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A View from Chechnya:
An Assessment of Russian Counterinsurgency
During the two Chechen Wars
and Future Implications

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Abstract

Following the 11 September 2001 attacks, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the myriad of smaller engagements taking place around the world in conjunction with the global war on terrorism, military academia has increasingly focused study on historical counter-insurgencies. The study of historical counter-insurgency has been very beneficial to the conduct of contemporary counter-insurgency operations. Although lessons can be learned from historical study, any conclusions tend to be subjective and are time, space and country specific.

Notwithstanding this, historical case studies of counter-insurgency operations reveal a number of consistent themes. These themes include: the recommended approaches towards the conduct of information, security, hearts and minds, and reconstruction operations, the use of allied indigenous forces, the importance of unity of effort between the various counter-insurgent forces, the correct use of air power, the manipulation of the media, the proper training of counter-insurgent forces, logistics operations, and the importance of morale during counter-insurgencies.

In the last two decades Russia has fought two counter-insurgency conflicts in Chechnya. The First Chechen War (1994-1996) was conducted by an underprepared, poorly coordinated Russian military. The First Chechen War was a disaster for the Russians because they simply had no road map for their ultimate objective of returning Chechnya to the Russian Federation. As a result, the Russians were severely mauled by the committed Chechen ‘warrior patriots’ and were forced to withdraw in 1996. Following this war, the Russian military began examining lessons from the first war and other counter-insurgencies with an eye to re-invading Chechnya. When that invasion commenced in 1999, the Russian forces were better prepared and more successful. They saturated the tiny republic with enormous firepower and manpower which made it difficult for the Chechen insurgents to manoeuvre. Although the war lingers on today, the Russians had control over the majority of the country within a year.

Despite this victory, the Russian campaign was flawed; and its conduct has major implications for the future of Russian counter-insurgency operations. While heavy quantities of firepower and manpower were able to put down the insurgency in Chechnya, it is questionable whether Russian firepower and manpower would be successful in putting down an insurgency in a larger country with a larger population.

For Roland Joseph Michael William Renaud,
Always treasured, forever remembered.

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Glossary

AO – Area of Operations

APC – Armoured Personnel Carrier

COIN – Counterinsurgency

FAPSI - Federal Agency of Government Communication and Information

FARC – Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Columbia

FSK – Federal Counterintelligence Service

HN – Host Nation

IED – Improvised Explosive Device

IPB – Information Preparation of the Battlefield

MChS - Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Natural Disaster Relief

MOD – Ministry of Defence

MVD – Ministry of Internal Affairs

NCMD – North Caucasian Military District

NKVD – The Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Early Soviet Secret Police)

SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

The Future of war is not the son of Desert Storm
But the stepchild of Chechnya
*General Krulak*¹

Preface & Aim of Thesis

States have been engaging in Counter-insurgency (COIN) campaigns since antiquity. The Romans fought COIN warfare across their empire they were constantly putting down insurgencies across their empire. In the last century there have literally been hundreds of COIN wars fought across the world. Examples include the French fighting both the Viet Minh in Indo-China during the 1940's and 1950's and the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria during the 1950's until 1962, India fighting an intensified insurgency in Kashmir since 1989; and the government of Sudan's brutal campaign against Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa rebels in Darfur since 2003.

Russia, too, has fought numerous COIN campaigns. Tsarist Russia fought COIN campaigns in the Caucasus throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, putting down three full scale rebellions among the Chechen people during this period. The early Soviet Red Army fought early COIN campaigns against the remnants of the White Armies from 1917 to 1920; and went on to fight COIN operations against the Basmachi Movement in Central Asia between 1921 and 1931, as well as putting down several incipient insurgencies in the Caucasus. Following the Second World War, the Soviet military put down major insurgencies in the Baltic states from 1945 to 1971, and in the Ukraine between 1945 and 1955. This was in addition to putting down embryonic revolts/insurgencies in the Democratic Republic of Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

