly of a “Temporary Council” consisting of “more than 2,056 delegates representing more than two-thirds of Chechnya’s communities.”<sup>38</sup> The council “requested Russia assist in reestablishing “law and order” and for the creation of “more

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<sup>36</sup>Russell, 45.

<sup>37</sup>John Pilloni, “Burning Corpses in the Streets: Russia’s Doctrinal Flaws in the 1995 Fight for Grozny,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 13, no. 2 (2000): 42.

<sup>38</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 24.



secure and more normal living conditions for its citizens.”<sup>39</sup> This was the opening Yeltsin had waited to exploit. Yeltsin used this invitation to avenge the Russian humiliation two years earlier at the airfield. Yeltsin was afraid that if “Chechnya was allowed to split off, the other autonomous republics would begin to demand the same.”<sup>40</sup> By providing assistance to the council, Yeltsin could keep that from happening. “On 2 August 1994, Russia quickly announced its open support for the Temporary Council. Yeltsin spoke openly about the possible use of force in Chechnya. From that moment on, the threat of an unavoidable war began to hang over Chechnya.”<sup>41</sup>

The Chechen problem was not simply a matter of Russian territorial integrity. It was a matter of personal pride for Yeltsin who especially resented the disgrace from Russia’s 1991 incursion. This would be Yeltsin’s chance for revenge. No matter the cost for Russia, “out of a mixture of frustration, anger, and humiliation, Yeltsin disregarded strategic, economic, and domestic policy considerations and launched a policy aimed at crushing Dudayev with direct military intervention.”<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that the Russians only motivator was revenge. Concern about the second and third order effects of a republic breaking away, also contributed to the Russian decision. If Yeltsin were to allow Chechnya to break away, then, other regions could follow. It was not the security situation in Chechnya, but rather “Yeltsin’s fear of the spread of independence movements to other parts of the Federation that was his primary motive for involvement

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>42</sup>Pilloni, “Burning Corpses in the Streets,” 42.

in Chechnya.”<sup>43</sup> Yeltsin feared the independence domino effect that occurred in 1991 and the economic repercussions this would have on Russia.<sup>44</sup> However, Yeltsin’s argument for intervention would not be sufficient enough to garner the support of the Russian people. A more pressing security matter was required to justify intervention.

The best argument for Russia’s use of force against Chechnya, of course, was blood. The open use of force to prevent the further spilling of blood would be justifiable in both the eyes of the Russian citizenry and the international community. So that blood would begin to be spilled in Chechnya, the opposition was hurriedly armed.<sup>45</sup>

The Russian arming of the Chechen opposition directly caused the internal conflict that Yeltsin desired. The Chechen internal crisis further escalated when the Chechen National Assembly backed by Dudayev handed down a death sentence for opposition leader Umar Avturchanov.<sup>46</sup> Dudayev used this sentence as an excuse to launch attacks against his opponents.

On 17 August 1994, Dudayev’s forces attacked the village of Tolstoi Jurt. “The pretext for Moscow to openly use force in Chechnya was now in place.”<sup>47</sup> With a viable opposition and Dudayev’s support beginning to falter in Chechnya, the Russians saw an

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Timothy Thomas, “The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: the Russian Armed Forces confront Chechnya Part One, Section One: From Intervention to the Outskirts of Grozny (Military-Political Events from 11 December to 31 December),” *Slavic Military Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 1995): 233-256.

<sup>45</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 30.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 32.

opportunity to solve the Chechen problem without resorting to the use of Russian military forces. The plan would instead use the Chechen opposition.

The official position in Moscow was to treat it as an ‘internal Chechen matter.’ The model was used with two other Caucasian republics, Azerbaijan and Georgia, where in 1992 two anti-Moscow presidents had successfully been overthrown with covert Russian help.<sup>48</sup>

Yeltsin planned to do the same thing with Chechnya. Having already armed the Chechen opposition, Yeltsin used them to attack Dudayev. These Chechen groups armed and equipped by Russia went on the offensive. On 26 November 1994, the opposition began their assault on Grozny.<sup>49</sup> This unorganized band had little to no military training and was more concerned with looting than overthrowing Dudayev. In a prelude of things to come, Dudayev's forces waited until the opposition entered the city and then conducted well-coordinated urban anti-armor ambushes. They succeeded in capturing or destroying almost all of the Russian supplied equipment. Additionally Dudayev's forces captured sixty-eight Russian soldiers as prisoners.<sup>50</sup> These soldiers although not part of any official action were promised extra pay by their commanders to take part in the operation.

Their capture was especially embarrassing for the Russians who touted this operation as purely Chechen. Russian participation in this operation could no longer be denied. Dudayev “threatened to execute the Russian soldiers being held prisoner,” if the Russians did not admit participation.<sup>51</sup> After the Chechen opposition's failed operation,

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<sup>48</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 148.

<sup>49</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 46.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

Yeltsin faced an increasing number of difficulties. Paramount among the difficulties, Yeltsin now only had two choices with regard to Chechnya:

[E]ither recognize Dudayev or switch to direct intervention. The first choice presented two unacceptable evils. It would have been a personal political disgrace for Yeltsin to accept defeat. Plus, he recognized that to accept Chechen independence might threaten the cohesion of the Russian Federation.<sup>52</sup>

With only these choices as viable options, Yeltsin chose to go on the offensive. Having now been embarrassed twice by Dudayev and the Chechens, Yeltsin mobilized Russian forces and launched an attack directly against Chechnya.

### Russian Military Preparation

“What stands out in the sequence of events following the botched 26 November operation is the sudden escalation in the speed of decision making.”<sup>53</sup> In less than a month, the Russian military had to plan and prepare for military action. This shortened timeline was inadequate. The problems were further exacerbated by the decrepit state of the Russian military.

In order to bring forces up to strength, the Russian Federation had to combine units and sub-units from various branches of services and departments from across the federation. The degree of combat readiness varied among them, and they were not trained to work together in combat operations.<sup>54</sup>

The First Deputy Commander of Russia’s Ground Forces, Colonel General Eduard Vorobyov observed the soldiers prior to the invasion and concluded “the lack of

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<sup>52</sup>Pilloni, “Burning Corpses in the Streets,” 42.

<sup>53</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 162.

<sup>54</sup>Pilloni, “Burning Corpses in the Streets,” 45.

preparation of the military operation verged on criminal.”<sup>55</sup> Although it would seem irrational to send units into combat in this state, the Russians believed that Chechen forces would capitulate at the first show of force. Combat readiness was inconsequential to Russian political leaders who believed that no combat was to occur.

“The Federal Counterintelligence Service (formerly KGB) and the Russian Army General Staff’s Intelligence Command (formerly GRU) reported that Dudayev’s forces were as yet insufficiently organized and were not ready to resist a larger armed force.”<sup>56</sup> It was this reporting combined with information that “the elders and the Chechen Army were dissatisfied with Dudayev. Further they believed it would only be necessary to blow a little to cause his regime to collapse.”<sup>57</sup> This belief in enemy disorganization led Russian leaders to downplay their own disorganization and accept the state of Russian preparation.

Years of Soviet mismanagement and the drastic drop in military spending by the Russian Federation ensured that troops and commanders both were not trained. Additionally, the equipment was in such a state of disrepair that it almost failed to make it into the theater. When the attack finally commenced, three prongs consisting of a large unsupported force were sent toward Grozny.<sup>58</sup> The impressive size of this force convinced Russian military leadership and Russian politicians that victory in Chechnya

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<sup>55</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 179.

<sup>56</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 43.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Raymond Finch, *Why the Russian Military Failed in Chechnya* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 1996), <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/yirusfail/yirusfail.htm> (accessed 22 November 2013).

would be inevitable. Although some bluster must be taken into account, senior leaders believed that a smaller force could achieve Russia's objective. Pavel Grachev, the Russian Minister of Defense, stated prior to the invasion that the entire issue "could be resolved with a single parachute division."<sup>59</sup> This was not to be the case. "Russia once again acted in its traditional hurried manner, that is, without exhaustive preparation and with too much belief in its own military might."<sup>60</sup> Russian soldiers paid the price.

### Invasion

On the morning of 11 December 1994, the "largest Russian military operation since the war in Afghanistan" commenced.<sup>61</sup> Over 40,000 Russian soldiers converged on Chechnya from the North, East and West. Although impressive in size and potential capability, the forces suffered a series of breakdowns. "Much of the armored equipment was in bad repair. First generation T-72 tanks struggled to complete the march. Drivers had to continuously stop and retrieve buckets of water to fill their leaking radiators."<sup>62</sup> Also, soldiers did not know what to do in the face of civilian interference and "the lack of a clearly understood set of 'rules of engagement' heightened the vulnerability of the Russian forces."<sup>63</sup> In what was to become common in the first Chechen campaign, Russian forces received vague orders and minimal guidance. The problem was so bad

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<sup>59</sup>Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 141.

<sup>60</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 67.

<sup>61</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 173. See figure 1.

<sup>62</sup>Pilloni, "Burning Corpses in the Streets," 44-45.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

that some units “had not been told they were heading to Chechnya until they arrived.”<sup>64</sup> This was likely because the operation was “botched together at the last moment—and this was specifically stated by General Eduard Varobyev, who refused command of the operation precisely on the grounds that there had been no plan and no preparation.”<sup>65</sup>

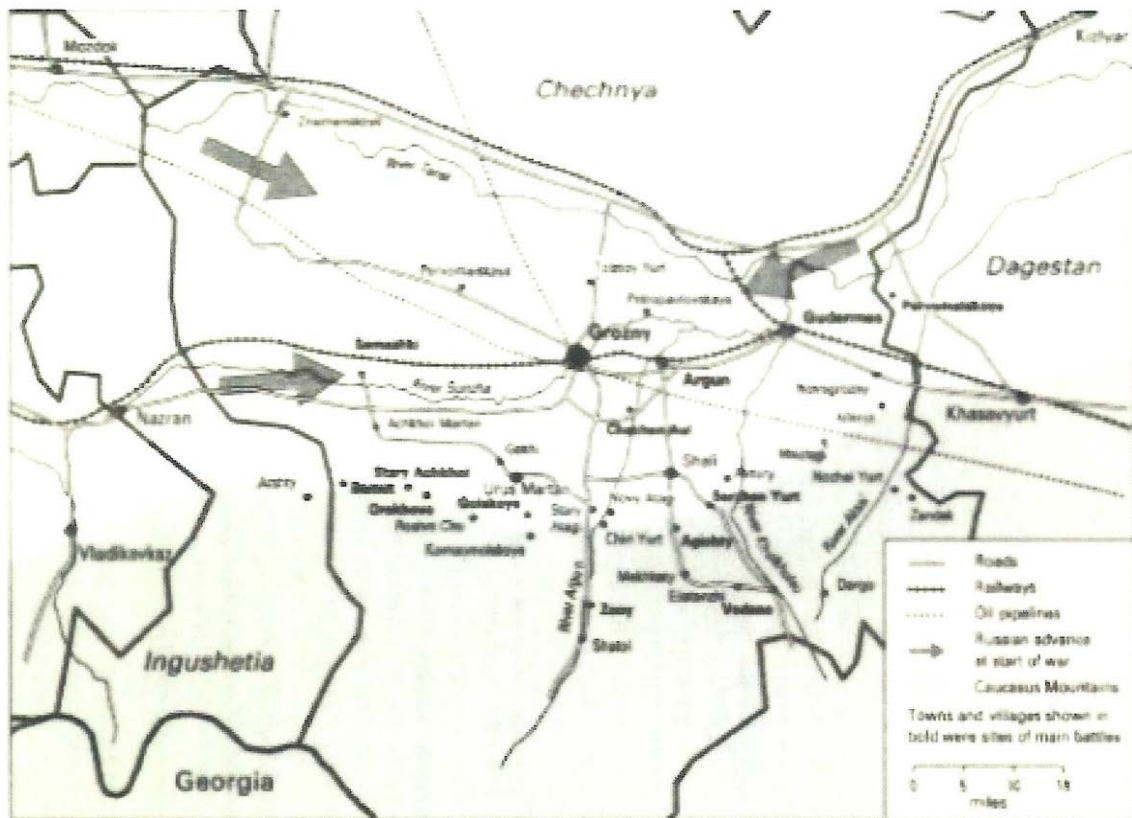


Figure 1. Initial Invasion of Chechnya

Source: Carlotta Gall and Thomas deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), map 5.

<sup>64</sup>Carlotta Gall and Thomas deWaal, *Chechnya, A Small Victorious War* (London: Pan Books, 1997), 209.

<sup>65</sup>Lieven, 89.

As a result of this lack of planning, only the most basic understanding of operational objectives came from the commander of forces down to the lowest ranking conscript. Additionally, guidance on how to deal with contingencies that were likely was never provided. The operational readiness of the forces contributed to this problem. However, the root of the problem was a lack of responsibility at all levels. From the highest levels of government down, no one wanted to be held accountable for this operation. This desire for plausible deniability resulted in the transmission of vague verbal orders instead of written orders. If subordinates possessed written orders commanders would be the ones held liable after its failure. If no written orders are given, senior political and military leaders could claim that subordinates simply did not follow the orders given. It is then the commander on the ground that is responsible.

To compound matters, “Yeltsin's 11 December 1994 decree stated, 'I order all officials responsible for conducting measures to restore constitutional order in the Chechen Republic not to use violence against the civilian population but to take these people under their protection.’”<sup>66</sup> This decree made operations exceedingly difficult for the Russian army. It provided Yeltsin a means to deny responsibility for any civilian deaths, but limited the army's options. If the operation turned violent and civilians were injured, the politicians could claim the army simply violated its orders. The army would be the scapegoat. Although this was a problem, Russian commanders were not overly concerned. They still operated under the belief that a mere show of force would be enough for the Chechens to capitulate. This unfounded belief and the previously discussed lack of readiness almost guaranteed a Russian military catastrophe. Although

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<sup>66</sup>Pilloni, “Burning Corpses in the Streets,” 61.



there were obvious combat readiness deficiencies, none of the soldiers expected anything more than minor civilian interference. No one expected a bloody conflict.

## Fall of Grozny

### Initial Attack

As the Russian military positioned itself to attack into Chechnya, Russian citizens and leaders openly questioned the need for military action. Senior Russian military leaders and political leaders such as Yeltsin's advisor on nationality affairs Emil Pain, expressed their extreme opposition to Yeltsin's Chechen policy and resigned in protest. As stated above Colonel General Eduard Varobyev resigned due to the Russian forces lack of planning and preparation. "Three of the Defense Ministry's top generals, Boris Gromov, Georgy Kondratyev and Valery Mironov, all Deputy Ministers, also spoke out against use of the army in Chechnya."<sup>67</sup> The Yeltsin administration then asked them to resign. All of these senior military leaders understood what attacking Chechnya would cost in blood and treasure. The operation was simply not worth it. Senior military leaders were not the only ones voicing opposition. Yury Kalmykov the Justice Minister in Yeltsin's administration attempted to reason with Yeltsin and the other senior political leaders about the catastrophe that was about to unfold. After presenting his argument, he was rebuffed.<sup>68</sup> The decision was already made. With no recourse, he too resigned. Even though a number of senior advisors recommended against action, Yeltsin and the remainder of his ministers pressed ahead.

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<sup>67</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 181.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

Russian forces pushed into Chechnya on 11 December 1994, moving toward the capital from three different directions. The movement did not go as planned:

The 76th Pskov Paratroop Division and the 21st Detached Paratroop Brigade moving along Route 3 were stopped near the community of Verchnyje Ashaluk by local inhabitants who blocked the road. As no provision had been made as to what to do in the event that local inhabitants refused to allow the columns to pass, the troops turned back.<sup>69</sup>

The lack of preparation and planning that Colonel General Varobyev resigned over was beginning to show itself. All along the routes, Russian forces met with occasional attacks and stiff civilian interference. The Russians encountered intense, but manageable resistance in the villages surrounding Grozny. Although Russian forces achieved their objectives, the resistance was just a prelude to the ferocity that waited.

In some of the fiercest fighting prior to the Grozny operation, Russian forces managed to displace approximately 1000 Chechen fighters from the Village of Petropavlovskaya. “In the end, rather than storming the Chechen positions, the Russian forces literally blasted the Chechen fighters out of them.”<sup>70</sup> This technique of overwhelming firepower was used throughout the remainder of the conflict. This was the only tactic available as a result of the lack of training, manpower, and substandard equipment. However, the cost to the civilian population as a result of this techniques utilization was enormous. By 17 December 1994, Russian forces cleared to the very outskirts of Grozny. Yeltsin issued a final ultimatum demanding Chechen disarmament; as a show of goodwill, the “Russian Army withdrew a short distance.”<sup>71</sup> His demand was

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<sup>69</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 71.

<sup>70</sup>Lieven, 111.

<sup>71</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 71.

pointless. The Chechens would not consider disarming and allowed the ultimatum to pass.

Russian planes began bombing shortly after the deadline. Except for a two-day reprieve, Russian aircraft bombed the city continuously. The campaign lasted until Russian forces moved into the city and began the occupation.<sup>72</sup> Because of the limited number of military targets engaged, this bombing was as much of a show of force as it was an attempt to destroy enemy positions. Russian forces were still convinced that their numerical, armored, and aerial superiority would be sufficient to convince the Chechens to disarm. They were wrong.

### Siege and Fall

By 25 December 1994, Russian forces were in position around Grozny and Russian military leaders developed a plan to capture the city. “Grachev decided to assault Grozny and finish the operation off in one blow, despite the fact that advanced preparations had not been made for such a move.”<sup>73</sup> The Russians would break into four battle groups securing locations deemed key to the Chechen government’s power. These battle groups moved into the city from generally the north, east, and west, intentionally leaving the south open for Dudayev's forces to flee. Although in hindsight, this decision seems shocking, there was really no other alternative. The number of soldiers required to accomplish the southern blocking movement was far more than Russian commanders

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<sup>72</sup>CBS News, “Chechen Militant Leader Doku Umarov Calls on Islamists to Disrupt the Sochi Winter Olympics,” [www.cbsnews.com/chechen-militant-leader-duko-umarov-calls-on-islamists-to-disrupt-sochi-winter-olympics/8301-202\\_162-57592100.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/chechen-militant-leader-duko-umarov-calls-on-islamists-to-disrupt-sochi-winter-olympics/8301-202_162-57592100.html) (accessed 5 November 2013).

<sup>73</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 93.

possessed. This decision like many others would prove to be catastrophic and would result in a significantly longer conflict.

At the tactical level, failing to isolate before the attack violated Russian doctrine and greatly contributed to Chechen initial successes. Although understanding the potential difficulties associated with allowing the southern portion to remain open, Russian commanders did not possess the number of troops required to close it. Additionally, they continued to believe that the size of their force and the firepower brought to bear if required would be sufficient to ensure victory. Grachev also believed it possible to decapitate the Chechen government and “in one step liquidate Dudayev and the government officials supporting him.”<sup>74</sup> On 30 December 1994, Russian forces began the operations against Grozny with a significant aerial and artillery bombardment. Although the bombardment did not abide by Yeltsin’s 11 December decree, Russian commanders possessed nothing else to give them a tactical advantage.

Russian commanders believed that this demonstration of firepower combined with a rapid occupation by armored forces would shock the Chechens into submission. However, Chechen fighters had already faced Russian armor and Russian fire and they would not be shocked. Russian commanders missed the Chechen resolve during the assaults on the defended villages surrounding Grozny. These attacks demonstrated not only the Chechen fighters resolve, but the skill with which they would fight. Chechens defended tenaciously, forcing the Russians to resort to overwhelming fire as the only means to achieve success. The initial aerial and artillery urban bombardment did little to nothing against Chechen fighters. They were prepared, tested and ready. Although

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

ineffective operationally, this artillery preparation did begin what would be the almost total destruction of the city.