¹ Glenn, R. (2001). *Capital Preservation: Preparing For Urban Operations in the Twenty-First Century*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, p.61.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss whether or not Russia has been successful when fighting COIN. This thesis will closely examine the two most recent COIN operations fought by the Russian military. The operations discussed will be the two Russian invasions of Chechnya, the first war which lasted from 1994 until 1996, and the second and ongoing war which began in 1999. The conclusion will examine how well the Russians fought COIN in the two wars, and analyze whether lessons learned in the first war were implemented into Russian COIN fighting in the second. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to whether or not Russia will be able to successfully fight COIN operations in the future. This conclusion will be made based upon an analysis of what the Russian armed forces have done correctly and incorrectly with regards to the ‘best practices’ of COIN operations.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this thesis is that it relies completely on secondary sources. The Russian security services do not publish writings on lessons learned; further, very few translations are available of writings from official Russian publications. Because of the Russian media blockade of Chechnya many subjects covered in detail in the first conflict such as intelligence will not be covered in as great a level of detail in the Second.

Notwithstanding, there is adequate secondary source material available in English language publications, as well as translated Russian scholarly journals and writings in order to extract relevant issues and relevant issues and properly analyze Russian COIN fighting in both wars. This will allow the thesis to make convincing and original conclusions on the subject of the Russians security services ability to fight COIN.

Due to the brief nature of this work, ancillary subjects which could have provided insight into the subject matter have had to be omitted. Further, COIN or quasi COIN small wars such as Nagorno-Karabagh, Trans-Dniester, Tajikistan and both the original and recent South Ossetian-Georgian and Abkhazian-Georgian conflicts in which the post-Soviet Russian security services participated will not be covered. However, their performance in

these conflicts could be subjects for future research.

Delimitations

The scope of this thesis is limited to analyzing how proficient the Russian security services were in fighting COIN during the two Chechen Wars. Specific comparisons can be drawn on Russian lessons learned between the two conflicts because of the brief interlude between the two conflicts. Further, the lengthy duration of both conflicts provides scope for an intensive inspection of the Russian security services performance in both conflicts.

Significance of the Thesis

In the post September 11 world, the study of insurgency and COIN has gone from being an ancillary subject of military study into required reading for young officers in Western Armed Forces. Transversely, study of the Soviet military, which was required reading for officers during the Cold War years, has been sorely lacking since the inception of the Russian Federation in 1991.

This has been a mistake, as Russia has gone through a period of deep economic recession in which the Russian security services suffered as well. Russia was destined to be a prosperous country, as it contains rich oil and gas reserves as well as large reserves of many other natural resources. This means that although the Russian military was neglected, renewed investment in strong Russian security services was a certainty once economic recovery was underway, particularly as the Russian psyche has historically lent itself to strong institutions of state power.

Further, the two Chechen wars and Russia's performance therein provide valuable insight into the conduct of Russian forces in conducting COIN operations, as well as how other forces could operate in similar conditions. The thesis will provide valuable

comparable material, as many of the Russians' success and failures in COIN can be seen in the light of the continuing COIN operations being conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Methodology

In order to assess the proficiency of the Russian security services in conducting COIN operations, this thesis will judge Russian performance based on other examples of COIN warfare. To accomplish this, Russia's performance in COIN warfare will be looked at based on nine factors which have been proven to be important during successful COIN campaigns. These nine factors are: information, security, reconstruction hearts and minds, indigenous allies, unity of effort, air power, media manipulation and training, logistics and morale.

Successful COIN operations can be defined as those by in which the country fighting them can consider itself victorious, either through having achieved outright military victory over the insurgency or having reached a political conciliation which retains the COIN nation's interest within the area of operations (AO).

Chapter 1: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Considerations

“The highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy’s plans;
next is to attack their alliances;
next to attack their army;
and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities.”
*Sun Tzu*¹

Defining Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Insurgencies are conflicts in which a superior military force confronts an inferior state, indigenous force or political movement on the ground of the latter’s choosing, either domestically or overseas. Insurgencies are organized low level, localized subversion, using violence in order to seize, nullify or challenge the political authority in a region.² Insurgencies are struggles over contested political space; they are popular uprisings that form and grow through pre-existing societies. Further, they are low intensity conflicts where victory cannot be guaranteed by territorial gain or superior firepower, with the result that traditional decisive battles are replaced by a series of tactical engagements.³ Although a great power may be able to bring overwhelmingly superior resources, technology and an advantage in combat power to a small war, COIN forces often have been beaten or face incredibly prolonged struggles against local insurgents.