As discussed earlier, one of the most significant problems facing Russian forces was the substantial lack of training.<sup>75</sup> This proved catastrophic in the coming operation. Russian forces operated in a highly kinetic operation. They were simply not prepared. Their lack of preparedness forced the Russians to resort to using old Soviet tactics that they were familiar with, namely massive and indiscriminate use of indirect fire. Individual infantry fire and maneuver techniques were non-existent and the conscript soldiers were as much a danger to themselves as to the Chechens.<sup>76</sup>

Compounding matters, Russian aerial precision fires were non-existent, training and readiness lapsed so much that Russian forces could not find pilots qualified to fly the fighter aircraft, let alone deliver precision fires.<sup>77</sup> The problem was so acute that “it was necessary to call up pilots from the Achiubinsk Flight Center.”<sup>78</sup> Even with the instructor pilots, the Russians “were only able to form a five (plane)-SU-24M fighter-bomber squadron.”<sup>79</sup>

On 31 December the main attack commenced. Having encountered resistance in the movement to Grozny, Russian commanders chose to shock the Chechen forces with a

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<sup>75</sup>Gall and de Waal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 207.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>77</sup>Timothy Thomas, “Air Operations in Low Intensity Conflict: The Case of Chechnya,” *Air Power Journal* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 51-59.

<sup>78</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 96.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

rapid and massive show of force inside the city.<sup>80</sup> Chechen forces already experienced an armored force entering Grozny, and displayed tenacity in the November attack by the Chechen Opposition. Although this event was recent history, Russian commanders continued to believe that “physically occupying Grozny and disarming Dudayev's militants within the city were paramount to the success.”<sup>81</sup> Russian commanders did not brief their soldiers about the threats they faced and subsequently, they rode inside their Armored Personnel Carriers not even bothering to provide security around their vehicle.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>See figure 2.

<sup>81</sup>Pilloni, “Burning Corpses in the Streets,” 43.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 47.

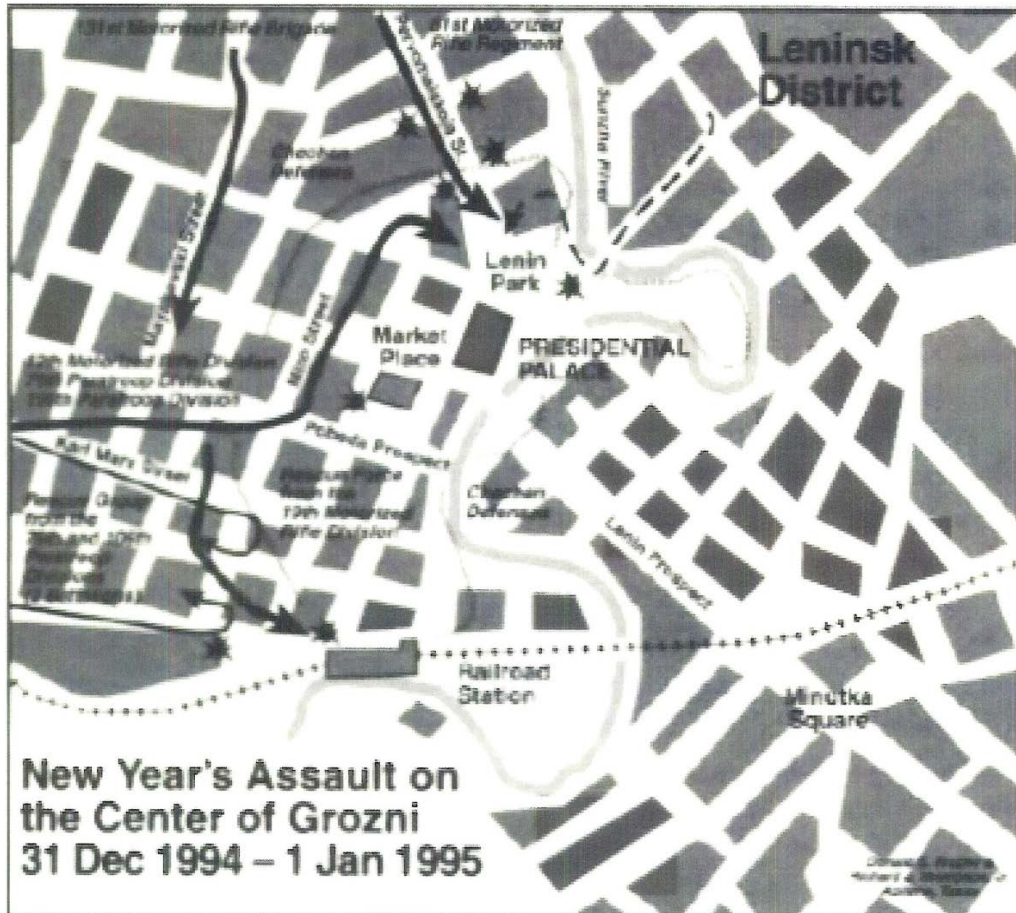


Figure 2. New Year's Assault on the Center of Grozny

Source: Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 97.

Additionally, Russian forces failed to follow doctrine and provided no dismounted infantry support to the armored forces. The common soldier was aware of Yeltsin's decree and believed that this operation would be low intensity, a mission to protect the population. Russian military leadership however knew otherwise.<sup>83</sup> This

<sup>83</sup>Finch, *Why the Russian Military Failed in Chechnya*.

unwillingness to act on critical information led directly to the catastrophe that occurred and resulted in the loss of Russian soldiers.

Although Russia's leadership knew about Dudayev's preparation, they were willing to send soldiers into combat unprepared with the hope that the operation would succeed. The unconcerned attitude of senior military leaders, maintained the perception emanating from Moscow that this would be a simple and peaceful operation. The administration continued to state that a show of Russian military power would be sufficient to achieve the desired results. Had the Russian military followed their doctrine and used overwhelming force and direct firepower, they would "not have met Yeltsin's stated intent to safeguard the lives of noncombatants."<sup>84</sup> This may be a bit of a contradiction following the aerial and artillery bombardments. However, the sight of Russian forces directly conducting kinetic operations contradicted Yeltsin's guidance. A forceful seizure of the city demonstrated that Russian forces are not occupying based on a desire to protect the population. The military was there to destroy. When Russian aircraft bomb civilians from the air, it can be explained away as a miss on a viable military target. The same denials cannot be made when infantry conduct a deliberate attack. As Russians began their movement to the identified targets, they encountered heavy resistance. The Chechens, well armed, trained and prepared, executed planned and coordinated anti armor ambushes. Russian forces were again simply not prepared.

When ordered into the city, Russian forces conducted movement in armored columns. These columns did not follow Russian doctrine and as stated above were not supported by dismounted infantry. Combined with Russia's failure to block south of the

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<sup>84</sup>Pilloni, "Burning Corpses in the Streets," 54.



city, the Chechens could move and attack freely. Adding to Russia's problems, Chechen fighters were well versed in urban defense. Not only were a significant number of fighters Soviet army veterans, the recent operation conducted against Chechen Opposition forces allowed them to hone their techniques.

The Russians, just like the Chechen Opposition before them, attempted to take the city by driving unsupported armored columns straight to the city center. Just like with the previous operation, once Russian forces were inside the city, the Chechens demonstrated their skill and training. Chechen gunners destroyed both the first and last vehicles of the Russian convoy. This effectively blocked the Russians and contained them in well organized and prepared ambush zones. Withering Chechen fire and untrained Russian forces resulted in the almost total destruction of the Russian columns. One of the attacking brigades the 131st Maikop Brigade lost "20 of its 26 tanks and 102 of its 120 BMPs. By all accounts, the 131st ceased to exist as a fighting force."<sup>85</sup> Other Russian units fared little better."<sup>86</sup> With the first significant engagement of the conflict over, the Russians now understood that this operation would not be easy.

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<sup>85</sup>See figure 3.

<sup>86</sup>Pilloni, "Burning Corpses in the Streets," 51.

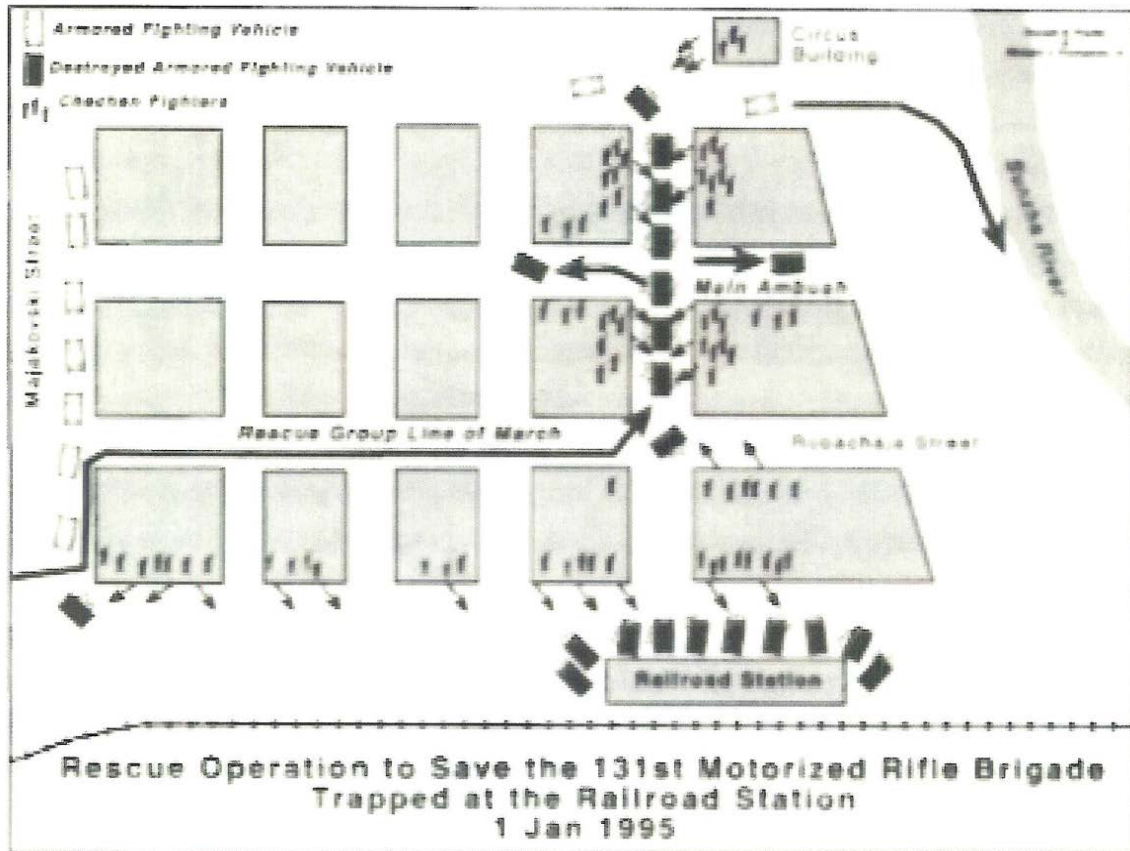


Figure 3. Destruction of 131st and Relief Column

Source: Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 100.

After suffering such a devastating initial attack, the remaining Russian forces regrouped and supplemented their forces with units that just arrived in Chechnya. Russia's commanders finally accepted that the Chechens planned, prepared, and equipped their soldiers for a highly kinetic fight. Understanding this, the remaining Russian forces planned accordingly. For the next assault on Grozny, Russian forces began following their doctrine and sealed off the city center limiting the ability of the Chechen fighters to resupply.

Even with Russian forces utilizing their doctrine, they were still “unable to conduct precision operations in urban terrain that incorporate appropriate measured response.”<sup>87</sup> This inability, which resulted from the significant lack of training and readiness, required Russian forces to rely extensively on artillery, inaccurate aerial, and massed direct fire attacks. These attacks were more devastating than the initial bombardment and served to clear areas prior to Russian occupation.

Although effective at clearing enemy forces in an urban area, this technique also destroyed the homes of citizens still unlucky enough to remain in the city. Utilizing the technique of overwhelming fire, Russian forces eventually seized all of the now destroyed locations targeted during the initial assault. With the occupation of the identified target areas, the Russians claimed to have seized the city. “President Yeltsin announced that the taking of the palace factually meant the cessation of hostilities.”<sup>88</sup> This claim however was simply not the case. Russian forces failed to control the southern portion of the city as well as the majority of towns and villages surrounding the city. This inability to control the entirety of the nation directly led to the growth of an insurgency and required the continued presence of Russian combat forces. The fight for Grozny and the rest of Chechnya continued.

#### Russian Counterinsurgency

Russian forces using the techniques that proved successful in the seizing of Grozny pushed Chechen forces out of the villages and into the mountains, the traditional

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>88</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 113.

sanctuary of the Chechen fighter. Although the Chechens were continuously beaten back by overwhelming Russian fire, they were not defeated. Throughout the remainder of the campaign, Chechen fighters demonstrated capability and daring. These two factors reenergized the Chechens and opened yet another chapter in the conflict.

On 14 June 1995, Shamil Basayev one of the most effective Chechen field commanders seized the Russian town of Budyonnovsk 100 miles from the Chechen border. Following an initial skirmish, a large number of Russian security forces arrived and began engaging Chechen's who took Russian civilians hostage and marched them into the local hospital.<sup>89</sup> Following a multi-day standoff, the Russian government agreed to allow the Chechens and hostages to board busses which drove the fighters and hostages to Chechnya. The result of this operation was profound. Specifically:

Budyonnovsk was a pivotal episode of the war. Facing defeat, the Chechens had launched a ruthless raid that appeared suicidal both for themselves and their cause. Yet they emerged not only relatively unscathed, but in a stronger position than before. They had won a much-needed ceasefire and forced Russia to be serious about peace talks.<sup>90</sup>

Although this operation was one of the largest and best executed, it was certainly not the last.

Throughout the summer and early winter of 1995, Russian and Chechen forces upheld an uneasy truce. The Russians did not leave and "the Chechens being the kind of people they are, as long as Russian soldiers were in Chechnya, then ceasefire or no

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<sup>89</sup>Michael Specter, "Chechen Rebels said to Kill Hostages at Russian Hospital," *New York Times*, 16 June 1995, [www.nytimes.com/1995/06/16/world/chechen-rebels-said-to-kill-hostages-at-russian-hospital.htm](http://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/16/world/chechen-rebels-said-to-kill-hostages-at-russian-hospital.htm) (accessed 16 November 2013).

<sup>90</sup>Gall and deWaal, *Chechnya, A Small Victorious War*, 275.

ceasefire, Chechen fighters would attack them.<sup>91</sup> The Russians did not possess the combat power to address the Chechen guerilla attacks and Yeltsin would not allow the military to leave.

Compounding the problems for the Russians was the constant hostility between themselves and the Chechen civilians. “Even in Grozny, Russian rule never evolved from a state of military occupation.”<sup>92</sup> This inability to work with the Chechens enabled the resistance to grow and weakened the Russian's position in Chechnya. The Chechens realized that they “only had to destroy the Russians’ will to fight, a task in which, like the Vietcong and FLN, they eventually succeeded.”<sup>93</sup> This is not to say that Russia did not secure any victories following their seizure of Grozny. On 21 April 1996, a rocket fired from a Russian plane found its mark and killed President Dudayev while he was talking on a satellite telephone.<sup>94</sup> Although Russia managed to kill the leader of the resistance, they did not break the Chechen will.

Throughout this period, negotiations between the Russians and Chechens took place. But even with a demoralized army, Russia did not capitulate. Discussions had failed, it was time the Chechens tried something else. Furthermore:

The Chechens believed that there was no way of terminating war actions but to stop force with force. Only equals could negotiate on equal footing. Thus to demonstrate that they were equal in force to the Russians, the Chechens needed to

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<sup>91</sup>Lieven, 135.

<sup>92</sup>Smith, *Allah's Mountains*, 187.

<sup>93</sup>Lieven, 126.

<sup>94</sup>Gall and de Waal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 318-319.

mount an operation that could prove that the resistance forces were not only not exhausted but, to the contrary, had regrouped and become even stronger.<sup>95</sup>

This operation was to be the recapture of Grozny and the final blow to the already demoralized Russian army. As individuals and in small groups the Chechens infiltrated into Grozny and prepared to attack.<sup>96</sup> The lack of public support and at times bribes paid to conscripts manning the checkpoints allowed the Chechens to move in over 1500 fighters seemingly undetected.<sup>97</sup> On the morning of 6 August 1996, operation “Zero Option” the Chechen plan to finally remove the Russians from Chechnya, commenced.<sup>98</sup>

The operation caught the Russians off guard as Chechen fighters surrounded Russian soldiers in Grozny. When Russian commanders dispatched relief columns, these were ambushed and destroyed.<sup>99</sup> Russia no longer possessed the capability to remove the Chechens from Grozny. The only alternative was a negotiated peace.

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<sup>95</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 286.

<sup>96</sup>Smith, *Allah's Mountains*, 247-248.

<sup>97</sup>Gall and de Waal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 331.

<sup>98</sup>Knezys and Sedlickas, 288. See figure 4.

<sup>99</sup>Gall and de Waal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 339.



Figure 4. Chechen Seizure of Grozny “Zero Option”

Source: Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 289.

### Aftermath

With the inability to reclaim Grozny and their forces demoralized, the Russians finally accepted that a negotiated peace must occur. On 12 August 1996, Russia’s General Alexander Lebed met with Chechen General Maskhadov in the village of Khasavyurt, Dagestan. During the next two weeks, the two generals “developed the basis for the Russian withdrawal from Chechnya.”<sup>100</sup> By the end of August 1996, Russia’s

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<sup>100</sup>Lieven, 142.

military departed Grozny but was not yet on its way back to Russia. In September 1996, Lebed and Maskhadov met again to agree upon the final withdrawal and diplomatic terms. The final agreement “was an amalgamation of many previous proposals but with one key difference. Any decision on Chechnya’s status was deferred for five years.”<sup>101</sup> Although this deferment and the question of Chechen independence would again become an issue, for now there was peace. On 3 October 1996 the war that “had killed some 50,000 civilians, at least 6000 Russian troops and 2000 to 3000 Chechen fighters” was finally over.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Gall and de Waal, *Calamity in the Caucasus*, 359.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 360.



## CHAPTER 3

### SECOND CHECHEN WAR

#### Prelude to War: de facto Chechen Independence

On 31 August 1996, Russia and Chechnya signed the Khasavyurt Treaty officially marking the end of hostilities between the two nations. This treaty addressed four key issues in an attempt to maintain peace between the belligerents. These four points included the implementation of a permanent ceasefire; complete withdrawal of Russian forces and disarmament of the Chechens; A five year period of autonomy during which the parties would discuss the feasibility of independence; and the establishment of a mechanism for the two governments to discuss Chechnya's status in or out of the Russian federation.<sup>103</sup> The architects of the treaty, Russian General Lebed and Chechen General Maskhadov, designed it as a means to separate the belligerents and provide a cooling off period during which the primary cause of the conflict, Chechen independence, could be discussed.<sup>104</sup> However, the serious discussion about Chechen independence never occurred. Although separating the belligerents, the treaty did not fix any of the underlying problems in the conflict and as implemented, directly led to the next crisis.

Following the first Chechen conflict, Russia employed a strategy of maligned neglect. Although Presidents Maskhadov and Yeltsin signed economic agreements in late 1996, which as signed, provided Russian assistance in the rebuilding of Chechnya's

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<sup>103</sup>Lajos Szaszdi, *Russian Civil Military Relations and the Origins of the Second Chechen War* (New York: University Press of America, 2008), 47.

<sup>104</sup>Anne Aldis, *The Second Chechen War* (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 5.

infrastructure and governmental systems, no support ever materialized. As a result, “it remained a region exploited, impoverished, confused and still suffering from the legacies of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>105</sup> The inability of the Russians to assist Chechnya was simply the latest example of neglect imposed on the Caucasus region. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chechnya consistently ranked at the bottom in terms of economic development.<sup>106</sup> This deplorable situation enabled the continuation of criminal enterprises started prior to the demise of the Soviet Union and enabled the rise of warlords. The Russians referred to these criminals and warlords as bandits. These bandit groups posed the most significant threat to Chechnya as they directly opposed the legitimacy of the duly elected government.<sup>107</sup> The Chechen government was weak following the first conflict and did not possess the means to counter these bandit groups effectively. Retired Lieutenant General Alexander Lebed, the architect of the Khasavyurt Treaty, “declared in a statement reported on 13 January 1999 that the Russian government risked a new war in the North Caucasus by not shoring up the regime of President Maskhadov.”<sup>108</sup> Without Russian financial and material support, the Chechen government was destined to fail.

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<sup>105</sup>C. W. Blandy, *Moscow's Failure to Comprehend*, in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 11.

<sup>106</sup>Anup Shah, “Crisis in Chechnya,” *Global Issues*, 4 September 2004, [www.globalissues.org/article/100/crisis-in-chechnya](http://www.globalissues.org/article/100/crisis-in-chechnya) (accessed 22 November 2012).

<sup>107</sup>Agence France-Presse, “Chechen President Declares War on the Warlords,” *Reliefweb*, 21 October 1998, <http://reliefweb.int/report/russian-federation/chechen-president-declares-war-warlords> (accessed 23 September 2013).

<sup>108</sup>Szaszdi, 48.

## Russian Reaction to the Conflict in Dagestan

Following Russia's departure from Chechnya in 1996, governmental services such as water and electricity across Chechnya were either limited or completely non-existent. Additionally the payment of war reparations to Chechen citizens from the damage caused by the first conflict never fully materialized, this resulted in continued impoverishment of the population. The security apparatus in the country was also either weak or depending on the part of the country, non-existent. As a corollary "Aslan Maskhadov, elected president of Chechnya in January 1997, could not effectively maintain any semblance of law and order."<sup>109</sup> This inability enabled the consolidation of power for prominent fighters from the first conflict like Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab. These former rebel commanders rapidly consolidated control of their own areas of the country, and operated as the de facto government. Maskhadov possessed neither the strength of arms, nor the political clout to control these leaders. Additionally troubling for Maskhadov's regime, the economic and security issues in Chechnya provided the perfect breeding ground for radical Islam to take root. Jihadi fighters received significant financial support from the Middle East, financial support that the Chechen government could not match.<sup>110</sup> As a result, the Chechen rebels of the second conflict followed a more radical strain of Islam.

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<sup>109</sup>Dr M. A. Smith, "The Second Chechen War: The All-Russian Context.," in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 6.

<sup>110</sup>Lorenzo Vidino, "How Chechnya Became a Breeding Ground for Terror," *The Middle East Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 60.

The duly elected government in Grozny was in trouble. The Chechens continuously claimed that the Russians did not do enough to assist Chechnya. The Russians cited the 26 February 1999 conference on crime in Chechnya as an honest attempt to assist Chechnya.<sup>111</sup> Russian politicians stated that they were assisting Chechnya, and expressed their willingness to meet with the Chechen government, but no significant progress in dealing with criminals ever resulted. As discussed later, this lack of progress provided the Russians with the *casus belli* for the second invasion of Chechnya.

If the Chechen government failed, Russia would have the excuse it needed to reoccupy the country, instill a pro-Russian government, and reclaim some of the lost prestige resulting from the defeat of the first war. “On 17 September, RIA-Novost reported that the Russian MOD was drawing up a plan for carrying out a large scale operation to destroy illegal Chechen armed formations and their bases in Chechnya.”<sup>112</sup> This planning was not the only Russian action designed to ensure another conflict with Chechnya. As discussed below, Russian authorities were reactionary in their dealings with the Chechen Republic. Russian forces never provided assistance to the Chechen security apparatus.

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<sup>111</sup>Szaszdi, 53.

<sup>112</sup>Smith, “The Second Chechen War,” 6.

## Political Maneuvers

Following years of mismanagement, Russian people were extremely dissatisfied with the state of the nation and the leadership abilities of President Yeltsin.<sup>113</sup> Near the end of his second term, Yeltsin's approval rating went from a high of approximately 60 percent, to below 20 percent.<sup>114</sup> The concern about the Russian economy, which steadily declined under Yeltsin's tenure, as well as questions about the handling of the first Chechen crisis directly led to calls for Yeltsin's impeachment. On 15 May 1999, opposition leaders held a vote for the impeachment of President Yeltsin. Of all of the counts that Yeltsin could be impeached for, the one closest to succeeding was in regards to Yeltsin's handling of the first Chechen conflict.<sup>115</sup> A mere seventeen votes separated him from impeachment and maintaining his position as president.<sup>116</sup> Although Yeltsin avoided impeachment he could still face prosecution. If the opposition won the upcoming elections, Yeltsin would have likely been charged with crimes resulting from the

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<sup>113</sup>Richard C. Paddock, "Yeltsin Admits Worry Over His Unpopularity," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 February 1997, [http://articles.latimes.com/1997-02-25/news/mn-32248\\_1\\_kremlin](http://articles.latimes.com/1997-02-25/news/mn-32248_1_kremlin) (accessed 23 September 2013).

<sup>114</sup>Daniel Treisman, *Presidential Popularity in a Young Democracy. Russia under Yeltsin and Putin*, November 2009, [www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/treisman/Papers/Pres%20pop.pdf](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/treisman/Papers/Pres%20pop.pdf) (accessed 28 August 2013), 7.

<sup>115</sup>CNN, "Communists Lose Battle to impeach Yeltsin," 15 May 1999, [www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9905/15/russia.yeltsin.04/](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9905/15/russia.yeltsin.04/) (accessed 28 August 2013).

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*

direction and handling of that crisis.<sup>117</sup> Yeltsin needed to change the political environment, and he needed to do it quickly. Interestingly:

The Russian intervention in Chechnya appears to have been determined by Russia's election timetable. Duma elections would take place in December 1999 with the Presidential election to follow in June 2000. The Presidential elections were especially important as they were to determine the succession to Boris Yeltsin.<sup>118</sup>

As there was no quick fix for the Russian economy, Yeltsin needed another way to gain public support. The only other way to gain public support for Yeltsin was to inflame nationalistic pride by going to war against a foreign threat. Gaining public support for a war in Chechnya presented the Kremlin with a problem because approximately 75 percent of the population did not believe that another war with Chechnya was necessary and that Chechen separation was acceptable.<sup>119</sup> Actions that changed public perception would be required.

Several crucial events occurred between May and December 1999. How the events unfolded and who was responsible for them, is still debated. What is not debated is that destabilization in Chechnya and surrounding regions combined with terror attacks in Russia changed the public's perception about Chechnya and how it should be dealt with. As public opinion shifted more toward military action, there was no alternative.

[A] die was cast and the hardliners in the Russian military and intelligence community decided to plot the future demise of Chechnya's independence by

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<sup>117</sup>Henry Plater-Zyberk, "The Russian Decisionmakers in the Chechen Conflict," in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 64.

<sup>118</sup>Smith, "The Second Chechen War," 7.

<sup>119</sup>Emil Pain, "The Second Chechen War: The Information Component," *Military Review* 80, no. 4 (July-August 2000): 60.

waging another war against the North Caucasian republic. A new *casus belli* in the form of another Chechen ‘outrage’ would be the catalyst of a new Russian military campaign against Chechnya.<sup>120</sup>

As discussed above, the internal situation in Chechnya continued to deteriorate. Further compounding the problems for the Chechens, a series of bomb blasts in September 1999 tore through apartment buildings across Russia. Russian authorities were quick to blame the Chechens for these attacks without ever providing proof.<sup>121</sup> There was speculation amongst the Russian opposition that the bombings precipitating the invasion were actually carried out by Russian intelligence forces.<sup>122</sup> While discussing one of the bombings, the Russian journalist Pavel Felgenhauer stated that “Putin ‘probably’ knew about the bomb attacks of September in Moscow and two other Russian cities, and that these ‘happened just in time to whip up public support for a war in the Caucasus that was pre-planned by the Kremlin.’”<sup>123</sup> Although it is possible that Russian security forces were complicit in the bombings, no direct evidence has ever been presented linking the government to the attacks.

The official government story is another possibility for who was responsible for the attacks. During the time period between 1996 and 1999 Chechnya experienced a rise in Islamist extremism. Two of the more prominent Islamic warlords, Shamil Basayev and Al-Khattab possessed both the means and motivation for the September attacks.

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<sup>120</sup>Szaszdi, 71.

<sup>121</sup>Pain, 61.

<sup>122</sup>Throughout the month of September 1999, a series of blasts tore across Russia killing approximately 300 people.

<sup>123</sup>Szaszdi, 310.

Furthermore the later attacks against the school in Belsan and Nord Ost demonstrated the propensity for terrorist activity by the Chechens.<sup>124</sup> Although it is entirely possible that one or both of these individuals conducted the September attacks as the Russians claimed, the Chechen fighters maintained their innocence.<sup>125</sup>

Along with the September bombings, events in and around Chechnya incited the Russian public and built support for another military incursion.<sup>126</sup> Prior to the invasion, groups that the Russians referred to as bandits conducted kidnappings and cross border criminal operations in the regions surrounding Chechnya. Reports of aid workers, journalists, and ordinary Russian citizens being taken by armed men occurred on a regular basis.<sup>127</sup> The Chechen government expressed determination to resolve these issues, but with limited resources, they lacked the means to counter the threats posed by these kidnapping groups. The extent of these issues became readily apparent on 5 March 1999, five armed men abducted Major General Gennady Shipgun from his aircraft prior

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<sup>124</sup>Chechen fighters associated with Shamil Basayev occupied Belsan School One. Controversy remains about how the operation ended. Russians claim that they assaulted when Chechens began shooting hostages, Chechens claim that Russian's engaged first. The incident resulted in the death of over 380 people. Nord Ost was the play being performed in the Moscow Dubrovka Theater during the attack perpetrated by Islamic Radicals from Chechnya.

<sup>125</sup>Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Putin Outlines Plan to Isolate Chechnya," *Newsline*, 15 September 1999, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1141992.html> (accessed 23 September 2013).

<sup>126</sup>RT News. "Effect of Dagestan Invasion was Similar to 9/11," 7 August 2009, <http://rt.com/news/effect-dagestan-invasion> (accessed 23 September 2013).

<sup>127</sup>Kathy Lally and Will Englund. "Kidnapping Foreigners becomes Chechen Industry Lawlessness Escalates After Rebellion Fails," *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 October 1997, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1997-10-29/news/1997302082\\_1\\_chechnya-chechen-kidnapping](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1997-10-29/news/1997302082_1_chechnya-chechen-kidnapping) (accessed 28 August 2013).



to his departure for Moscow.<sup>128</sup> This kidnapping demonstrated to the Russian people the extent of the problem in Chechnya. Chechen criminals created a business empire out of kidnapping, the effects of this problem now extended beyond Chechnya. Russians along the border regions demanded action. These criminal cross border operations required a response.

From 1996 to 1999, the security issues for Russia grew from kidnapping, to all out invasion. Cross border raids and kidnapping became so common that Russia had no alternative but to act. The final straw was the August 1999 invasion in which:

guerillas led by the Dagestanis Nadir Khachilaev and Bagantden Magomedov, invaded the Tsumadin district from Chechnya in an attempt to capture the Dagestani town of Agvali. Dagestani Interior Ministry (MVD) troops intervened and thwarted the Chechen attempt.<sup>129</sup>

The Saudi Ibn Al-Khattab and the famous Chechen fighter from the first conflict Shamil Basayev led a larger and more successful invasion. It took time for Russia's forces to organize and mass forces against the Chechens. However, by September 1999 Russian forces conducted a series of successful operations, and no Chechen fighters remained in Dagestan. This crisis provided the catalyst for renewed Russian attention toward Chechnya. The bombings described above that occurred throughout September would be the final straw.

These bombings galvanized the support of the Russian public. By focusing on terrorism, Putin changed the topic of the debate. No longer were Russians discussing Chechen independence, they were discussing Chechen terrorists. As a result:

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<sup>128</sup>Szaszdi, 64.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 322.

The anti-terrorist operation against Chechnya completely altered the political mood in Russia. Putin possessed widespread support for the military operation in Chechnya, in contrast to the war of 1994-1996 and Putin played a prominent role in leading and coordinating the anti-terrorist operation.<sup>130</sup>

Russian politicians finally possessed the modern day equivalent of *panem et circenses*.

Russian politicians possessed something to divert the public's attention away from their own problems. No longer did the Russian people focus on the economic issues facing the nation and President Yeltsin's horrible job at overseeing the economy. Russian politicians identified an external foe and the government wasted little time in dealing with it. This crisis relieved Yeltsin's political pressure.

Although Yeltsin's popularity remained low, he no longer faced the prospect of impeachment and prison.<sup>131</sup> The rise of Vladimir Putin in the public and political arena and his ascension as Russia's president can also be attributed to these terror attacks. Putin's election ensured that Yeltsin no longer faced prosecution over his handling of the first Chechen crisis.<sup>132</sup> With this breathing room, Russian leaders shifted focus to the military operation in order to put an end to de facto Chechnya independence.

### Russian Military Buildup

The raid staged from Chechnya on the village of Agvali was the stated catalyst for the second invasion of Chechnya. Although this attack was the final straw for the Russians, the situation during the past years in Chechnya was not good. Criminal and

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<sup>130</sup>Smith, "The Second Chechen War," 8.

<sup>131</sup>Triesman, 7.

<sup>132</sup>Michael McFaul, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 3 (July 2000): 19.

jihadist elements virtually controlled the country.<sup>133</sup> Islamic radicals like Al-Khattab turned a secular movement for independence into a front of the global jihad. Prior to the raid in September, the central government in Chechnya acknowledged problems and the potential for Russian intervention. By June, the security situation across the country was so bad that the government may have lost control.<sup>134</sup> In order to address these problems, “Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov put on a twenty four hour alert status his military forces deployed throughout the country.”<sup>135</sup> Maskhadov issued this order to restore order and establish effective governance. Although symbolic, the order produced little effect. Warlords continued to control the countryside and criminal and kidnapping elements maintained their lucrative businesses. Maskhadov simply lacked the power to take on the Islamic warlords and criminal elements.

Maskhadov’s inability to effect the deteriorating situation inside the country was directly tied to his nation’s economic condition. The repeated promises by Russia to help re-establish the economy and infrastructure following the first Chechen war never materialized. The Russians never provided the material nor financial support as promised and stipulated in the Khasavyurt Treaty. As a result, “throughout the 1990s rightly or wrongly Chechnya has been viewed by both Russia and elsewhere as a ‘rouge republic’ where corruption and crime are rife and lawlessness is virtually a way of life.”<sup>136</sup> By

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<sup>133</sup>Walter Comins-Richmond, “The Second Chechen War,” [http://faculty.oxy.edu/richmond/csp8/second\\_chechen\\_war.htm](http://faculty.oxy.edu/richmond/csp8/second_chechen_war.htm) (accessed 31 October 2013).

<sup>134</sup>Aldis, *The Second Chechen War*, 5.

<sup>135</sup>Szaszdi, 304.

<sup>136</sup>Dr. Steven J. Main, “Counter-Terrorist Operation in Chechnya on the Legality of the Current Conflict,” in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The

withholding the promised support, Russia limited economic development prospects and weakened governmental structures throughout Chechnya. The inability by the central government, all but assured the lawlessness and rise of warlords in the Chechen republic. The lawlessness and the September Dagestani crisis provided the Russians all the reason they needed for intervention. It is likely that the Russian military developed plans for another intervention into Chechnya prior to the September crisis. As the first Chechen conflict was one of the biggest debacles in Russian military history, it would be prudent to develop such a plan. Planning for the operation was finally confirmed when “on 17 September, RIA-Novosti reported that the Russian MOD was drawing up a plan for carrying out a large scale operation to destroy illegal Chechen armed formations and their bases in Chechnya.”<sup>137</sup>

### Military Developments

The second war in Chechnya did not begin the same as the first. Russian forces initially focused their capability toward Dagestan as well as the border with Chechnya. Russia developed this focus as a result of the numerous incursions of bandits into Russian territory.<sup>138</sup> The Russians designed the operations in Dagestan “to culminate in the forcible expulsion of the bandit formations from Dagestan.”<sup>139</sup> If the Russian forces

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Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 22.

<sup>137</sup>Smith, “The Second Chechen War,” 6.

<sup>138</sup>James Hughes, *Chechnya: from Nationalism to Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 109-110.

<sup>139</sup>Blandy, 12.

could dislodge the Chechen fighters from the border areas between Chechnya and Dagestan, then they possessed a suitable area to mass forces for an invasion of Chechnya. Additionally, Russian military forces used this operation as a lead in “to Federal military intervention into Chechnya at the beginning of October 1999.”<sup>140</sup> This operation provided Russian forces with an idea of the future tactics of the Chechen fighters and served as the full dress rehearsal for the invasion into Chechnya.

Additionally, this fight served to demonstrate to Russian soldiers how the enemy fought. Unlike the first Chechen war where the Russians expected weak resistance, this brief fight demonstrated to the front line soldiers the tenacity of their foe. The stage was set for Russia’s movement into Chechnya.

#### Russian Invasion

By October 1999, Russian forces successfully engaged and blocked any Chechen forces that could attack across the border. It was now time to go on the offensive. Russian politicians understood the lessons from the first war. To be successful, Russia needed public support. Yeltsin’s impeachment hearings made this readily apparent. To ensure public support they needed legal justification. Putin and Yeltsin found this justification in Russia’s criminal code. They used a Ministry of Justice report that stated “the activity of the Chechen bandit formations and terrorist groups is directed and financed by external extremist organizations.”<sup>141</sup> By classifying the activities of the Chechens as terrorist and foreign, Russia had legal recourse to respond. “In unleashing military hostilities against

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Main, “Counter-Terrorist Operation in Chechnya on the Legality of the Current Conflict,” 26-27.

Chechnya, Russia, not only preserved its own constitutional order, but also restored Chechnya's.”<sup>142</sup> The biggest criticism by Russia's population about the first Chechen War was the use of Ministry of Defense soldiers in what many Russians considered an internal issue. Since they viewed it as internal issue, many Russians considered the use of the Army illegal.<sup>143</sup> By invoking terrorism and citing the threat of foreigners like Al-Khattab, Yeltsin provided a legal justification for intervention. Furthermore, “given the presence of–Islamic- mercenaries, the conflict could be portrayed as an international terrorist' threat, thereby strengthening Russia's legal hand in its use of regular soldiers as well as making use of the increased firepower of the Russian military.”<sup>144</sup> An external threat was clear to ordinary Russians, the government could finally demonstrate the need to ensure constitutional order as well as protect the Russian federation from attacks by Chechen criminals and foreign terrorists.

The Russian government finally possessed an acceptable reason to invade. However, in order to maintain the war beyond an initial invasion, the government needed to maintain public support. Yeltsin accomplished this through control of the media reports from Chechnya. In regards to controlling the media:

Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent Moscow military analyst, summed up the Russian information war approach during the October intervention as thus; ‘this is

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>143</sup>Lieven, 107-108.