Insurgents tend to avoid large scale confrontations with COIN forces, instead relying on small scale actions, such as ambushes, raids, mining and other tactics which allow insurgents to minimize the duration of contact with COIN forces, inflicting the maximum amount of damage while exposing insurgents as little as possible. Kissinger’s maxim that big powers do not necessarily lose small wars, they simply fail to win, is accurate. Big powers are often forced to withdraw from the disputed area once the war has

¹ Sun Tzu. (1994). *Art of War*. USA: Westview Press, Inc., p.129.

² Bureau of Political Military Affairs, U.S. Department of State. (2009). *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.state.gov/document/organization/119629.pdf>, p.2.

³ Cassidy, R. (2003). *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya: Military Strategic Culture and the Paradoxes of Asymmetric Conflict*. Carlisle, PA, USA: Strategic Studies Institute. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB125.pdf>, p.6.

become politically unacceptable; or are forced to change the definition of victory in order to reach some political accommodation. Despite COIN forces winning numerous tactical victories on the battlefield, a COIN force can ultimately lose the war if it goes on long enough to become politically unpopular resulting in a loss of domestic support, as was the case for the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam.

Newly formed insurgent groups are often small in number and fight with limited means. Despite this, they have optimistic strategic objectives: freedom, independence, or the victory of their political thought. As a result insurgents often display a willingness to accept higher costs and persevere against setbacks. COIN forces on the other hand often are both quantitatively and qualitatively superior but fight for limited ends, such as the preservation of their political regime in the best case, and in the worst case the preservation of a peripheral territory or outpost.⁴

Although there are certain factors which have improved the operational success of COIN operations, COIN warfare is very complex. Each factor is very country, time, threat and ally specific. Most COIN operations have been prolonged, usually exceeding five years.⁵

COIN forces must go beyond simply fighting insurgents. They must also protect the population. Insurgents on the other hand only need to demonstrate that they have the ability to cause enough chaos to prove that the COIN forces and other authorities cannot provide adequate security.⁶ The purpose of insurgencies is not necessarily to kill COIN forces, although it is a bonus if they are able to do so. The primary objective of an insurgency is to create enough instability to establish a competing system of control over the population so that the government cannot administer the region.

Insurgents rely on asymmetric tactics to accomplish this, and have little hope of

⁴ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.5.

⁵ Sepp, K. (2005 May-June). *Best Practices in Counterinsurgency*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/sepp.pdf>, p.11.

⁶ Lynn, J. (2005, July-August) *Patterns of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/search/articles/lynn.pdf>, p.23.

ever winning outright in a large confrontation. Thus, insurgents seek to bleed large armies in small scale localized confrontations in the hope that the continuation of the war will be too politically costly for COIN forces and their political superiors to continue to pursue. The goal of an insurgency is best summarised by Mao Tse-Tung:

‘The enemy’s objective is to have us concentrate our main forces for a decisive engagement. Our objective is exactly the opposite. We want to choose conditions favourable to us, concentrate superior forces and fight decisive campaign and battles only when we are sure of victory,....we want to avoid decisive engagements under unfavourable conditions when we are not sure of victory.’⁷

COIN forces objectives are not strictly doing battle with insurgent elements, but also maintaining order; protecting the population as well as protecting important infrastructure. As COIN forces must therefore fight insurgents as well as provide security anywhere the insurgents may strike, security is a major component of successful COIN operations. Without a secure environment no permanent reforms can be implemented. Because of this, the early stages of COIN operations generally require large amounts of COIN forces to protect the population and important infrastructure/installations. With large numbers of personnel conducting operations for protracted periods of time, firm political will and support among the COIN nation’s home population must be maintained through the active engagement of COIN forces with the media. Successful COIN operations have been able to control or mediate the message being portrayed by the media, by aiding propaganda against the target population and minimising the negative messages being received by the home population.

COIN is a dual campaign. It is a military campaign designed to contain the insurgency, while simultaneously being a civil/political campaign which seeks to address the root causes of the insurgency.⁸ All actions must be used to destroy, contain, marginalize or co-opt insurgents or a mixture of these objectives. Ultimate victory occurs when insurgents have been effectively isolated or marginalized from society, and this isolation or marginalization remains permanent because of the support of the population. Most insurgencies are not totally eliminated; rather the insurgents’ movement and their leaders tend to be co-opted or marginalized, and the majority of their supporters become

⁷ Tse-Tung, M. (1967) *On Protracted Warfare*. Peking, China: Foreign Language Press, p.97.

⁸ Bureau of Political Military Affairs, p.2.

reintegrated into society, the economy and local politics as a result of the simultaneous security, civil and political campaigns.

Both societal and government functions require security, and although COIN forces can provide this assistance for a period, the insurgency must be brought down to levels whereby the security situation can be normalized. Security ultimately must be provided by the host nation (HN). Successful COIN forces have ultimately been able to reduce violence levels to allow a transition from COIN forces to police forces. This is vital, because COIN forces cannot necessarily maintain legitimacy indefinitely.⁹ Successful COIN forces have aided HN forces in their development of indigenous security forces and modes of security. This aid has included training HN forces, and equipping and employing them alongside COIN forces on operations.¹⁰

Intelligence

The key component of COIN is information. Throughout the course of a COIN operation, good information provides the difference between killing or capturing insurgents and taking in or killing civilians. Simply put, good intelligence is one of the few sure-fire ways to accurately differentiate between friend and foe. According to Kitson, 'If it is accepted that the problem of defeating the enemy consists very largely of finding him, it is easy to recognize the paramount importance of good information.'¹¹ Good actionable information can identify and detect insurgents or their supporters, allowing COIN commanders to plan missions in which surgical operations such as 'cordon and knock' operations, and targeted raids can be utilised, as opposed to large sweeps that can be unproductive.¹² In short, intelligence can be the difference between successful and

⁹ _____. (2006 June). *U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. FM 3-24, MCWP 3-33.5*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24fd>, p.1-121.

¹⁰ *U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, p.5-40.

¹¹ Kitson, F. (1971) *Low-Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peacekeeping* London: Faber and Faber, p.95.

¹² Petraeus, D. (2006, January-February). *Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/doctrine/doctrine13/version_us/etranger/art3.pdf, p.6.

unsuccessful COIN operations. According to Professor Lawrence Freedmen, ‘in irregular warfare, superiority in the physical environment is of little value unless it can be translated into an advantage in the information environment.’¹³

The primary thrust of the initial information process must be devoted to information preparation of the battlefield (IPB). IPB facilitates the operational understanding of the local that COIN forces are entering. Further, it allows commanders to create a plan that addresses the underlying causes of the insurgency and to prepare units accordingly, the overall goal being that neither commanders nor their subordinates are surprised by what they encounter.¹⁴

IPB provides COIN forces information regarding the cultures living within the Area of Operations (AO), and the perceptions and decision making processes of primary groups and individuals within the AO. It provides COIN forces with information concerning the operational environment in which they will be operating. This information emphasises on details of the human geography of the AO, the makeup of the insurgents, analysis of suburban and urban terrain, key infrastructure, lines of communication and weather analysis.¹⁵ When the IPB process is sustained throughout the course of COIN operations and continuously re-evaluated as circumstances have changed, it has provided COIN commanders with a firm ground work from which to plan operations.

While COIN forces primarily depend on information derived from their own efforts, a significant portion of vital intelligence will come from pro-government sections of the population and those who feel that their security is best provided by COIN forces.¹⁶ The prolonged nature of COIN warfare makes it difficult to neutralize the insurgency in a given AO: it generally takes handovers to occur where new batches of COIN troops enter the AO to replace weary forces. It has proven to be a successful practice in both the Coalition’s Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for COIN forces to provide detailed handover notes to the

¹³ Freedmen, L. (2006). *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

¹⁴ *U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, p. 3-7,8.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3-1,2,16.

¹⁶ Lynn, p.24.

COIN forces which will take over their assignments when they are rotated home. When this practice has been followed through properly, there has been an essentially unbroken line on IPB and operations.

Cultural awareness is a force multiplier in COIN operations. A COIN force that understands the different ethnic groups, tribes, religious elements or political parties, and how these elements view society and interact with one another, has enhanced the conduct of COIN operations in the past. During the course of COIN operations one of the primary modes of gathering intelligence is done in the day to day operations of COIN forces. The contact they make with the civilian population in the AO can provide invaluable information, soliciting the advice of locals on matters of reconstruction, aid and security solutions as well as other pertinent information.