<sup>144</sup>Main, “Counter-Terrorist Operation in Chechnya on the Legality of the Current Conflict,” 25.

not journalism. You can't even call it one-sided. This is propaganda. But it keeps up the popularity of the war.<sup>145</sup>

Yeltsin understood the importance of maintaining popularity. "In May 1999, President Boris Yeltsin was almost impeached for his decision to intervene in Chechnya in 1994."<sup>146</sup> If the opposition succeeded in impeaching Yeltsin, there was an increased likelihood that he could end up in jail. Yeltsin did not make the same mistake again. Russia's forces did everything possible to highlight the successes of the conflict.

During the 1994-1995 battle for Grozny, Russian forces incurred heavy casualties. Pictures of the casualties, destroyed Russian equipment, and charred Russian corpses galvanized public opposition to the conflict.<sup>147</sup> Russians did not want their money and their sons lives wasted in a far corner of the federation for an operation most did not support.<sup>148</sup> Learning from this, the Russian government and military in particular ensured that news and graphic pictures of Russia's dead would not be permitted.

Other than suppressing information, the other means of ensuring support was to keep casualties low. Throughout the remainder of October 1999, Russian troops occupied the border areas inside Chechnya. Unlike the 1994 war, Russia's field commanders undertook a methodical approach to the invasion. Russian commanders established a

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<sup>145</sup>Timothy Thomas, "Manipulating the Mass Consciousness: Russia and Chechen 'Information War' Tactics in the Second Chechen-Russian Conflict," in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 115.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>147</sup>Pictures from the 1994 Chechen conflict of the charred remains of Russian soldiers greatly swayed the Russian public's perception of the conflict. The pictures shocked the public who demanded answers from President Yeltsin.

<sup>148</sup>Lieven, 107-108.

cordon comprised of multiple units “established in depth.”<sup>149</sup> These mutually supporting units provided strength to Russian formations. Russia’s command also changed between the wars. Colonel General Vladimimir Shamanov led the second invasion of Chechnya. Colonel General Shamanov commanded Russia’s airborne forces and believed that Russian forces must maintain a constant offensive operational mindset. He adjusted how the Russian military fought, Shamanov “tended to let firepower dominate in engagements to the detriment of any discrimination between combatants and non-combatants.”<sup>150</sup> As the Russians invaded, they did so behind a shield of artillery fire. Russian commanders exploited their superior firepower to pound Chechen positions before infantry or armor were exposed to Chechen fire.<sup>151</sup>

Unlike the first war where civilian casualties were to be minimized, this conflict maximized the use of force.<sup>152</sup> Russian commanders concerned themselves with minimizing casualties within their ranks only. Unlike the previous campaign where soldiers received instruction to protect civilians, this campaign was led by artillery and would not be concerned with civilian casualties. Following the collapse of the Soviet

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<sup>149</sup>Blandy, 17.

<sup>150</sup>Rod Thorton, “Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces: The Lessons of the Georgia Conflict” (Monograph, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 17.

<sup>151</sup>Michael Orr, “Better or Just Not So Bad? An Evaluation of Russian Combat Effectiveness in the Second Chechen War,” in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 87.

<sup>152</sup>Thorton, “Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces: The Lessons of the Georgia Conflict,” 17.



Union, the only reliably functioning material asset the Russian military possessed in excess was artillery. Russian commanders built their tactics off of this capability.

Prior to the start of this conflict, Russian military planners “realized that whenever possible, it was to the Russian Army’s advantage to keep the Chechens at least 300 meters away from the conscript Russian ground force.”<sup>153</sup> This distance is the maximum effective range of the AK-47. Since the Chechens did not possess an abundance of long-range weaponry, engagements at greater than 300 meters favored the Russians. If the Russians failed, then the potential for Chechen forces to inflict heavy casualties greatly increased. However, “with a more effective system of fire planning and control, the Russians were in a position to exploit their overwhelming superiority in air power and artillery during the advance into the Chechen Republic.”<sup>154</sup> The utilization of air and artillery by the Russians, limited the Chechens opportunity to inflict casualties reminiscent of the 1994 war. Russian forces adapted between the first and second campaign and made significant progress at the tactical level. Unlike the 1994 invasion, Russian forces were not massacred during the invasion.

The Russians developed the concept of a tactical group that “worked together more or less permanently within a specific zone of responsibility.”<sup>155</sup> This tactical group comprised soldiers who trained together and knew the area they were operating in. Unlike

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<sup>153</sup>Lester W. Grau, “Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign: Not all New and not that Much,” in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 101.

<sup>154</sup>Orr, 94.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

the first campaign where soldiers from different units combined just prior to the operation, Russia attempted during this war to maintain unit cohesion. This cohesion greatly enhanced the tactical effectiveness of the conscript forces and created significant difficulties for the Chechen fighters. By advancing methodically through the northern parts of Chechnya and engaging suspected targets immediately after identification, Russian forces presented a more difficult target for the Chechens. They never allowed Chechen fighters skilled at close fighting near their positions.

Although the tactics and pace of this invasion were different, the forces used were not all that dissimilar from the force that invaded in 1994. The Russian military still primarily consisted of a conscript force. This conscript force served two-year terms and never fully developed the skills associated with professional soldiers. The utilization of massed artillery fire served this type of conscription army exceptionally well and directly led to their initial success.

Although Russia's forces were not well trained, they did attempt to adapt and correct their most pressing deficiencies. Russian forces realized this prior to departing Chechnya the first time and began "to take into account the combat experience of the troops."<sup>156</sup> As a result, the Russian military designed units that would be "highly mobile formations, having a modular structure, equipped first and foremost with modern weapons and equipment."<sup>157</sup> Through the use of overwhelming artillery support and

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<sup>156</sup>Dr Steven J. Main, "North Caucasus Military District: Defending Russia's Interests in the Caucasus," in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 38.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

highly mobile units, the Russians developed a plan for defeating Chechen groups. However, the poor state of military readiness often forced changes to Russia's plans. "Given the relatively poor state of the Russian armed forces, they would not be able to cope with the full range of tasks presented by the situation in the Caucasus."<sup>158</sup> The modernized mobile formations that Russian commanders envisioned were simply not possible in the fiscally constrained environment of the late 1990s. The problems were so great for the Russian military that the military budget in 1992 was 75 percent less than it had been only four years earlier.<sup>159</sup> By 1999 the fiscal situation had still not improved. This inability to adopt the full range of tactical changes forced Russian forces to continually rely on overwhelming artillery support. As a result, "the key doctrine was the long range fire destruction of the enemy."<sup>160</sup>

Unlike the 1994 war, Russian forces moved in mutually supporting formations until they encountered Chechen positions. "Any Chechen positions discovered in the course of the advance were quickly engaged by artillery and aviation available in the company or Battalion commander in whose zone of responsibility they were located."<sup>161</sup> As a result of this tactic, Russian forces moved meticulously and cleaned out Chechen strongpoints. In urban or suburban environments, successful progress could be determined as the capture of a single city block or only several hundred yards of terrain.

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>159</sup>Federation of American Scientists, "Russian Military Spending," 7 September 2000, [www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mo-budget.htm](http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mo-budget.htm) (accessed 31 October 2013).

<sup>160</sup>Orr, 92.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 94.

Utilizing a methodical artillery centric method, Russia's casualty figures remained much lower than during the invasion of first conflict. Additionally, Russian forces used "high-precision laser-guided artillery deployed against selected targets."<sup>162</sup> Utilization of this technique enabled commanders to quickly destroy any opposing Chechen position.

Russian forces adapted between the two conflicts, the Chechen fighters did not. Many of the field commanders from the 1994 war still operated in Chechnya. These warlords and bandits, such as Shamil Basayev defeated the Russians before and believed they could do it again. The Chechen's "minds were fixed on the poor performance of the Russian military in the 1994-96 Russo-Chechen conflict and miscalculated the speed that Russia could coordinate and concentrate sufficient forces to neutralize the bandit formations."<sup>163</sup> Unlike the 1994 conflict where Chechens possessed some long-range indirect fire assets, Chechen fighters in this conflict needed to be close. Chechen commanders believed that like the first conflict, Russian armored forces would move unassisted to areas where Chechen fighters could successfully engage them. As Russian columns moved toward Grozny, it became apparent they were wrong. Russian front line soldiers, shielded by artillery steadily, progressed across the northern plains to the suburbs of Grozny.

#### Russian Siege of Grozny

As Russia's forces approached Grozny, they again applied the lessons of the 1994 debacle. During the first war, Russian commanders and politicians ignored the threat of

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<sup>162</sup>Grau, "Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign," 102.

<sup>163</sup>Blandy, 14.

the Chechen forces. Russian Soldiers entered the city in armored vehicles manned by crews who did not know and had not trained with each other. Instead of following Russian military doctrine and surrounding the city prior to an assault, “armored columns pushed inside the city in an attempt to seize the critical sites and buildings and capture the city in a coup de main.”<sup>164</sup> The operation was an utter debacle and resulted in ambushed and slaughtered Russian soldiers. The ferocity of the attack destroyed Russian morale, and the prestige of the Russian military. As the Russians approached Grozny in 1999, Russian commanders would ensure the calamity of 1994 did not happen again.

“During the second campaign, the Russian forces surrounded the city, but did not enter it in force. Tanks and artillery ringed the city, while dismounted infantry and Special Forces personnel, accompanied by artillery forward observers and snipers, slowly crept into the city.”<sup>165</sup> The Russians understood the Chechens prepared their defenses and would not give up without a fight. In order to overcome the Chechen preparation, “many of the lessons applied to the second Chechen campaign were not new.”<sup>166</sup> Russian commanders incorporated lessons from Afghanistan and the first Chechen war to ensure victory. Russia’s military failed in the first campaign and they knew it.<sup>167</sup> This campaign would be bloody, but Russian commanders did everything to ensure this time it would be Chechen blood.

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<sup>164</sup>Grau, “Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign,” 105.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>167</sup>Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 359.

Following their doctrine of isolating before an attack, Russian commanders surrounded the Chechen capital and effectively sealed it off. Continuing with their tactic of massed artillery fire, Russian forces conducted “an artillery preparation that left Grozny looking like Berlin in 1945.”<sup>168</sup> These artillery barrages reduced the city so completely, the United Nations called it “the most destroyed city on earth.”<sup>169</sup> Throughout this bombardment the citizens of Grozny had to hide, It was only after this intense bombardment was over that Russia allowed civilians to flee. Specifically:

On 6 December 1999 the Russian high command issued an ultimatum to the citizens of Grozny. It stated that a humanitarian corridor would remain open until 11 December, after which date all those who remained in the Chechen capital will be viewed as terrorists and bandits and will be destroyed by artillery and aviation.<sup>170</sup>

This was not an idle bluff. Russian commanders did not intend to provide the slightest advantage to the Chechen fighters inside the city. This bombardment demonstrated that Russian forces clearly did not care about the civilians in Grozny. This action was a direct reflection of the guidance of the architect of this invasion Colonel General Shamanov who seemed “not be overly concerned about the civilian casualties his methods caused. To him, a war was a war, his operational techniques would be the same whether the war

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<sup>168</sup>Robert Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 189.

<sup>169</sup>BBC News, “Scars Remain Amid Chechen Revival,” 3 March 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/6414603.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/6414603.stm) (accessed 31 August 2013).

<sup>170</sup>Dr TRW Waters, “Human Rights in Chechnya-a Lost Cause?, in *The Second Chechen War*, ed. Anne Aldis (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000), 141.

was conventional or counter-guerilla.”<sup>171</sup> This targeting of civilians by the military directly violated the “norms enshrined in the human rights law.”<sup>172</sup> In this fight, those norms no longer mattered to Russia’s politicians, commanders and soldiers. Unlike the first campaign, Russian forces controlled the media. This might have been an outrage and completely outside of the rules of war, but without media scrutiny, Russian commanders possessed significantly more latitude in the conduct of operations. The Russians used the term *bez predel* (without limits) to describe their operations.<sup>173</sup> This included targeting civilians, looting, and murder.

Following the passage of the December 11th deadline, Russia’s forces commenced the full-scale operation against Grozny. During the buildup and encirclement of Grozny, Russia conducted operations to clear and occupy the towns surrounding the city. Additional units established blocking positions south of the city to halt any attempts by the Chechens to either reinforce the city or escape from it. “By the end of the month (December 1999), airborne assault units occupied areas adjacent to the Georgian border in the south . . . in a bid to stop reinforcements, arms and ammunition getting through to the Chechen fighters.”<sup>174</sup>

Unlike the first war where Chechen forces possessed as many weapons and as much ammunition as their Russian opponents, Russia’s forces during this conflict cut the Chechens from their much needed base of supplies. Although the Russians developed a

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<sup>171</sup>Thorton, “Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces,” 18.

<sup>172</sup>Waters, 141.

<sup>173</sup>Schaefer, 193.

<sup>174</sup>Blandy, 17.

sound plan for the defeat of the Chechens, Russian commanders still faced difficult problems.

Russia's conscript army still confronted a dearth of training, causing the potential for operational failure. Again, "unlike the 1995 assault on Grozny, the Russians taught their soldiers some basic MOUT (military operations in urban terrain) techniques."<sup>175</sup>

The training continued prior to the final push into the city. Russian commanders understood that to be successful, soldiers would need to train together. The commanders used the time it took to isolate Chechen forces to continue to train their forces for the eventual assault into Grozny. All through the month before the attack, Russian commanders trained and prepared their forces. They:

conducted urban combat training in the rubble suburbs of Grozny before they entered the city. Squads were reformed using the successful Chechen model from the first campaign, around the boyevaya troika (combat trio) . . . these teams were taught movement and engagement drills and rehearsed thoroughly.<sup>176</sup>

Unlike the first Chechen war, Russian commanders understood the importance of preparation and training. Continuing to train their soldiers even during the conduct of combat operations demonstrates exactly how important the lessons of the first Chechen war were.

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<sup>175</sup>Schaefer, 189.

<sup>176</sup>Grau, "Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign," 106-107.



DIAGRAM 6

KEY

- a. Infantry section
- b. Sapper with mine detector
- c. Sapper with explosive charge
- d. Command group
- e. Troika + sniper
- f. Blocking group
- g. Tank
- h. BMP (BTR) firing cannon/machine gun across street
- i. IMR (combat engineer vehicle)
- j. ATGW group (may be armed with SPG recoilless rifles)
- k. Mortar platoon

Engr Gp = Engineer Group  
 Rear Svc = Rear Services (logistic support)  
 Tech Spt = Technical Support (equipment repair & recovery)

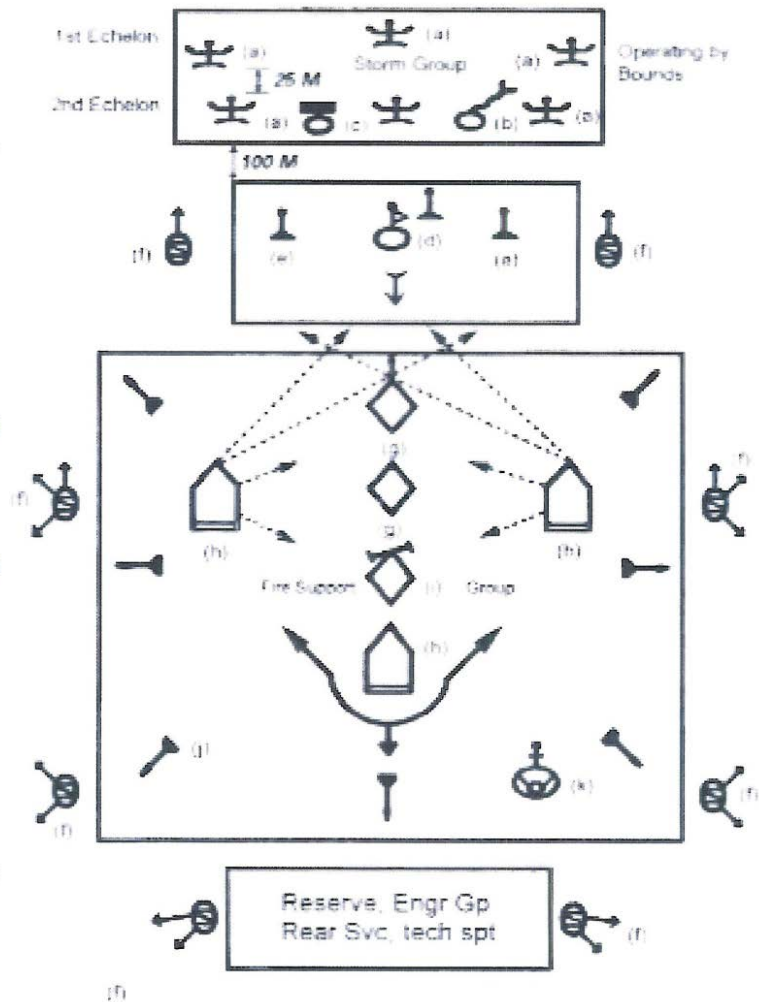


Figure 5. Diagram1

Source: Anne Aldis, ed., *The Second Chechen War* (Shrivenham: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute (in association with The Conflict Studies Research Centre), 2000).

When conducting urban operations, Russian doctrine called for an integrated combined arms team. The tanks and armored personnel carriers protected the dismounted infantry from distant threats, and the dismounted infantry protected the tanks from near threats. Although not in doctrine, Russian forces integrated a ZSU-23 (*Zenitnaya Samokhodnaya Ustanovka*) anti-aircraft weapon system to protect units from dismounted

threats on nearby rooftops.<sup>177</sup> During the first campaign, this did not happen. Russian commanders trained their forces to ensure that the catastrophe of 1994-1995 would not happen again. Proper and effective integration between infantry and armor units was designed to ensure maximum safety for Russian soldiers.

“The improvement in Russian tank-infantry cooperation in these street battles may be judged from the claim that only one tank was destroyed in Grozny while it was shielding a group evacuating the wounded.”<sup>178</sup> Russian forces have been known to exaggerate operational successes, and diminish any failures. As a result, this claim may simply be bluster on the part of Russia’s commanders. It is especially dubious when taken with the lack of independent journalists throughout this campaign. Although independent confirmation about the exact number of Russian combat losses is non-existent, it is undeniable that the Russian forces conducted a significantly more successful and integrated attack on Grozny than occurred during the first campaign.

As the Russians moved into the city, they maintained a slow and meticulous pace. Combined arms units of infantry and armor directly supported by artillery and aviation led the attack. They searched “for Chechen strong points, when they found them, artillery and long-range tank fire was directed to eliminate the strongpoint and crush the building.”<sup>179</sup> Urban environments present significant challenges for the attacker. Defenders possess an almost infinite amount of hiding places and the ability to attack from any direction. Russia overcame this just as they had during the movement from the

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<sup>177</sup>John Pilloni, Interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 15 August 2013.

<sup>178</sup>Orr, 96.

<sup>179</sup>Grau, “Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign,” 105.

border to Grozny, with overwhelming artillery support. Chechen fighters quickly learned Russia's technique and would often hide in basements until the barrage ended. Following the barrage, they would move to firing positions. This technique somewhat negated Russia's advantage by limiting the casualties produced by artillery. In order to address the tactical shortcomings of a barrage, Russian commanders often changed tactics. In order to adjust:

Russian commanders retained flexibility with their techniques and often changed tactics forcing the defenders to react quickly. A common ploy was to dispense with heavy preparatory fires immediately before an attack. Instead a detachment would launch a surprise attack just before dawn and occupy a limited objective, one or two blocks perhaps. The enemy, deprived of rest by ceaseless artillery fire, might be taken unaware, but usually made a major effort to recapture the lost ground.<sup>180</sup>

Russian troops supported by overwhelming artillery fire could easily beat back the attacks of the Chechens.