Due to this it is imperative that members of COIN forces understand the basics of at least one of the languages being spoken in the AO and have an understanding of the culture in the AO. Through the course of the IPB, it is imperative that the languages within the AO are identified so that language training can be started, communication aids made and translators found. Translators are necessary throughout the course of operations, as they can collect and translate intelligence, and also interact fluently with the local population and their leaders. Commanders with good cultural awareness have had the ability to better assess the effect of a prospective operation on the perceptions of the population of the AO.

At the operational level, defining the perceptions and decisions making processes of individuals and groups within the AO is critical for COIN commanders and their forces. This stage looks at the human make-up of the AO, including family, tribal, ethnic, religious, and other links within the communities living in the AO. Correctly indentifying these groups is vital when COIN forces face insurgency organized around racial, ethnic, religious or tribal identities. In order to best manipulate any cleavages between groups, COIN commanders must have a working knowledge about formal relationships between the groups of the AO. During operations this information provides forces with the ability to

target the population of the AO along existing societal network lines.

Another key consideration in the IPB process is evaluating the operational environment. This consists of evaluating the terrain, weather, and evaluating the threat that the enemy poses and the capabilities which they possess. The purpose of evaluating the operational environment is to allow COIN forces and their commanders' to understand the operational environment in which they will be conducting operations, as well as to understand the insurgents' approaches and tactics that they might be faced with. It is important for COIN forces to know both what the geographical and physical environment they will be fighting in is, as well as know what the insurgents' goals are, their grievances and their means of generating support. IPB facilitates the COIN forces better understanding of the operational environment in which they are conducting operations, with regard to the people they are fighting amongst and the insurgents whom they are fighting. When the threat is accurately defined, ways of exploiting the insurgents' strategy can be identified.

COIN operations require the partitioning of units down to battalion and even company level. It is imperative that operations feed intelligence, which in turn generates operations. Every operation will have an intelligence component, and in the course of operations servicemen will gather intelligence through their observations and interactions with the civilians of the AO. Therefore, it is vital to the intelligence effort that a good bottom up flow of intelligence can be processed and analysed, so commanders can be better informed when making decisions.

Security

COIN forces must be able to provide security to be successful in COIN operations. Without security, hearts and minds operations, nation building and all other associated COIN actions cannot be successful.¹⁷ According to Galula, successes in COIN operations

¹⁷ Hoffman, B, & Taw, J. (1991). *Defence Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict: The Development of Britain's "Small War" Doctrine During the 1950's*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, p.34.

can only be achieved when, ‘the population is convinced that the counter-insurgency has the will, the means, and the ability to win.’¹⁸ Often in domestic security, insurgency is initially ascribed to banditry, or civil unrest, as was the case with the 1994 Russian invasion of Chechnya or the early Ukrainian resistance of 1944. In foreign interventions, the forces often believe that a local insurgency will not occur because of their weight of numbers and superiority of equipment, as was the case with Napoleon’s invasion of Spain or the coalition invasion of 2003 of Iraq.

Once the insurgency has been identified, the primary security requirement for successful COIN operations is that there must be a plan for attacking the insurgents’ strategy. This cannot be accomplished solely by military means: rather, it requires a fusion of military, economic and political actions. It should be kept in mind that economic or political actions may be for nothing if the AO does not have security, ‘without security, no permanent reforms can be implemented, and disorder will spread.’¹⁹ For this reason, the initial thrust of COIN operations must focus on securing areas from which to conduct operations.²⁰ Within these areas, COIN forces must provide continuous security. Providing security to the area’s population should increase the respect and support for COIN forces, and facilitate the establishment of local government, restoration of basic services and revival of the local economy. These areas can be a model for economic and political objectives, as well as a means to provide secure bases from which to conduct operations against areas where the same level of COIN security is not present.

Areas which are not under the control of COIN forces must be systematically secured by COIN forces. The pattern was followed by the Royal Thai Military when fighting the Communist Party of Thailand, and by the Filipino Military when fighting the Filipino Communists.²¹ Successful COIN forces clear the AO of as many insurgents as possible, and then maintain security in the area so that insurgents cannot return and

¹⁸ Galula, D. (2005). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, p.78.