Unlike the first Chechen campaign, Russian forces employed advanced and more destructive weaponry like the fuel air bomb and laser guided ordinance.<sup>181</sup> This included both aerial delivered bombs and ground fired artillery weapons capable of large-scale destruction. With the change in commander and the limitations about attacking civilian areas lifted, the use of these destructive weapons made Russia's advance easier and more destructive than the first Chechen war.

One of the most destructive weapons used during the conflict were fuel air bombs or thermobaric bombs. "Russia used thermobaric weapons sparingly during the first Chechen campaign," during the second campaign Russia relied on this weapons

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<sup>180</sup>Orr, 96.

<sup>181</sup>Grau, "Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign," 104.

destructive capability.<sup>182</sup> By utilizing these weapons, the Russian forces intended maximum destruction of Chechen infrastructure and the fighters housed inside it. As the Russians began conducting operations inside of Grozny proper, the Soviet concrete block construction used throughout the city mitigated their fire superiority. Artillery could not penetrate multiple levels of concrete and kill Chechen fighters hiding in basements. As this problem continued to grow:

[T]he Russian army looked for other ways to move them. Two methods were proposed, chemical weapons and thermobaric weapons. The Russian political leadership apparently vetoed the use of chemical weapons, but allowed the use of ground delivered thermobaric weapons. Air-delivered thermobaric systems were used outside the city.<sup>183</sup>

The use of these systems was not a panacea, but it provided a potent tool for Russia's commanders. After the employment of thermobaric weapons, the conscript force occupied the area and conducted reducing operations. The use of these weapons allowed commanders to maintain the distance between their undertrained conscripts and the Chechen fighters. Russian forces also issued flamethrowers "which were effective in keeping the Chechens from "hugging" the advancing Russian forces as they had done in 1994."<sup>184</sup> Although the offensive of Grozny took several months to complete, Russian forces demonstrated more preparedness and better planning compared to their operations in 1994-1995.

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Schaefer, 190.

## Fall of Grozny

As Russian forces moved into Grozny, they began encountering stiff resistance from Chechen fighters. “By 31 December the operation had become bogged down.”<sup>185</sup> Russian forces resorted to massive artillery bombardments using both high explosive and thermobaric ammunition. The result was absolute devastation. “Large segments of the city were flattened before ground forces moved in . . . the damage to Grozny was much more severe during the second campaign.”<sup>186</sup> Chechen forces put up a valiant defense of the city, but Russian forces moving methodically with artillery and air support and dislodged pocket after pocket of Chechen fighters. Unlike the Russians who could call up more conscripts, the Chechens were limited in the number of fighters. The Chechen fighters could not be easily replaced. “After a relentless bombardment of Grozny by federal forces, the Chechens finally abandoned the city on 8 February, reportedly suffering the loss of some of their best commanders and the serious wounding of Shamil Basayev.”<sup>187</sup>

Basayev incurred his wound while trying to cross a Russian minefield. By this point in the conflict, Russian forces completed the encirclement of Grozny with three distinct rings. Chechen forces misidentified what they thought was a corridor out of the city. During the attempted escape, the Russians killed approximately 300 Chechen

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<sup>185</sup>Blandy, 17.

<sup>186</sup>Grau, “Technology and the Second Chechen Campaign,” 105.

<sup>187</sup>Blandy, 17.

fighters, and Shamil Basayev lost part of his leg.<sup>188</sup> For the second time, Chechen forces abandoned Grozny in the face of a Russian invasion. By taking Grozny, the Russian's significantly attrited the Chechen defenders, but they did not destroy them. Just as they had during the first campaign, Chechen forces fled south into the mountains to wage a protracted guerilla campaign.

### Russian Counterinsurgency

#### Techniques

After continued Russian victories fighting pitched battles against Chechens in fixed positions, Chechnya's leaders finally understood the need to change tactics.<sup>189</sup> As a result, the "Chechen high command gave the order to abandon all fixed positions and conduct guerrilla warfare."<sup>190</sup> Russian forces adopted a counter insurgency strategy of brutality. This war, sold to the Russian people as retaliation against terrorists enabled Russian forces to continue operating under the *bez predel* (no limits) mindset. The problem facing ordinary Chechens was this "no limits" approach used by the Russians was directed against innocent civilians.

As the year 2000 continued, the war transitioned from Russian attacks against Chechen defended positions to a classic guerilla phase with the attacks perpetrated by mobile groups of Chechens directly targeting Russia's military forces. Russians

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<sup>188</sup>Ilyas Akhmadov and Miriam Lanskoj, *The Chechen Struggle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010), 176.

<sup>189</sup>Dodge Billingsley with Lester Grau, *Fangs of the Lone Wolf* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2012), 5.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

responded to these attacks with overwhelming force and pressure on civilians. Following the fall of Grozny, Russian forces, without warning the civilian population commenced an hours long aerial bombardment of the village of Katyr-Yurt. The use of 500lb-unguided bombs was reminiscent of the carpet-bombing of World War II and resulted in the deaths of over 350 civilians.<sup>191</sup> The Russians conducted this action and others like it as retribution for perceived civilian support to the fighters. Another prominent technique employed by the Russians called *zachistki*, an arbitrary mopping-up in civilian areas demonstrated Russia's approach to counter insurgency. Civilians would be routinely contained in their village. Russian soldiers searched houses, stole valuables, and often killed indiscriminately.<sup>192</sup>

These forces demonstrated a healthy disdain for any Chechen citizen and raped, murdered, and insulted Chechens at any opportunity. Russian journalist and author Anna Politkovskaya observed one such incident:

5 June 2001, in Grozny. . . . People came to a protest meeting. They were holding signs in their hands: 'give me back my mother' . . . . And also: 'Give us back our children's corpses!' . . . . A couple of armored vehicles puff along the road past the meeting. Middle-aged men, probably mercenaries, not soldiers, are on top of the car. They are cheerful and vigorous, with strong, healthy teeth. . . . They're convulsed with laughter, leaning against the armor in ecstasy. . . . They point fingers in cut-off gloves, mostly at those with the 'Give me back my mother!' signs. And to top it off, they demonstrate with rude gestures what they plan to do to both the protestors 'moms' and their son's corpses. Nearby is an officer, the superior of the group. He behaves the same way.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Schaefer, 192.

<sup>192</sup>Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "'Zachistki' Undercut Anti-Terror Claims in Chechnya," 14 August 2002, [www.rferl.org/content/pressrelease/1105571.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/pressrelease/1105571.html) (accessed 3 September 2013).

<sup>193</sup>Anna Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell Dispatches from Chechnya* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 131-132.

The missing “mothers” and the “children’s corpses” were the byproduct of Russia’s occupation. Chechen civilians claimed that Russian forces kidnapped and executed any Chechen they pleased. Terrorist or militant activity was not required, simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time could result in death.<sup>194</sup>

As with the invasion and siege of Grozny, Russian forces continued to rely on overwhelming force during the conduct of counter insurgency operations. As the conflict developed and Chechen fighters no longer massed in defensive positions, Russian forces developed specific tactics designed to target smaller groups of Chechen fighters. One tactic used by both the Russians and Chechens was the employment of conventional mines. As described above, Russians effectively utilized minefields during the final assault on Grozny. During the counter insurgency phase of the conflict, Russia again used this technique to deny terrain to Chechen fighters.<sup>195</sup> However, conventional mines are non-discriminatory and were often carefully removed from Russian minefields by the Chechens in order to be employed against Russia’s forces. Russian forces identified this and routinely employed anti-handling devices on their mines.<sup>196</sup> As Chechens ceded urban terrain to Russia, the Russians established small forward operating bases in the villages. These bases enabled Russian forces to project combat power, but left them vulnerable to coordinated attacks or ambushes.

Although Russia preferred to employ massed artillery attacks against Chechen fighters, this technique lost effectiveness as the war progressed. Following Maskhadov’s

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>195</sup>Billingsley with Grau, 127.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid.



order to conduct guerilla attacks, large Chechen formations seldom occurred. As a result, Chechen forces often attacked and dispersed before the Russians could bring the artillery capability to bear. As a result, “the large and powerful but disorganized federal units, which are devoid of any genuine support among the local (Chechen) population, often have been powerless when confronted by much smaller but mobile bands of guerrillas in the region . . . .Our troops aside from trying to protect themselves against attack, are usually incapable of doing anything.”<sup>197</sup> The Chechens adjusted their techniques. It would be several years before Russia successfully made adjustments.

As the Chechens often lacked the combat power to overwhelm Russian fortifications, Chechens focused attacks on “soft targets” or Russian logistics convoys. These attacks forced the Russians to spend an increasing amount of energy on ensuring the Lines of Communication remained open. Ensuring freedom of movement became exceedingly difficult the longer Russian forces remained in Chechnya. This difficulty was primarily due to improvised explosive devices.

By mid-2004 the number of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks had risen so high that a senior correspondent for the Russian parliament’s daily newspaper expressed alarm: “The mine war waged by the guerrillas in Chechnya has become so intense that the daily operational reports are overflowing with dispatches about the latest ‘roadside bomb attacks.’”<sup>198</sup>

These small, yet effective, attacks created significant problems for the Russian forces. The increased number of ambushes and Improvised Explosive Devices combined with an already inefficient Russian logistical system caused continued material shortages.

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<sup>197</sup>Mark Kramer, “The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia’s War in Chechnya,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/2005), 22.

<sup>198</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

Russian units constantly complained that the Russian military failed to ameliorate their logistical shortfalls. As a result of this failure, “many Russian units endured prolonged shortages of ammunition, fuel, spare parts, flak jackets, combat gear, tents, radios, medical supplies, food, and fresh water.”<sup>199</sup> This dearth of logistical support contributed to the poor treatment of Chechen citizens described above. As many Russian soldiers lacked the bare essentials for survival, they often took from the civilian population. These actions did not engender support from the populace and contributed to the difficulties faced by the Russian forces.<sup>200</sup>

On 11 September 2001 Russia received a major boost to its Chechen war effort. As the western world and America in particular familiarized itself with international jihad, Russia continued the active struggle. President Putin used the threat of global jihad and terrorism resulting from it as justification for his actions in Chechnya. The United States agreed with Putin and provided him political cover in the international community. By continuing to support the American objectives in Afghanistan, Putin understood the benefits to be had. Putin was not the only one:

Putin, who had been the first to call Bush with his sympathy after learning of the 9/11 attacks, graciously offered to help with the invasion of Afghanistan. He let the U.S. ship supplies through Russian territory and did not object to the U.S. setting up bases in Central Asia, where the local despots quickly caught on to the opportunity.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>200</sup>Politkovskaya, 86.

<sup>201</sup>Simon Shuster, “How the War on Terrorism did Putin a Favor,” *Time World*, 19 September 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2093529,00.html> (accessed 5 September 2013).

No longer would western nations voice opposition to Russia's actions in Chechnya. The west after all, now fought the same threat of Islamic terrorism. Through his political maneuvering, Putin severed any potential ties between the Chechens fighting for their independence and western nations who could provide monetary assistance and more importantly legitimization for their cause. The world would not support the Chechens. The Kremlin knew it was now time for Russia to finish the operation. The only question would be how?

The occupying force rarely wins counter insurgencies through brute force. Russia understood this and as a result began a gradual policy shift to a Chechen government led operation. This began with the "Chechenization" of a pro-Russian security force and slowly developed into other governmental systems. By March 2003 Chechnya held a referendum on a constitution and the following October elected the Moscow backed Akhmad Kadyrov. The election however was a farce for two reasons. The first was the Moscow backed opponent Kadyrov ran basically unopposed. The second reason was that Maskhadov was not removed by the whole Chechen parliament, as a result, he was still technically the president.<sup>202</sup> The following May, Chechen rebels killed Kadyrov in an explosion at the soccer stadium in Grozny. Kadyrov's son Ramzan eventually assumed the position held by his late father. As he assumed his role, Ramzan who was flush with money provided by the Kremlin undertook reconstruction projects throughout Grozny. The ability for the government to return some semblance of normalcy back to the population greatly assisted in the counter insurgency operations. Although the Russians never gained the trust of the Chechens, they were through their own methods, able to

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<sup>202</sup>Akhmadov and Lanskoj, 216-217.

bring the semblance of peace. This was accomplished by the younger Kadyrov who developed a Chechen security apparatus that avoided targeting civilians. In the end, Russia claimed some sort of victory in Chechnya by wearing down the opposition. But in reality, the people of Chechnya “were exhausted by fourteen years of war and chaos. They were willing to accept any terms that would permit them to survive.”<sup>203</sup>

### Aftermath

Although Russia claimed victory it may in the end be just another temporary reprieve. To further Russia’s problems, the Islamic aspect of the insurgency that Putin used to garner western support for actions in Chechnya appears to be a legitimate threat throughout the northern Caucasus. “Despite the fact that the Chechens have not yet regrouped into a unified resistance, the other nationalities within the emirate seem to have coalesced into a relatively professional force with some clearly discernable organizational characteristics.”<sup>204</sup> Each north Caucasus region experienced varying degrees of violence, but Russia no longer possessed the clout or capability to address the new threats directly. As a result, Russia continues to use the same tactic that proved successful in Chechnya. By continuing to provide material, financial, and security support, the Russian backed leaders of these nations keep the lid on the Islamic insurgency.<sup>205</sup> Although this localized approach keeps the number of Russian forces actively operating in the region to a

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<sup>203</sup>Ibid., 219-220.

<sup>204</sup>Schaefer, 241.

<sup>205</sup>Editor, World Politics Review, “Global Insider: Russia’s North Caucasus Insurgency Shows Little Sign of Slowing,” *World Politics Review*, 3 April 2013, [www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/12845/global-insider-russia-s-north-caucasus-insurgency-shows-little-sign-of-slowing](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/12845/global-insider-russia-s-north-caucasus-insurgency-shows-little-sign-of-slowing) (accessed 6 September 2013).

minimum, it also limits the direct influence they are able to exert. This will be acceptable unless drastic changes to the security situation occur.

The end of the second Chechen conflict looks remarkably similar to the start of the conflict. Islamic militants continue to operate in Chechnya, albeit not in the large numbers present prior to the conflict. They also possess the ability to launch attacks into Russia though not with the strength possessed prior to the conflict.<sup>206</sup> Additionally, there remains a large number of Chechens who long for complete independence. This is not likely to occur.

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<sup>206</sup>CBS News, “Chechen Militant Leader Doku Umarov Calls on Islamists to Disrupt the Sochi Winter Olympics,” 3 July 2013, [www.cbsnews.com/chechen-militant-leader-duko-umarov-calls-on-islamists-to-disrupt-sochi-winter-olympics/8301-202\\_162-57592100.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/chechen-militant-leader-duko-umarov-calls-on-islamists-to-disrupt-sochi-winter-olympics/8301-202_162-57592100.html) (accessed 5 November 2013).

CHAPTER 4  
GEORGIAN WAR

Prelude to War

On 7 August 2008, Georgian and Russian forces began what would be a five day armed conflict. This conflict for the Georgians was about preserving their territorial integrity and sovereignty.<sup>207</sup> Georgia intended to halt any further discussion about an independent Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to block further Russian support for these aims. Unlike the Russians, Georgian forces demonstrated tactical proficiency. However, the Russian operational plan was better conceived, better executed, and overwhelmed the Georgian army. This failure of Georgia demonstrated to other former Soviet republics that although they may attempt to align themselves with the west, they still fell under Russia's sphere of influence.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and Georgia steadily deteriorated.<sup>208</sup> Unlike other South Caucasus republics such as Azerbaijan and Armenia, Georgia shunned Moscow's attempts to exert influence. This independent course plotted by the Georgians occurred prior to the final collapse of the Soviet Union, and directly led to the 2008 war. Russian intervention during the Georgian civil war from 1988 through

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<sup>207</sup>Angelika Nussberger, "The War between Russia and Georgia-Consequences and Unresolved Questions," *Göttingen Journal of International Law* 1, no. 2 (2009), 345.

<sup>208</sup>Aleksandr Iashvili, "Georgia Demands Withdrawal of Peacekeepers from Abkhazia and South Ossetia," in *Countdown to War in Georgia*, ed. Kent Lee (Minneapolis: East View Press, 2008), 200.

1992 only increased the tension between the two nations.<sup>209</sup> Further souring relations with Moscow was the continual assistance provided to the Abkhaz and Ossetians. This assistance proved to be to the detriment of Georgia and the ethnic Georgians living in those two regions.<sup>210</sup> As the 1990s progressed, tension between Georgia and Russia increased as a result of Russia's policies. Neither Abkhazians or South Ossetians initially called for independence, it was only with continued Russian support for these two republics and the inflammation of tensions that they embraced independence.<sup>211</sup>

Russia possessed its own reasons for desiring war in the Caucasus. As described above, Georgian and Russian relations were never good.<sup>212</sup> However, the Russian motivations for conflict had to do as much with external concerns as they did with the problems from Georgia. Russia's action was "driven in part by Western policies such as NATO expansion, missile defense, and encroachments on the Russian sphere of privileged interests."<sup>213</sup> Combined with Putin's drive to restore Russian influence, the Georgian war proved to be an expedient means to address the issues faced by Russia. A message to the west was not all Russia planned to gain from military action against

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<sup>209</sup>Global Security, "War in Georgia," 30 September 2012, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/georgia.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/georgia.htm) (accessed 16 November 2013).

<sup>210</sup>Christopher Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 133.

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>212</sup>Ian T. Brown, "Georgian, Russian Relations Sour Before Conflict," Gallup World, 11 August 2008, [www.gallup.com/poll/109423/georgian-russian-relations-sour-before-conflict.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/109423/georgian-russian-relations-sour-before-conflict.aspx) (accessed 16 November 2013).

<sup>213</sup>Stephen F. Jones, "Introduction: Georgia's Domestic Front," in *War and Revolution in the Caucasus*, ed. Stephen F. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

Georgia. Russia continued to deal with problems emanating from Ukraine. Ukraine along with other former Soviet states engaged in a regional alignment away from the Russian sphere of influence toward NATO.<sup>214</sup> By waging a war with Georgia, Russia sought to demonstrate the unwillingness of the west to assist in the security of former Soviet republics and displayed Russian resolve in maintaining influence throughout the region.

### Russian and Georgian Political Maneuvering

Although the August war was short in duration, the events and maneuvers leading up to the actual conflict were years in the making. Georgia began alignment with western nations and organizations shortly after its 1991 independence under the direction of President Eduard Shevardnadze. Although this courting of western governments and institutions disturbed Moscow, the Georgians continued their alignment with the west. Russian internal economic issues and political turmoil as well as the later conflicts in Chechnya tied up an already diminished Russian military. With the November 2003 Rose Revolution, Russia hoped to gain a more Moscow focused partner in Georgia. In President Mikhail Saakashvili, Russia got just the opposite.

Saakashvili rose to power following the Rose Revolution. Young Georgians who wanted nothing to do with the Russian influence of the past spawned this revolution. They wanted to turn west and prosper like the Baltic States.<sup>215</sup> This turn to the west was

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<sup>214</sup>On 26 September 2013 Ukraine announced the preparing of implementation of Association Agreement. This agreement will further open European markets to Ukrainian products and aligns the Ukraine closer with Europe. Interfax. "Ukraine Preparing Program of Implementation of Association Agreement with EU, says Foreign Ministry," <http://en/interfax.com.ua/news/general/168539.html> (accessed 26 September 2013).

<sup>215</sup>Ronald Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 57.



something that the Russians were not willing to tolerate. As a result and almost from the beginning of the Saakashvili presidency, “Russia by all means available sought to apply pressure on the Saakashvili government to moderate its course.”<sup>216</sup> Russia began exerting influence, utilizing elements of national power. Diplomatically, they provided support to the separatist regions of Georgia–Abkhazia, South Ossetia making it difficult for Georgia to exert influence within their own territory. Militarily they provided “peacekeeping” forces in the separatist republics. Economically Russia tried to hamper Georgian infrastructure. “In January 2006, an explosion on the Russian side of the border destroyed both a gas pipeline and electricity lines supplying Georgia.”<sup>217</sup> Russia then enacted an embargo and deported ethnic Georgians who sent remittances back to Georgia.<sup>218</sup>

During the build-up to 2008, Moscow began to exert ever-increasing pressure on Tbilisi. By March 2008, Russia announced that it no longer intended to enforce the trade sanctions imposed by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on Abkhazia.<sup>219</sup> The situation continued to grow worse in April when President Saakashvili attempted to inform NATO about the increasing pressure that Tbilisi was under from Moscow. Tbilisi

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<sup>216</sup>Niklas Nilsson, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution: The Break with the Past,” in *The Guns of August: 2008 Russia’s War in Georgia*, ed. Svante Cornell and Fredrick Starr (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2009), 101.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid.

<sup>219</sup>Per Gahrton, *Georgia Pawn in the New Great Game* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 177.

desired assistance from NATO in countering the Russian threat.<sup>220</sup> What they received instead was a Membership Action Plan. Although a significant step to gaining admission into NATO, the Bucharest summit did not resolve any of Georgia's problems and actually made things worse. "After the NATO Bucharest summit, Moscow's campaign against Georgia intensified."<sup>221</sup> Putin spearheaded the destabilization by:

signing a presidential decree instructing Russian state agencies to establish official ties with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian de-facto administrations; to institutionalize trade relations between Russia and the two entities; and to provide consular assistance to residents of the two regions.<sup>222</sup>

President Saakashvili continued to stress to his western allies the problems his nation faced, unfortunately for Georgia, none agreed with his assessment. "In retrospect, the warnings were evident, but the blinders of a twenty-first century diplomatic paradigm prevented the west from reading the writing on the wall."<sup>223</sup> The west refused to pay attention to both Russian and Georgian actions regarding this crisis.

One of the deftest political moves taken by Russia prior to the conflict dealt with citizenship. Russia opened citizenship in the Russian federation to people of the former Soviet Union republics. As a result, "90% of South Ossetia's population of under 100,000

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<sup>220</sup>Regnum, "NATO Summit: Georgia asks for NATO Help in Settling Problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," 28 November 2006, [www.regnum.ru/english/746100.html](http://www.regnum.ru/english/746100.html) (accessed 16 November 2013).

<sup>221</sup>Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 147.

<sup>222</sup>Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in *The Guns of August: 2008 Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. Svante Cornell and Fredrick Starr (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2009), 145.

<sup>223</sup>David Smith, "The Saakashvili Administration's Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War," in *The Guns of August: 2008 Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. Svante Cornell and Fredrick Starr (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2009), 122.

. . . acquire[d] Russian Citizenship.”<sup>224</sup> This policy characterized as creeping annexation by Georgia, provided Moscow with the ability to claim federation forces deployed to Georgia in order to protect its citizens.<sup>225</sup> Putin took this claim further with his “invocation of the so called Bush doctrine allowing for preemptive war-making with no regard for international institutions.”<sup>226</sup> With this as with other provocations, Moscow ensured increased pressure on Tbilisi.

Moscow achieved its strategic aims in part due to the inability, or unwillingness, of western powers to assist Georgia. Western nations did not acknowledge the Georgian pleas for assistance. This made it easier for Russia to blame the conflict on Georgian aggression. The Russian strategic plan needed “military action in Georgia to be seen merely as a reaction to “Georgian aggression” against Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, and against Russian peacekeepers in the region.”<sup>227</sup> Militarily for Russia to be successful, they needed to not only provoke Georgia into attacking, they needed significant and appropriate forces in place to react.

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<sup>224</sup>Kristopher Natoli, “Weaponizing Nationality: An Analysis Of Russia Passport Policy in Georgia,” *Boston University Law* (2010): 392.

<sup>225</sup>Ariel Cohen, “Saving Georgia,” The Heritage Foundation Research Report, 12 August 2008, [www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/08/saving-georgia](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/08/saving-georgia) (accessed 28 September 2013).

<sup>226</sup>Thomas Goltz, *Georgia Diary* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), 253.

<sup>227</sup>Pavel Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” in *The Guns of August: 2008 Russia’s War in Georgia*, edited by Svante Cornell and Fredrick Starr (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 165.

## Build-up of Forces and Border Skirmishes

“The outbreak of the war was precipitated by a month’s long series of Russian strategic moves that deftly set the conditions for political and military success in the campaign.”<sup>228</sup> In order to possess sufficient combat power in the region, Russia used a number of pretexts as a cover for its action. Among these were the movements of railroad troops into Abkhazia under the auspices of rebuilding a rail line.<sup>229</sup> Additionally, there was an unscheduled movement of a combat battalion into South Ossetia the day prior to the initiation of hostilities.<sup>230</sup> Most importantly for Russia, the initiation of the Kavkaz 2008 military exercise provided a large force in the region. This exercise included approximately eight thousand members of Russia’s military who conducted war games just north of the Georgian border.<sup>231</sup> Additionally, Russia increased troop numbers capable of immediate response to a crisis as well as potentially instigating a crisis by violating Georgian airspace. Specifically:

On August the 4th, the 58th Army positioned about five battalions in vicinity of the Roki tunnel. Additionally, the Russian government publicly admitted that

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<sup>228</sup>Ariel Cohen and Robert Hamilton, “The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications” (Monograph, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 23.

<sup>229</sup>Popjanevski, 146.

<sup>230</sup>C. J. Chivers, “Georgia Offers Fresh Evidence on War’s Start,” *New York Times*, 15 September 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/09/16/world/europe/16georgia.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/16/world/europe/16georgia.html?pagewanted=all) (accessed 16 November 2013).

<sup>231</sup>Svante Cornell, “War in Georgia, Jitters All Around,” *Current History* 107, no. 711 (October 2008), 311.

Russian aircraft were overflying Georgia. This announcement gave Russia the cover to conduct more detailed reconnaissance overflights.<sup>232</sup>

Russian forces were now in position for an assault, compounding matters for Georgia the international community was unaware. As Pavel Fleughenauer pointed out, “Russia led by former KGB agent Vladimir Putin, managed to hide its preparations and intentions not only from the Georgians, but also from western governments and intelligence services.”<sup>233</sup> These military and political movements provided Russia with significant operational and strategic advantages that no amount of Georgian tactical ability could surmount.<sup>234</sup>

Having utilized the lessons of the first Chechen war, Russia understood the need to present its message to the world. In order to assure the Russian message was the only information emanating from the conflict zone, denial-of-service attacks occurred from Russia in excess of a week before the war.

By conducting military operations in a sovereign country, Russia played a potentially risky game. The potential for western intervention was a serious consideration for Russia. If western forces deployed to buttress the Georgian military, there was a significant risk of conflict escalation. Additionally the Russians could fail at their desired goal of blocking NATO expansion, while simultaneously consolidating control of other

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<sup>232</sup>George Donovan, “Russian Operational Art” (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2008), 11.

<sup>233</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 165.

<sup>234</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 28.

nations looking for western patronage.<sup>235</sup> A means of limiting the potential for western intervention relied on portraying Georgia as the aggressor. Russia used two different methods for ensuring this narrative for the conflict. The first relied on small attacks designed to provoke a Georgian response.<sup>236</sup> The second relied on a Russian information campaign following the first shots of the conflict.

In the months prior to the conflict, Russian supported separatists increased their attacks against Georgian police. The offensive military capabilities of the separatists were increased following Russia's removal of CIS sanctions. This removal of sanctions "cleared the way for Russian arms shipments to the Abkhaz separatists."<sup>237</sup> With the increase in Abkhaz and Ossetian military capability, and backed by Russian support, the security situation deteriorated in the two breakaway republics and attacks against Georgians increased. The most prominent of these attacks involved the kidnapping of four Georgian police officers, released only after Georgia threatened military action.<sup>238</sup> Had Georgia responded militarily to this action, they would have deprived Russia of a key piece of their information campaign. As a result, the captors released the Georgian

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<sup>235</sup>Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 5.

<sup>236</sup>Shaun Walker, "Georgia began War with Russia, but was Provoked, inquiry Finds," *The Independent*, 1 October 2009, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/georgia-began-war-with-russia-but-it-was-provoked-inquiry-finds-1795744.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/georgia-began-war-with-russia-but-it-was-provoked-inquiry-finds-1795744.html) (accessed 16 November 2013).

<sup>237</sup>Smith, "The Saakashvili Administration's Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War," 129.

<sup>238</sup>Popjanevski, 148.

policemen, Russia responded by flying four military aircraft over Georgia in a direct violation of Georgia's airspace.<sup>239</sup>

Russia also directly attacked a Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle flying over Abkhazia.<sup>240</sup> Although the Russians initially denied shooting down the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, subsequent footage taken by the drone and posted on the internet clearly shows a Russian Mig-29 firing on and destroying the Georgian aircraft.<sup>241</sup> Small actions like these combined with the Russian build-up of forces convinced Tbilisi they possessed no other option but military action. This intervention was just what the Russians had planned.

Russia's information campaign ensured operational and strategic success for Moscow. Prior to the initiation of hostilities, "Moscow accused Tbilisi of mobilizing its troops in the Kodori Gorge in preparation for an attack against Abkhazia."<sup>242</sup> This narrative coincided with Moscow's statements following the initiation of conflict that they were protecting citizens. Additionally, Russia utilized talking points previously used in the west to defend western military intervention. Moscow claimed they "intervened to prevent 'ethnic cleansing' and 'genocide' in the Georgian republics."<sup>243</sup> Although neither the Russian claims of increased Georgian military presence prior to the war, nor Georgian

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<sup>239</sup>Ibid.

<sup>240</sup>C. J. Chivers, "Georgia-Russia Tension Escalates Over Downed Drone," *New York Times*, 22 April 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/04/22/world/europe/22georgia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/22/world/europe/22georgia.html?_r=0) (accessed 30 September 2013).

<sup>241</sup>VVSDCN, *Russian MIG-29 Shooting Down Georgian Drone*, Updated 22 April 2008, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6b35gjZ9cc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6b35gjZ9cc) (accessed 1 December 2013).

<sup>242</sup>Popjanevski, 145.

<sup>243</sup>Goltz, 252-253.

atrocities during the war were true, Russia set the tone of the information campaign. By setting the tone and framing the invasion as a response, Russia bought more time before western pressure halted Russian attacks. Russia however still had much to learn about crafting and delivering a message to the media. Primarily, the Russians did not understand that when crafting a story it is important for lies, or misinformation, to stand up to basic scrutiny. However unlike the first Chechen campaign, Russia did understand the importance of a media message. In “one of the clearest indications of the importance Moscow attached to the information war in Georgia . . . [the Russian government] prepositioned journalists in Tskhinvali prior to the start of hostilities.”<sup>244</sup> This however backfired as Russia attempted to claim that they were merely responding to a Georgian attack.

### Initiation of Hostilities

Russia continued to move forces into the two Georgian regions right up to the initiation of conflict. In Abkhazia “Moscow dispatched heavily armed so-called peacekeepers to counter the mythical Georgian buildup in the Kodori Gorge.”<sup>245</sup> Additionally, Tbilisi’s own military intelligence informed President Saakashvili that Russia was quietly moving soldiers into Abkhazia with the intent that they “familiarize themselves with the terrain.”<sup>246</sup> In South Ossetia, Russia deployed the 135th motorized

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<sup>244</sup>Paul Goble, “Defining Victory and Defeat: The Information War between Russia and Georgia,” in *The Guns of August: 2008 Russia’s War in Georgia*, ed. Svante Cornell and Fredrick Starr (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 180.

<sup>245</sup>Smith, “The Saakashvili Administration's Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War,” 138.

<sup>246</sup>Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 142.



rifle regiment. Russia initially denied the existence of the unit. Russia then “claimed the unit was merely a routine rotation of CIS peacekeeping forces.”<sup>247</sup> Additional deployments of paratroopers who brought with them a significant number of “tanks, artillery, and air defense weapons” added to Russia’s pre-deployed combat power in the area.<sup>248</sup> This heavy equipment is not traditionally used during peacekeeping operations. However Russia claimed that peacekeeping operations and not an offensive capability was the equipment’s purpose.<sup>249</sup>

Combined with the separatist fighters in both republics, the inclusion of additional Russian military forces provided Moscow with a “numerical advantage almost from the start of combat operations.”<sup>250</sup> Additionally the Kavkaz 2008 exercises allowed Russia to “keep those forces in pre-position before the order to “counterattack” after sufficient provocations had goaded Georgia into a police action against South Ossetian separatists.<sup>251</sup> Additional indicators that military action would occur came from the departure of over 800 South Ossetian women and children. These people were sent north into Russia to attend what the South Ossetian government called a “pre-arranged summer camp.”<sup>252</sup> On the 7 August 2008, Georgian forces “reported shelling attacks against

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<sup>247</sup>Goltz, 262.

<sup>248</sup>Donovan, 10.

<sup>249</sup>Chivers, “Georgia Offers Fresh Evidence on War’s Start.”

<sup>250</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 36.

<sup>251</sup>Goltz, 260.

<sup>252</sup>Popjanevski, 149.

villages under Georgian control.”<sup>253</sup> President Saakashvili believed that he no longer possessed any other diplomatic options. Russian forces occupied Georgian territory and attacked Georgian controlled villages, it was time to attack.

### Georgian Strategy

The Georgian perspective of the conflict centers around the belief by the Georgian government that Russia was trying to annex Georgian territory. This annexation and the re-establishment of Georgian territorial integrity was one of president Saakashvili’s primary concerns following his election.<sup>254</sup> It was with this focus that he implored the world community to assist Georgia in removing Russian forces enabling the continuity of Georgian borders. Although Saakashvili possessed valid reasons for moving forces into South Ossetia, the mobilization and employment of Georgia’s forces was “a disastrous miscalculation by a Georgian leadership that was impatient with gradual confidence building and a Russian-dominated negotiations process.”<sup>255</sup> Saakashvili however believed he possessed no other alternatives.

Following the order by Saakashvili to attack into South Ossetia, Georgian forces launched an artillery barrage against the occupied capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali. Georgian forces initially met with success, however Georgian forces never secured or blocked the Roki tunnel thus allowing Russian forces to move freely across the border. This lack of focus toward the tunnel and Russia’s reaction stemmed from Georgia’s focus

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>254</sup>Nilsson, 91.

<sup>255</sup>Gahrton, 176-177.

toward the South Ossetian separatist forces. However, “in the actual fighting in August 2008, the separatist forces that the Georgians had seen as their main adversary played only a supporting role as a vanguard to the Russians, to engage and draw the Georgians into combat.”<sup>256</sup> Georgia’s military did not understand this. As a result they did not address their biggest threat, the likely response of the Russians. Compounding problems for the Georgians, “Georgian officers contend that militia forces deployed in Tskhinvali continually harassed Georgian forces as they moved through the town.”<sup>257</sup> This harassment slowed the Georgian advance and provided Russia with time to move forces through the Roki tunnel.

From the very start of the conflict, Georgia displayed a lack of understanding of their threat, as well as weak operational and strategic planning. As a result of the weaknesses, “the often haphazard way in which plans were conceived and implemented undercut the tactical advantages the Georgians enjoyed and undermined their entire effort.”<sup>258</sup> Although Georgian forces were equipped with newer weapons and received training from western militaries, their lack of planning enabled Russia to invade and defeat the Georgian military.

### Russia’s Strategy

Russia’s strategy toward Georgia was a combined political-military campaign. Both Putin and Medvedev through direct Russian intervention and pressure through their

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<sup>256</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 162.

<sup>257</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 42.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 30.

proxy forces in the separatist republics increased pressure on Tbilisi. This pressure increased until Georgian politicians were forced to conduct military operations.<sup>259</sup> Additionally, Moscow limited any western interference by downplaying pre-conflict action, and immediately employing an effective information strategy at the outset of hostilities. Russian planning also focused at the strategic and operational levels of warfare. The Russians designed a campaign that opened a second front overwhelming the Georgians. This plan maximized Russian advantages and Georgian disadvantages, while minimizing Russian disadvantages.<sup>260</sup>

Upon the initiation of hostilities, Russian forces began what would become an all out invasion with the intent to “decimate and destroy the Georgian military—in effect, a full demilitarization of Georgia.”<sup>261</sup> Although as described below, Russia’s military demonstrated a significant number of tactical deficiencies. Even with these tactical deficiencies, their ability to maintain a high operational tempo combined with effective artillery and close air support enabled Russia to gain an advantage. The Russians used this advantage to “seize key objectives before the world could react.”<sup>262</sup> Additionally, the Russians realized that in order to maintain the gains from the conflict, they would not be

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<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>260</sup>Cohen, “The Russian Military and the Georgia War,” 8.

<sup>261</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 162.

<sup>262</sup>Donovan, 12.

able to maintain a military presence in Georgia. If Russian forces remained, they would likely face a prolonged guerilla conflict similar to both Chechen conflicts.<sup>263</sup>

### Ground Forces

#### South Ossetia Action

Although Russia previously stationed “peace keepers” in South Ossetia and therefore had combat power in the area before the conflict, the first significant Russian response came from the area of the Roki tunnel. Russian forces having just trained during the Kavkaz 2008 exercise began movement through the tunnel and massed in South Ossetia. Although eventually able to deploy sufficient forces through the tunnel, Russia’s military readiness slowed movement and initial deployment attempts met with significant difficulty. Russia’s forces still primarily used vehicles and vehicle designs left over from the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the equipment was not maintained causing impairment to movement.<sup>264</sup> Compounding these matters, Georgian forces effectively conducted artillery fire on the area outside of the tunnel further slowing Russian deployment. Georgian forces however continued to focus on the South Ossetian fighters and did not block the Roki tunnel.<sup>265</sup> This proved crucial as the conflict continued, and Russian forces poured through the tunnel.

Russian forces continued through the Georgian fire and successfully engaged the Georgian forward elements focused on seizing Tskhinvali. Russia’s forces advanced on

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<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>264</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 34.

<sup>265</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 170.

the Georgian military's positions using the same techniques that served them well during the 1999 Chechen war. Namely they advanced with a significant amount of aerial and artillery support. The overwhelming firepower scattered Georgian formations and allowed Russian units to advance and seize Tskhinvali. As Russian forces advanced through South Ossetia, they "generally used Soviet tactics, moving in column formation, fighting from the lead elements and continuing to press forward after making contact."<sup>266</sup> Column fighting was effective fighting an insurgent or militia force like the one faced in Chechnya. However when facing a western trained military, column fighting left the Russian forces exceedingly vulnerable. The command element of Russia's 58th Army experienced this when they were ambushed and effectively destroyed by Georgia's ground forces.<sup>267</sup>

In order to mitigate their tactical weakness, Russia relied on overwhelming force and rapid movement of airborne troops. The speed of the highly trained airborne soldiers in coordination with "massive air and artillery attacks against Georgian forces seem to have had a significant shock effect on Georgian forces."<sup>268</sup> Russian forces successfully dislodged the Georgians from Tskhinvali, and Georgian forces retreated. In order to ensure success, Russia continued to send additional units into the conflict. They would not make the same mistake as the first Chechen war and as a result "deployed an

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<sup>266</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 28.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., 29.

overwhelming force.”<sup>269</sup> Although this overwhelming force succeeded in removing the Georgians from South Ossetia and attacked to the Georgian city of Gori, the strain on Russia’s equipment became excessive. At some point throughout the conflict, between sixty and seventy percent of Russia’s armored vehicles broke down.<sup>270</sup> Additionally, even though the conflict was short in duration and did not cover a wide area, “there are indications that the Russian ground logistics systems was severely taxed.”<sup>271</sup>

The battle near the village of Zemo-Nikozi highlighted this point. The Russian commander claimed that after running out of ammunition, his forces were surrounded by the Georgians and destroyed.<sup>272</sup> Even though the Russians faced significant difficulties, the ground forces seized the Georgian city of Gori. With this action, the Russians effectively divided the country.<sup>273</sup> Although Russia’s actions in South Ossetia drove out the Georgian military, the Russian invasion of Abkhazia solidified Russia’s victory.