¹⁹ Cohen, E, Horvath, J, & Nagl, J. (2006 March-April). *Principles Imperatives and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency*. Military Review. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://www.usgcoin.org/docs1/MilitaryReview_2006-Mar-Apr.pdf, p.50.

²⁰ *U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, p. 5-2.

²¹ Marks, T. (1996). *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*. Abingdon, Great Britain: Frank Cass, p.59, 126.

civilians feel safe to continue normal activities. Only then can COIN forces build upon this success by initiating economic projects and political action. In areas with heavy saturations of insurgents, it is often best for COIN forces to begin by conducting raids to disrupt the insurgents' day to day operations: COIN forces should only seek to gain control of these areas if they have firm control over the neighbouring areas.

Throughout the AO individual commanders must conduct operations based upon their assessment of how entrenched insurgents are within their individual AO. Depending upon the strength of the insurgents, offensive or defensive actions may be required. It is essential that COIN forces remain proactive, as passivity provides insurgents with the time and space to launch operations of their own. Constant patrolling by COIN and indigenous forces establishes a presence that also enhances security. Throughout modern COIN operations all successful COIN forces have used patrolling as a fundamental day to day practice: indeed, during the largest extent of their involvement some COIN forces have had as much as two thirds of their force out patrolling.²²

Due to the need to provide large areas of security, initial COIN operations have required large force outputs on the part of COIN forces. It has therefore been imperative that high levels of conflict do not continue for prolonged periods of time, as this may reduce the support for the campaign among the COIN forces' home country population. This means COIN forces must provide security over relatively wide areas, which in turn requires units being broken down to battalion or company strength. These units must live among the population of the AO while conducting operations from joint security stations, combat outposts and patrol bases. With this reality in mind, squad or platoon leaders become significant decision makers during the COIN security operations. Their judgments in the heat of the moment can have a lasting impact on the battlefield.

An important tactic of the insurgents when forced to move due to the presence of too many security forces is their ability to move to another area where there are less security forces operating. The problem is well articulated by Galula who notes:

²² Sepp, p.11.

‘the trouble here is that the enemy holds no territory and refuses to fight for it. He is everywhere and nowhere. By concentrating sufficient forces, the counterinsurgent can at any time penetrate and garrison a red area. Such an operation if sustained, may reduce guerrilla activity, but if the situation becomes untenable for the guerrillas, they will transfer their activity to another area and the problem remains unsolved.’²³

Although COIN forces must be protected, the ultimate arbiter of successful COIN operations is the population of the AO, ‘the counterinsurgent gains ultimate success by, protecting the populace not himself. If military forces stayed locked up in compounds, they will lose touch with the people.’²⁴

The ultimate requirement of the security effort must be to cut off the source of the regenerative power of the insurgency, that is, new recruits and sources of supply. The short term physical support of an insurgency can be interrupted or cut off using many methods such as population control mechanisms or heightened border security.²⁵ Securing borders has been essential because securing border crossings enhances the sovereignty of the AO, and further serves the higher security priority of denying the insurgents both sanctuary and a source of supplies.²⁶ Note that ending foreign and domestic support for the insurgency cannot be achieved by COIN forces alone, but also requires political conciliation and diplomatic pressure.

Ultimately domestic security forces must take over day to day security in AOs. It is important that this is not implemented too early, because often domestic armed forces are not prepared to take over security, and the police forces do not have the power or equipment; and insurgents can capitalize on this weakness. It is important that COIN forces remain until the situation is safer in the AO and local forces are prepared to take on the responsibilities. If COIN forces publicize a withdrawal date, insurgents may bide their time until this date before striking. COIN forces must ensure the people within the AO know their area will not be abandoned to the insurgency. Therefore, it has proven to be preferable when COIN forces can gradually reduce their numbers and hand over the security of the AO to domestic armed or police forces. This process of normalization has proven to be the

²³ Galula, p.50.

²⁴ Cohen, Horvath & Nagl, p.52.

²⁵ *U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, p.1-129.