#### Abkhazia Action

“In the afternoon of 9 August, less than forty hours into the fighting, Russia opened a second front in Abkhazia.”<sup>274</sup> The Russian navy “arrived off the coast of

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<sup>269</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 168.

<sup>270</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 34.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>272</sup>Ibid.

<sup>273</sup>Goltz, 252.

<sup>274</sup>Popjanevski, 152.

Abkhazia and landed approximately 4,000 paratroopers at Ochamchire.”<sup>275</sup> Russia also moved heavy equipment along the rail line recently repaired under the guise of humanitarian assistance. Russia wasted little time attacking the small Georgian garrison in the Kodori Gorge easily routing them. Next Russian forces attacked down the Georgian coast occupying the port of Poti, the main Georgian port.<sup>276</sup> Russian forces also occupied Georgian military bases in western Georgia destroying or stealing everything they could.<sup>277</sup> By the end of the five-day conflict Russia’s ground forces moved approximately twenty thousand soldiers into Abkhazia.<sup>278</sup> With the opening of this second front and the overwhelming number of forces deployed, this operation set conditions for Russia’s success, the ability to strike deep into Georgia’s territory would ensure victory.

### Air Force

Russia’s air forces gained and maintained air superiority throughout the conflict. Even though dominating the aerial arena, Russia’s air force made a series of significant errors as well as demonstrated a lack of overall operational proficiency. During the campaign, “Moscow flew over 400 bombing sorties against 36 targets across the entire country during the five day war and is reported to have flown 120 sorties on 9 August

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<sup>275</sup>Donovan, 15.

<sup>276</sup>Reuters, “Russian Tanks in Georgia’s Poti: Witness,” August 2008, [www.reuters.com/article/2008/08/14/us-georgia-ossetia-poti-idUSLE12620920080814](http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/08/14/us-georgia-ossetia-poti-idUSLE12620920080814) (accessed 3 October 2013).

<sup>277</sup>Goltz, 252.

<sup>278</sup>Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 180.



alone.”<sup>279</sup> Although this figure is impressive especially given the overall poor state of Russia’s air force, the targets chosen often demonstrated a lack of planning and intelligence preparation prior to conducting operations. This lack of intelligence was especially costly given that Russia reported a loss of at least six aircraft during the five-day war. With the acute lack of training within the air force, the loss of qualified pilots was even more devastating than the loss of aircraft. Demonstrating the lack of planning and preparation within Russia’s air force was the fact that these losses were not due to aerial combat with the Georgian air force, but were a result of the Georgian air defense network. Although Georgia highlighted their purchase of the BUK-M1 air defense system in the international media, Russia was not aware that Georgia possessed that capability.<sup>280</sup> This significant oversight combined with Russian targeting of Georgian military facilities not used since the Soviet Union collapsed indicated significant problems within Russia’s intelligence community and air force.<sup>281</sup> Although Georgia’s air defense network proved to be damaging to the Russian air effort, the small size and eventual routing of the Georgian ground forces limited its overall effectiveness.

Russia’s air force also failed to conduct effective airmobile operations with the army.<sup>282</sup> This point was demonstrated by the fact that although several Russian airborne and air assault units participated in this conflict, the “army did not attempt a vertical

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<sup>279</sup>Ibid.

<sup>280</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 168.

<sup>281</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 34-35.

<sup>282</sup>Ibid., 41.

envelopment.”<sup>283</sup> As the army no longer controlled the rotary aviation assets, proper coordination could not be conducted. Although several aspects of the Russian air force demonstrated the need for significant improvement, several elements of the Russian air force excelled at their specific tasks.

“The Russian air force, while underperforming by western standards demonstrated decisive air superiority over its Georgian foe.”<sup>284</sup> As a result of massive Russian aerial incursions into Georgia, Saakashvili limited the use of the air force in order to preserve combat power following the conflict.<sup>285</sup> Tbilisi rightly realized that if the small Georgian air force engaged the Russian forces, they would quickly be overwhelmed. As a result of the air force limitations by the Georgians, Russia was able to conduct effective close air support. This capability honed by action in Chechnya had a disastrous impact on Georgian ground forces.<sup>286</sup> This point is highlighted by the fact that most of Georgia’s casualties resulted from Russian air attacks.<sup>287</sup>

The Russian air force also effectively conducted airlift operations from various locations across Russia into the theater of operations. This capability provided Russia’s ground forces with additional combat power that assisted in overwhelming Georgia’s forces. The Russian air force provided an essential force multiplier for the Russian

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<sup>283</sup>Donovan, 26-27.

<sup>284</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 11.

<sup>285</sup>Paul Rich, *Crisis in the Caucasus: Russia, Georgia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 32.

<sup>286</sup>Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 176.

<sup>287</sup>Felgenhauer, “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War,” 170.

operation. The Georgians possessed a fairly robust air defense system, but were unable to integrate that system into the overall campaign plan. Additionally the Georgian air force did not attempt to resist. As a result Russia's air force dominated the battle space.

Although successful in some arenas, overall the "Russian air component demonstrated a remarkably limited capacity to wage air combat for a country aspiring to be a military great power."<sup>288</sup>

### Operational Challenges

Although Russia's forces overwhelmed and defeated their Georgian opponents, they encountered significant internal operational challenges. Primarily among the challenges was the inability of Russian command, control, communications, and intelligence systems to function effectively. A significant number of Russia's commanders displayed extreme incompetence during the short war. The problem was so acute that the Russians:

[W]ere forced to handpick colonels and generals from all over Russia, [men] who were able to command in battle; the commanders of the paper divisions, when they were given reinforcements of men and armaments . . . were confused and some [even] refused to obey orders.<sup>289</sup>

This failure of command and control necessitated the deployment of a significantly larger force than would have otherwise been required. This caused additional problems beyond the logistical issues mentioned above. Although Russian forces were in the process of adding more contracted professional soldiers (kontractniki), they did not possess enough

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<sup>288</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 37.

<sup>289</sup>Felgenhauer, "After August 7: The Escalation of the Russian-Georgian War," 166.

men to fill the ranks.<sup>290</sup> This necessitated the deployment of “conscripts, despite an official policy banning their use in wars.”<sup>291</sup> Had this conflict lasted longer, or turned into a bloody guerilla fight similar to the Chechen campaigns, the use of conscripts could have been politically untenable in Russia.

Furthermore, Russia’s communications systems also proved deficient. This problem was endemic across all echelons and greatly hampered Russia’s operations. The problem became readily apparent when the “58th Army commander, Lieutenant-General Anatoliy Khrulev, communicated with his forces in the midst of combat via a satellite phone borrowed from a journalist, since communication between units was unavailable.”<sup>292</sup> Unless fixed, this problem would prove catastrophic against a better-trained and equipped foe.

Additionally, the Russians noted a significant number of intelligence failures during this conflict. As discussed above, Russia’s air force targeting officers did not have sufficient intelligence on Georgian capabilities and target locations. Although the war was short, the dearth of intelligence capability led to a high number of Russian aircraft destroyed. The Russians also identified deficiencies in their tactical intelligence collection capabilities. Russian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle’s did not possess effective sensors. The cameras mounted on the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle had such poor resolution

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<sup>290</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 31.

<sup>291</sup>Ibid.

<sup>292</sup>Roger McDermott, “Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces and the Georgian War,” *Parameters* (Spring 2009), <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/09spring/mcdermott.pdf> (accessed 22 November 2013).

that they provided no benefit to Russian commanders.<sup>293</sup> Unless Russia has fixed the myriad of command, control, communications, and intelligence issues that were apparent with this war, the chances of success during their next military operation will be greatly diminished.

### Aftermath

#### Political

At its most basic level the Georgian war was “intended to demonstrate that Moscow was again a force to be reckoned with and that the days of Russian strategic retreat were over.”<sup>294</sup> Putin settled the Chechen question of independence and with the invasion of Georgia demonstrated that it was “capable of effectively acting in its periphery, and is willing and able to use military force to protect its interests.”<sup>295</sup> This war also demonstrated that the “existing structures—NATO, EU, OSC-E and CIS—are plainly unable to prevent conflict between hostile countries.”<sup>296</sup> Additionally the lack of any meaningful response from the EU, the United States, or NATO demonstrated to Russia that they possessed *carte blanche*. That although they violated one of the most established rules of international relations—national sovereignty—they could take any

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<sup>293</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 34.

<sup>294</sup>Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World*, 5.

<sup>295</sup>Donovan, 6.

<sup>296</sup>Stephen Blank, “From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis before the 2008 War,” in *The Guns of August: 2008 Russia’s War in Georgia*, ed. Scante Cornell and Fredrick Starr (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 105.

action against former Soviet republics and the west would not intervene.<sup>297</sup> Although the war was disastrous for Georgia, the lack of western response made the war a crisis for all former Soviet republics. The war demonstrated that each nation is on its own and western support may not be forthcoming in their time of need.

### Economic

Georgia faced significant economic challenges following the 2008 war. Russia's forces successfully destroyed a sizeable amount of Georgian infrastructure including damage to Georgia's major port facilities. Following the war, western nations awarded over US \$4.5 billion to assist Georgia with reconstruction.<sup>298</sup> As demonstrated by the damage to the Port of Poti, a significant amount of destruction perpetrated by Russia did not serve any tactical necessity. The purpose of the destruction however was to send a message. Russia demonstrated to other nations just how far the country was willing to go to protect its interests. The economic destruction sustained by Georgia was a message to more than just Georgia and the Caucasus, it was a message to any former Soviet republic.

These nations are still within Russia's sphere of influence and would be handled severely if they did not follow Russia's lead. This is especially important given Russia's dominance in providing natural gas to heat European homes. Although Russia's army did not seize or destroy the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan or Baku-Supsa pipelines, the control of

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<sup>297</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>298</sup>Vladimer Papava, "Georgia's Economy: Post-Revolutionary Development and Post-War Difficulties," in *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze*, ed. Stephen Jones (New York: Routledge, 2010), 113.

South Ossetia places Russian forces easily within striking range.<sup>299</sup> The ability for Russia to destroy these pipelines demonstrated to Europe and specifically Georgia, of their “economic dependence on Russia.”<sup>300</sup> Russia’s destruction of Georgian infrastructure as well as the use of cluster munitions caused unnecessary and lengthy delays contributing to Georgia’s economic hardship.<sup>301</sup> Russia’s intent with the invasion of Georgia was to ensure Georgia and other former Soviet republics reconsider their shift to the west. If they continue to shun Russia, they could suffer economically. Although not the hegemon of the Soviet era, Russia still possessed power and is willing to utilize that power to further its own objectives.

Russia may have succeeded in intimidating its neighbors, as Socar the Azerbaijan state energy firm announced that it would transfer more oil directly through Russia and not the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.<sup>302</sup> This action at least partially validated Russia’s strategy and demonstrated the Russian benefits in engaging in this conflict.

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<sup>299</sup>Donovan, 7.

<sup>300</sup>Lester Grau, Interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, 12 September 2013,

<sup>301</sup>Human Rights Watch, *A Dying Practice use of Cluster Munitions by Russia and Georgia August 2008* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), 12.

<sup>302</sup>Arthur Bonner, “Georgian Losses and Russian Gains,” *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 90.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMATION OF RUSSIAN STRATEGY

Russia's military like any good military, continues to develop at all levels. It is through this development that distinct trends appear in how the post Soviet military conducts operations. By examining these trends a post Soviet way of war begins to emerge. As the Russian military is currently still in a period of great transition, the full extent of a new Russian way of war is not yet apparent, but the indicators highlight trends in a still developing Russian way of war.

#### How Russian Forces Developed to fit the Operational Environment

As with most aspects of Russian society, adaptation occurs slowly in the Russian military orthodoxy.<sup>303</sup> This slow pace of change allowed Chechen separatists to stay ahead of Russian forces during the first Chechen war and enabled the Chechens to continue to deploy effective and lethal measures against Russia during the second Chechen war. As with the Chechen wars, during the 2008 Georgia war, the speed of change and development hampered operational readiness. Russian front line soldiers were only marginally better prepared than during the 1999 invasion of Chechnya. Only through the massive use of force rediscovered during the Chechen wars was Russia able to overcome the tactical and technical capability of the Georgian army.

Although Russia's military took a hard look at itself following the Georgian war, significant problems remain apparent throughout its military. Russian manning is still

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<sup>303</sup>Rod Thorton, "Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces" (Monograph, US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, June 2011), iii.



deficient with a dearth of both trained soldiers and suitable recruits.<sup>304</sup> The Russian short-term solution to this problem remains conscription, but this system has significant issues. These manning issues force the Russian military to rely on antiquated Soviet era massing and fire superiority tactics that will likely result in failure should the Russian forces engage a near peer military. Compounding matters, “Russia’s scientific and industrial base is incapable of meeting the tactical and technical requirements” of a first rate military.<sup>305</sup> Russian leaders understand the depth of this problem and “on August 31, 2010, Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, reiterated his previous appeals for the military industrial complex (MIC) to transform itself to meet the challenges of modernizing the equipment and weapons inventory, to achieve a target of a 70 percent share of new systems by 2020.”<sup>306</sup> Technological advances would help but until the force structure is overhauled significant problems will remain.

Although significant, these problems in the Russian military are well understood by Russia’ senior leadership, but with an organization resistant to change and a military budget only slightly larger than that of France, Russia’s forces have a long way to go until they are a force capable of meeting a dynamic well-trained opponent.<sup>307</sup> Until

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<sup>304</sup>RT News, “Russia’s Military in National Service Dilemma,” 30 June 2009, <http://rt.com/news/russia-s-military-in-national-service-dilemma> (accessed 14 November 2013).

<sup>305</sup>Kramer, 31.

<sup>306</sup>Roger McDermott, *Maskirovka and Russian Military Procurement: Corruption, Deception and Crisis*, 9 September 2010, [www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Russia/McDermott-Roger/Maskirovka-and-Russian-Military-Procurement-Corruption-Deception-and-Crisis](http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Russia/McDermott-Roger/Maskirovka-and-Russian-Military-Procurement-Corruption-Deception-and-Crisis) (accessed 9 July 2013).

<sup>307</sup>Mark Adomanis, “Since 2000 Russia’ Defense Spending has Almost Tripled (But Still Isn’t a Threat to the West),” *Forbes*, 1 August 2013, [www.forbes.com/](http://www.forbes.com/)

Russia resolves its organizational issues, it is imperative that an overwhelmingly successful operational strategy is developed.

The 2008 Georgia war demonstrated that Russia's ability to develop a solid operational strategy overcame their tactical limitations. They understand the limitations of their force and overcame these limitations through proper planning at the operational and strategic levels. The development of a second front in Abkhazia and the inclusion of naval forces along the Georgian coast highlighted this point. Until the Russian military tactical capability is developed and integrated jointly, Russia's forces will continue to face difficulty. This development is unlikely to occur soon. As a result, the Russian military has focused on development at the operational and strategic levels of warfare, which enabled successful operations.

At the tactical level of warfare, Russia's forces will be forced to accept slow modernization and only a marginal increase in the quality soldier. As a result of these inadequacies, Russian forces must either make do with left over equipment and soldiers with limited training, or as the Russian military appears to be doing, attempt to modify equipment and TTPs to meet the operational requirements. However, with the limited number of experienced enlisted soldiers and officers, instituting lasting developmental changes will be problematic.

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[sites/markadomanis/2013/08/01/since-2000-russias-defense-spending-has-almost-tripled-but-it-still-isnt-a-threat-to-the-west/](http://sites/markadomanis/2013/08/01/since-2000-russias-defense-spending-has-almost-tripled-but-it-still-isnt-a-threat-to-the-west/) (accessed 31 October 2013).

## Creation of New Doctrine and TTPs to Meet Operational Needs

### Russian Organizational Development

The Russian force structure no longer resembles the Soviet army just prior to and during the collapse of the Soviet Union. This change has occurred slowly and has often been opposed by the military elite, which view any change as a direct challenge to their power and potential employment.<sup>308</sup> “The Russian military, as a whole, does not want to modernize; or rather it does not want to be “modernized” in the way that its political masters want.”<sup>309</sup> Although there has and will likely be continued resistance to change in the military, a common theme from Yeltsin through Putin has been near constant political pressure to develop and change the *modus operandi* of the Russian military. No longer will the military be free to conduct operations as it sees fit. In a new democratic system, civilian oversight must occur, something that the Russian military is not happy to accept.<sup>310</sup>

Although the will of politicians is generally supported by the public, “organizations resist change; military organizations resist change more than most; and it can be argued, Russian military organizations resist change more than most military organizations.”<sup>311</sup> The entrenched beliefs and constant resistance of senior officers has made even the best reform proposals almost impossible to implement. This resistance is a holdover from the Soviet days. Mikhail Gorbachev:

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<sup>308</sup>Miller, 16.

<sup>309</sup>Thorton, “Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces,” 1.

<sup>310</sup>Miller, 17.

<sup>311</sup>Thorton, “Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces,” iii.

[F]irst set in motion the process of military reform that the ending of the Cold War so demanded. He looked upon his military machine as a gargantuan, inflexible dinosaur that absorbed immense state resources, while seemingly providing for very little in the way of operational utility in the defense and security realm.<sup>312</sup>

Unless the Russian military adapts and functions in the contemporary operational environment, they may again find that they provide little to the nation.

### Smaller Force

As the Russian economy contracted following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ability to maintain large government institutions characteristic of a communist state, no longer existed. As a result, Yeltsin began to reduce Russia's military force structure. This effort was "driven largely by the rationale that smaller was better."<sup>313</sup> This belief was out of sheer fiscal necessity as much as an actual belief in the advantages of a smaller force. Since Russian forces were often not paid and resorted to selling military equipment the capability to field the force was reduced. A smaller force that the nation could afford was necessary.

The deployment of the military since the collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrates that without the professional force that Russia's politicians desire, mass is still the preferred technique used to meet operational and tactical success. Mass however brings with it a number of problems that the Russian military has attempted to address. Primarily the inability to relay orders up and down the chain of command. The decaying Russian military infrastructure contributes to as many operational problems as the force

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<sup>312</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>313</sup>Thorton, "Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces," 8.

structure, but as a result of the fiscal situation, Russia cannot adequately address material issues. As a result of these material deficiencies Russia has focused its attention where it will have the most impact, toward updated force structure.<sup>314</sup>

Although some senior Russian commanders including the chief of the General Staff Yuri Baluevskii objected, following the Georgian war Russia overhauled the military command structure.<sup>315</sup> “Command and control throughout the Russian military should now theoretically be more streamlined.”<sup>316</sup> Additionally, the Russians placed significantly more emphasis in the brigade as the main fighting force. This action followed developments within western armies who place the brigade as the primary war-fighting element. The war with Georgia demonstrated that “the brigade—smaller, easier to control, and with greater flexibility—was the arrangement of choice for the conduct of the fast paced maneuver warfare that was now *de rigueur* for any competent large army.”<sup>317</sup>

By transitioning from the old Soviet command and control system of the past, Russia’s forces are attempting to become more flexible in dealing with the challenges they will likely face in the coming decades.<sup>318</sup> Additionally as a more agile and

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<sup>314</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>315</sup>Marta Carlsson, *The Structure of Power - An insight into the Russian Ministry of Defence*, November 2012, [http://www.foi.se/Global/V%C3%A5r%20kunskap/S%C3%A4kerhetspolitiska%20studier/Ryssland/%C3%96vriga%20filer/foir\\_3571.pdf](http://www.foi.se/Global/V%C3%A5r%20kunskap/S%C3%A4kerhetspolitiska%20studier/Ryssland/%C3%96vriga%20filer/foir_3571.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2013).

<sup>316</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>317</sup>Ibid.

<sup>318</sup>The Soviet army possessed a large number of officers. Decisions were retained at higher levels requiring a large number of General Officers.

responsive force, they should provide Russia's policy makers with an expeditionary force which can be an effective foreign policy tool.

Even with the significant changes that have been made since the collapse of the Soviet Union, significant challenges remain. In line with a newer professional force, Russia's military has been forced to look at not only modernization equipment, but also the modernization of manning.

### Conscription

Since the time of the Czars, the Russian military has been primarily a conscription force.<sup>319</sup> From the Czarist army of World War I through to the demise of the Soviet Union, the Russian army has focused on massed forces with overwhelming "artillery and armor support. As many Soviet analysts stated, the Soviet army was an artillery army with a lot of tanks."<sup>320</sup> Although effective in the past, this method of warfare is rapidly moving past its prime.

Since the 1990s, the Russian president has pressured the military to change the manning structure. The military establishment however maintained a vested interest in the conscription method. Conscription required a large number of officers. The old Soviet and 1990s Russian army possessed approximately three times the officers as the American army.<sup>321</sup> As a result, senior officers stalled and actively subverted political

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<sup>319</sup>Josh Sanborn, "Conscription, Correspondence and Politics in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian History* 24, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1997): 27-28.

<sup>320</sup>Lester Grau, "Artillery and Counterinsurgency: The Soviet Experience," *Field Artillery Journal* (May-June 1997): 36.

<sup>321</sup>William Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 40.

attempts to limit or dismantle the conscription system.<sup>322</sup> This impasse resulted in compromise between the military and political forces in the Russian government. Putin proposed a compromise when he tried to “push through something like the Israeli system in which a professional force was always on hand that could in slow times, be reinforced by recalled conscripts.”<sup>323</sup>

In the end, Russia’s politicians will likely prevail, conscription is too rigid and does not offer enough benefit in the rapidly evolving contemporary world. Simply stated a conscription-based military does not provide Russia’s politicians with the type of force that would enhance foreign policy objectives or security policy.<sup>324</sup> This point is highlighted by the last three conflicts where the conscription system demonstrated its failures. As a result of the limited time in service of conscripted soldiers, the ability to train to anything beyond the most basic of skills is simply not feasible. This lack of training has proven to be a significant liability and shortcoming on the battlefield where conscripted soldiers are almost as much of a danger to their Russian comrades as they are to the enemy.<sup>325</sup> This deficiency became apparent during the first Chechen war, where “the untrained troops shot wildly at anything that moved inflicting in one estimate sixty

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<sup>322</sup>Andrew L. Spivak and William Alex Pridemore, “Conscription and Reform in the Russian Army” (The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, Washington, DC, May 2004), [www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2004\\_817-13\\_Spivak.pdf](http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2004_817-13_Spivak.pdf) (accessed 14 November 2013), 8.

<sup>323</sup>Thorton, “Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces,” 12.

<sup>324</sup>Ibid., iii.

<sup>325</sup>See Chapter 2, Siege and Fall of Grozny, 29.

percent of the friendly casualties.”<sup>326</sup> The consistently poor showing of these soldiers from the 1994 war through the war in 2008 greatly eroded the justification for maintaining this system and enhanced the politicians justification for building a professional force.

### Kontraktniki

The preferred method of Putin to man Russia’s military is the use of contracted soldiers “*kontraktniki*.” The distinction between contracted and conscripted soldiers in the Russian military is similar to drafted and enlisted soldiers in western armies. *Kontraktniki* soldiers sign contracts for a three-year period that serves in similar capacity to a western soldiers enlistment. Switching to a contracted force “would mean a smaller military. It would require fewer bases, less infrastructure and fewer officers to run it.”<sup>327</sup> However this transformation from conscription to a professional army has not occurred rapidly and there are still insufficient numbers of contract soldiers to fill the ranks.

Russia’s military is however making progress. By the end of 2013, Russia’s military is expected to have just under three hundred thousand contracted soldiers, with another fifty thousand each year following until the entire military is under contract.<sup>328</sup> To achieve this, Russia’s forces must address several quality of life issues including providing a higher standard of living, food, and training than provided to soldiers in the

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<sup>326</sup>Olga Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 16.

<sup>327</sup>Thorton, “Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces,” 4.

<sup>328</sup>Viktor Litovkin, “Russian Military Takes a Step Toward Civil Society?” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 10 July 2013, [http://rbth.ru/society/2013/07/10/russian\\_military\\_takes\\_step\\_toward\\_civil\\_society\\_27933.html](http://rbth.ru/society/2013/07/10/russian_military_takes_step_toward_civil_society_27933.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).



past. The Georgia war and the capture of Georgian army bases provided insight to Russian soldiers into the standard of living of other nations militaries. In a widely disseminated expletive laced video, Russian soldiers filmed themselves inside the Georgian barracks in Senaki and questioned why they are forced to live in squalid conditions when Georgian soldiers have nice facilities.<sup>329</sup> Russia's soldiers understand how other soldiers live and unless Russia reaches and maintains these standards, the ability to recruit and keep a professional standing army will be greatly diminished.

Russian forces have in the past struggled with the recruitment and longevity of contracted soldiers. The first serious attempt at contracting soldiers occurred in the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin. However as a result of the fiscal difficulties facing Russia, the promised pay was either late or non-existent. This problem has persisted and made recruitment extremely difficult.<sup>330</sup> Additionally as the video described above demonstrates, the living conditions were often poor further adding to the difficulty in maintaining trained and qualified soldiers. Although Russia faced significant difficulties in building a volunteer army, the combat abilities of these soldiers as exhibited by their effectiveness during the Georgian war have demonstrated the need to continue the program.

One of the primary benefits in building and maintaining an all-volunteer force rests with public support. Not only would the force be smaller, the unpopular

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<sup>329</sup>Cohen and Hamilton, 56.

<sup>330</sup>Aleksandr Khrolenko, Olga Vorobyeva, Oleg Pochinyuk, Vladislav Pavlyutkin, and Anna Potekhina, "Prospects for Military Recruitment," *Foreign Military Studies Office-Operational Environment Watch*, July 2013, [http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/oewatch/201307/Russia\\_07.html](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/oewatch/201307/Russia_07.html) (accessed 15 November 2013).

conscription system could be done away with. The reduction and eventual elimination of the wildly unpopular conscription system is what has driven politicians since Yeltsin to push for a contracted force.<sup>331</sup> Additionally the reports from conflict zones identified the advantages in contracted forces. During the Georgia war, “those units that had a fair number of kontrakniki within their ranks were perceived to have performed better than those that did not.”<sup>332</sup>

The building of a volunteer force is clearly the future for the Russian military. However, radical change in a system can create growing pains. Since the 1990s, Russia has dealt with force structure changes and continue to work through them. The result is a force better prepared than during the 2008 war and will pending any radical fiscal changes, be better prepared in the future.<sup>333</sup> This is not to say that there will not be setbacks. The previous architect for change “Anatolii Serdiukov was dismissed on 6 November 2012, due to a corruption scandal surrounding the state corporation Oboronservis, owned by the Ministry of Defense.”<sup>334</sup> Since his dismissal, military reform has greatly diminished. However to be effective during future conflicts, Russia needs to reform. This need will likely be the driver for future reform.

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<sup>331</sup>RIA Novosti, “Russian Prosecutors Find 65,000 Violations in 2012 Draft,” 16 April 2013, [http://en.ria.ru/military\\_news/20130416/180670179/Russian-prosecutors-find-65000-violations-in-2012-draft.html](http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20130416/180670179/Russian-prosecutors-find-65000-violations-in-2012-draft.html) (accessed 15 November 2013).

<sup>332</sup>Thorton, “Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces,” 19.

<sup>333</sup>Adomanis.

<sup>334</sup>Carlsson.

### Utilization of Soviet Doctrine and TTPs to Meet Operational Needs

With the significant problems still facing Russia's military it is unlikely that development and implementation of radically new doctrine will occur in the near future. However manning and equipment reforms have occurred. To be successful, the Russian military will have no other choice but to adopt new doctrine and tactics.

Among the tactics that most need changed is Russia's use of mass. Russia's use of that military term connotes not a massing of effects as in the American army, but a massing of soldiers. Without a large number of soldiers, Soviet and early Russian commanders could not succeed. "To the Russian commander it –mass- is an indicator of the potential success of an operation."<sup>335</sup> However this mass of soldiers that Russian commanders have relied upon since the Czars is losing its effectiveness. As the conscription-based army is slowly eliminated and a smaller contracted army replaces it, Russian commanders must radically change their thinking. The abundance of soldiers in the past allowed for inadequate leadership, this is no longer the case. Russia's military simply will not have the ability to use their limited number of soldiers for cannon fodder as they have in the past.

#### Lack of Modernity

Even prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia struggled to keep pace with the technological advancements in the west. This problem was only exacerbated with the fiscally constrained environment of the past two decades. Prior to President Putin's

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<sup>335</sup>Dale Smith, "Commonalities in Russian Military Operations in Urban Environments" (Master's Thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2003), 1-2.

efforts to increase military capability, “the Russian defense budget shrunk to two percent of the American budget and the armed forces have been reduced to 1.2 million.”<sup>336</sup>

Although previous defense budgets were only two percent of the American budget, the size of the Russian force was roughly equivalent to the size of the total American force.<sup>337</sup> As a result, the amount of available funds for research, development, and fielding of new and modern equipment is minimal. This minimalist approach to modernity risked becoming endemic across the Russian military with cuts in everything from training to pay.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had a devastating effect on Russia’s military. In the immediate aftermath, “many of the army’s best officers and soldiers left the military due to lack of pay, poor living conditions, and the new promise of capitalism that came with the fall of communism.”<sup>338</sup> The remainder that stayed supplemented their income where possible by selling off state assets such as fuel or even weapons.<sup>339</sup> The end result was a military incapable of conducting operations as demonstrated by the defeat of the Russian army by the Chechens in 1996.

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<sup>336</sup>Alexi Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*, Marshall Papers, No. 2 (Deutschland: George C Marshall Center, 2000), 5.

<sup>337</sup>Global Fire Power, “Russia Military Strength,” 4 December 2012, [http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=Russia](http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=Russia) (accessed 4 December 2012).

<sup>338</sup>Smith, “Commonalities in Russian Military Operations in Urban Environments,” 37.

<sup>339</sup>Haas.

Although some tactical development occurred between the two Chechen conflicts, Russia did not begin an honest assessment until after the 2008 Georgian war. What the Georgia war demonstrated, was the need for a massive reform of the entire Russian military apparatus. Everything from the command structure to upgrades in weaponry and tactics needed development.

During Serdiukov's tenure, he replaced the military districts and command structure from the Soviet era. Russia substituted the former Soviet command structure for four strategic commands (north, south, east, west) which would be overall responsible for all soldiers including ministry of the interior officers and border guards.<sup>340</sup> This setup is similar to the American Geographic Combatant Commanders in that they are given operational control of all soldiers within their area of responsibility.

At the tactical level, the Russian military initiated changes designed to enable flexibility and enhance operational capability. The Russians accomplished this by mirroring western militaries. The core of the old Soviet armies, the division, has been replaced by a modular brigade which possesses internal combat support and combat service support assets.<sup>341</sup> By task organizing the brigades with organic support assets, the Russian military will address the support problems that plagued the Russian invasions of Chechnya and Georgia. This change to the brigade will also begin to address the communication issues that continue to plague the Russian military.

During a fight against a symmetrical opponent, communication and the ability for commanders to control their forces may be the difference between victory and defeat.

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<sup>340</sup>Thorton, "Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces," 25.

<sup>341</sup>Thorton, "Organizational Change in the Russian Airborne Forces," 22.

Commanders need to mass effects at a particular time and place on the battlefield. Without the ability to communicate, failure is likely to occur. Unfortunately for the Russians, the 2008 Georgia war demonstrated the abject failure of Russia's communication network.<sup>342</sup> Although Russia overwhelmed the Georgian army, the inability for commanders to communicate between echelons could prove catastrophic against an army even slightly larger or better prepared than the Georgians.

The failures of Russia's army during the 2008 Georgian war empowered reformers such as Serdiukov to push through changes within the military. The Soviet era generals who actively subverted military reforms could no longer justify their approach to army management. The Soviet era systems failed "the need for quite drastic reform became starkly evident."<sup>343</sup> With President Putin again leading the nation, reforms designed to increase military capability may gain political support.

#### Russian Response to a Conventional Threat

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, degradation in Russian military capability became readily apparent. Russian forces lost in 1996 to the hybrid army fielded by the Chechens and although successful against a more asymmetric based Chechen threat in 1999, significant problems remained. The 2008 Georgia war highlighted these problems. Russia's ability to mass forces and overwhelm the Georgians was the only operational aspect that enabled Russia's success.

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<sup>342</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>343</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

As a result of these conventional military failures, Russia's politicians from Yeltsin in the 1990s through Medvedev to Putin have attempted to build force capacity. This capacity would be something similar to what the Soviet Union possessed in the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s: a conventional force capable of winning large-scale conventional wars and assisting Russian client states in low intensity conflicts.<sup>344</sup> If Russia effectively man's and pay for this type of army, then they would achieve the Putin's desire for an effective professional force. However with two different forces, one focused on large conventional threats in the east, and the other a smaller hybrid threat in the southwest the costs may be prohibitive.<sup>345</sup>

Due to the prohibitive costs associated with modernization and specialization, Putin may be forced to rely on another option. As a result, "Russia's national security concept and military doctrine emphasize nuclear deterrence and nuclear first use as the principal pillars of Russian security."<sup>346</sup> This reliance on a nuclear option was recently demonstrated during the Vostok-2010 exercise. As a means to block the conventional threat from the east, Russian forces "notionally exploded several nuclear land mines" and launched two nuclear capable Tochka-I (SS-21) missiles.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>344</sup>Arbatov, 64.

<sup>345</sup>Thorton, "Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces," 45.

<sup>346</sup>Arbatov, vi.

<sup>347</sup>Thorton, "Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces," 29.

## Conclusion

### A Post-Soviet Way of War?

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's military has dealt with both victory and disaster. Although occurring slowly, operations conducted by Russia have spurred change. The three major conflicts that have occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union highlighted several trends in military operations. Primary among these is Russia's reliance on Soviet tactical methods primarily mass and overwhelming and devastating indirect fire. Although prevalent in Russian operations, focusing on these aspects would miss the underlying evolution of post Soviet military development.

Examining the Chechen wars and the Georgian war, Russia's use of mass becomes readily apparent. During the 1994 Chechen conflict, the Russians only achieved tactical success when they massed significant forces to overcome Chechen combat proficiency. With the decrepit state of the Russian military following the Soviet collapse, this technique of massing forces in the Soviet style was logical, especially considering the deficits of training and maintenance of equipment. The eventual Russian defeat in 1996 identified the need for reforms. However, due to a myriad of factors including resistance of senior officers and a fiscally constrained environment, the Russian military was not able to make the required drastic changes. Strategically, the Kremlin simply did not understand the post Soviet operational environment and assumed that the grandeur of a bygone age would be sufficient to exert control over other states. This was not the case. Compounding the problem, the inability to develop capability at the tactical level forced change discussed later at the strategic level.



During the Chechen interwar period, the Russian military did evolve.<sup>348</sup> These evolutions however were primarily with regards to tactics and maneuver. Russia ensured that it would not make the same tactical mistakes made during the first Chechen conflict. These developments were the only ones that could be achieved as changes to the military structure were still beyond the realm of possibility. With Russia's officer corps filled with a large number of veterans from the first Chechen war, the tactical and operational mistakes made in 1994 were not repeated. Russia focused on use of indirect fire support of infantry and armor units. This technique utilized during the first Chechen war indicated the first steps in development of a new Russian way of war. A way of war more closely associated with the modern armies of the west. The massing of forces is still crucial to Russia's operational success. However, the competence in deploying forces as well as the utilization of joint warfare indicates a development and growth within Russia's military. At the strategic level, the Kremlin exercised operational restraint and built sufficient combat power. Unlike the 1994 war where the army of Russia made straight for the center of Grozny, the 1999 war demonstrated that Russia's military and political leaders possessed operational patience.

By the end of the second Chechen war, Russian forces limited direct operations and instead supported friendly Chechen operations. Following the drawdown, Russian forces again attempted to adapt. These adaptations slowly began to address the organizational deficiencies identified during the Chechen campaigns, primarily the lack of training and professionalism of Russian soldiers, as well as the material deficiencies

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<sup>348</sup>Period from the signing of the Khasavyurt Accords to the August 1999 response to the Dagestani crisis.

plaguing Russia's military. At the strategic level, the realization that Russian forces alone could not crush the Chechen opposition indicated a more realistic approach to handling the crisis. By empowering the Kadyrov regime, the Kremlin identified a way to extricate itself, while maintaining claims of victory. Russia achieved the same end state, the dominance of another region. However, the approach was completely different from Soviet methods. This conflict demonstrated that control, or political pressure, no longer requires the presence of military forces, as was the method preferred by the Soviet Union. Political control and influence will now suffice.

The 2008 Georgia war again demonstrated that Russia out of necessity clung to mass as the preferred technique for dealing with tactical problems. However, the employment of forces and operational goals of the operation are radically different from the techniques of the Soviet Union. As with the drawdown in Chechnya, Russia is content with maintaining a modicum of control through the threat of future force, not the imperial domination that characterized Soviet operations. Even with a modernization of operational and strategic goals, Russia's military continues to face significant obstacles at the tactical level.

As was the case during the Cold War, Russia still looks to the great equalizer, atomic weapons, as the means to ensure the conventional military is not overwhelmed. Planning for and utilizing nuclear capability during war game scenarios demonstrates that Russia's senior leaders still do not possess the confidence in their conventional military to stop a near peer threat to the homeland. Until Russia possess a military capable of repelling any threat, the nuclear option will likely be the primary option for defense of the homeland.

What we see today with Russia, is an army in transition. Russian military and political leaders possess a vision for where the military is headed. However financial and organizational restrictions continue to hamper transformation. As a result, the Russian military continues to rely on the doctrine and methods of the Soviet army. Although still reliant, Russia is simultaneously developing command, control, communications, computers and intelligence systems that will make this method of warfare obsolete. Russian senior leaders (Shoygu and Putin) are thus walking a fine line between the development of doctrine and material that support future war fighting efforts and the need based on manning and currently fielded equipment to fight utilizing the Soviet methods. Finally, with the more assertive international stance taken by President Putin, the readiness and capability of Russia's military becomes more important. It is hence imperative for Russia's military to continue development and transition to a modern army. Understanding this is also imperative for western policy makers as a more assertive Russia will utilize the developing military capability to enhance their international policy.

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