²⁶ Sepp, p.11.

key measure of security. Normality occurs when, ‘security must move from the realm of major combat operations into the realm of law enforcement.’²⁷

Despite the need for security, it is normally impossible to kill every insurgent, and even attempting to do so can be counterproductive. COIN forces pursuing the policy of insurgent annihilation risk engendering a negative response from the population of the AO. All the force used will inevitably result in some kind of reaction by the population. Although force is necessary to destroy the insurgent hardcore, all actions must be weighed up against the danger of creating more insurgents. All the actions of COIN forces can create popular resentment. Civilians and infrastructure are generally collateral damage during the actions taken to neutralize the insurgents.

It has therefore been imperative that before commencing operations the social/political implications of the operation were considered. According to Petraeus, ‘(we)²⁸ used to ask before the conduct of operations...Will this operation...take more bad guys off the street than in the way it was conducted? If the answer was no then we took a very hard look at the operation before proceeding.’²⁹ As a consequence of these operations martyrs can be created, and resentful refugees and other segments of an angry population can become the new recruits for the insurgency. It is not uncommon at these times for insurgents to conduct offensives, raids or acts of terror in the hope of enticing COIN forces to overreact.

COIN forces, who take a measured reaction to these events, face far better success in decreasing the immediate tempo of the insurgency. Stepping up dismounted patrols and targeted operations such as ‘cordon and knock’, rather than large sweeps, are examples of the types of measured reactions. Over-reaction by COIN forces can create cycles of revenge which feeds and increases the insurgency. Given that most insurgencies can only be successfully put down if security provides the framework for a wider political solution, it is imperative that COIN actions do not hinder the overall political solution. Marginalizing

²⁷ Cohen, Horvath & Nagl, pp.50-51.

²⁸ The COIN Commanders

²⁹ Petraeus, p.5.

and out-competing the insurgents and achieving control over the socio-political space is the true aim: ‘the intent is not to reduce violence to zero or to kill every insurgent, but rather to return the overall system to normality.’³⁰

Reconstruction and Hearts and Minds

The primary means by which eventual victory is achieved in COIN warfare is through obtaining the support of the population. COIN forces cannot wait until the conflict has been won to gain the population’s support: rather, support must be provided as soon as security is achieved in an area. COIN forces must act proactively. They are best served by utilizing resources towards reconstruction as well as rebuilding basic services as soon as the area is secure. Money must be provided as soon as possible to give those COIN forces, NGO’s, local contractors, businesses and workers the funds necessary to begin reconstruction. Reconstruction has been essential in providing much needed basic services, and stimulating long term economic growth. This growth, in turn, has ultimately led to public confidence in the government and reduced the pool of frustrated unemployed.

The root cause of many insurgencies is often traced to the government’s neglect of the people’s basic needs.³¹ There are numerous civil projects which will aid COIN forces in their hearts and minds campaign. Projects can improve the public perception of COIN forces. Examples of such projects include; the building of wells, repairing and building irrigation systems, creating employment programs, and rebuilding hospitals. Reconstruction funds can also aid in restoring a sense of normality among residents of the AO by, for example, repairing parks and swimming pools, providing funds for the creation of sports teams, and establishing loan programmes for small businesses. Reconstruction can also benefit security through the rebuilding of local police and military facilities such as operating bases or training centres. The security of the people must be assured as a basic

³⁰ Kilcullen, D. (2006, September, 28). *Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency*. Proceedings of the U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Conference. Washington, DC: Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.usgcoin.org/docs1/3PillarsOfCounterinsurgency.pdf>, p.3,6.

³¹ Sepp, p.49.

necessity, along with food, water, shelter, sanitation and healthcare.

Throughout reconstruction it is important that locals are used as much as possible as, ‘increasing the number of stakeholders is critical to success.’³² It is important that every project increases the number of people within the AO who feel that they have a stake in the country’s success. When effective hearts and minds operations have been conducted by COIN and friendly indigenous forces, it has often gone a long way in gaining the population’s support of the government and COIN forces as well as showing the population the benefits of actively supporting the government.³³

Indigenous Allies

Historically, most COIN forces have been able to eventually transfer security over to their indigenous allies. Optimally, the quantities of security forces are downsized and security responsibilities are transferred from the military to the police. Domestic public support in the COIN country does not hold out indefinitely when the country’s military is fighting protracted COIN campaigns, especially if troop losses mount and there appears to be little gain to show from it. While COIN forces may, at best, enter insurgent areas as liberators, it will only be a short time before they may be viewed as occupiers:

‘the length of the half-life is tied to the perceptions of the populace about the impact of the liberating force’s activities...(they)³⁴ would see us damage property and hurt innocent civilians in the course of operations, and would resent the inconveniences of checkpoints, low helicopter flights and other military activities’.³⁵

It has therefore proved to be imperative for countries conducting COIN to treat their indigenous allies as full partners. COIN forces must build meaningful relationships with local indigenous populations in security, reconstruction and economic revival.

The population within the AO knows the situation in more detail and familiarity

³² Petraeus, p.5.

³³ Sepp, p.52.

³⁴ The local populace within the AO

³⁵ Petraeus, p.4.

than the COIN forces.³⁶ Therefore, it is important for COIN commanders to heed T.E. Lawrence's advice:

‘do not try to do too much with your own hand ...it is their war, and you are to help them, not win it for them...It may take them longer and it may not be as good as you think, but if it is theirs, it will be better.’³⁷

The COIN forces must aid their indigenous allies to build their security services. This has initially focused on creating individual army and police units. The security units should in the outset be equipped similarly to the insurgents, as this is a cheaper and more effective way of supplanting the insurgents' role in society and in the streets. These forces, although effective when under the firm control and support of the COIN forces, can either be ineffective (for example, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam [ARVN]), or brutal, hurting the ongoing hearts and minds side of operations, when unregulated. In the long run, COIN forces must assist by supporting the creation of security support structures such as ministries, logistical support units, training organizations, and military education systems.³⁸ Creating local police and military units has proved to be as important as ensuring they have the structural and administrative support units, which can ultimately help to ensure the lasting security of the government in the AO.

Most societal and government functions require security. As it is in the best interest of COIN forces to create and utilize indigenous security forces, COIN forces must be prepared to train, equip and use indigenous forces alongside themselves during operations. This method has been very successful where the U.S. has equipped and trained the Iraqi Army, police and various pro-government militia forces. The success of the COIN force is thereby reflected in the success of the domestic forces and the domestic government. In all the activities conducted by COIN forces whether they are security operations, economic revival activities, rebuilding basic services or rebuilding local governance, it is beneficial to cooperate with local partners. To ensure the best cooperation from indigenous allies, COIN commanders and their forces must develop productive links with local government officials, religious leaders, local and tribal leaders.

³⁶ Lawrence, T. E. (1917, August, 20). ‘*Twenty-Seven Articles*’. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.pbs.org/lawrenceofarabia/revolt/warfare4.html>, p.5.

³⁷ Ibid, p.5.

³⁸ Petraeus, p.7.

Ultimately the end of COIN operations occurs when the AO can depend upon its own indigenous security forces to provide security and the rule of law. When indigenous security forces can ensure security, the establishment of government, social services and economic growth are more likely to be achieved.

Unity of Effort

Historically, COIN operations are more likely to be successful when a single COIN commander has the authority to both lead the COIN operations and have overarching authority over all government agencies. This was the case with Field Marshal Sir John Harding in Cyprus and General Sir Gerald Templar in Malaya. A single high commander can often help avoid bureaucratic rivalries or infighting, which allows better coordination between the intelligence effort and the civil, police and military administrations.

This however, is often not an option in modern COIN operations. As a result, COIN commanders must do their best to ensure cooperation, or, at a minimum, avoid confliction. COIN commanders must be able to constantly liaise with the different actors.³⁹ The ultimate goal is that COIN commanders can coordinate operations, initiatives and messages with their inter-agency partners, domestic security counterparts and domestic government leaders.

Due to the nature of COIN, battalion and smaller-sized unit operations are often more effective at countering insurgent activities. COIN forces need to spread out and get as close as possible to the population within the AO in order to provide them with security. The soldiers on the ground must have an easily identifiable chain of command to ensure they know who to contact for support. Commanders must ensure that all COIN forces are aware of the overarching mission intent and exercise initiative within those parameters.

³⁹ U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, p.1-121.

Unity of effort is required for COIN forces to be effective learning organizations. COIN units must make observations when they are conducting operations and apply lessons learned. All lessons must be passed throughout the command structures so that methods and tactics can be adapted, based on best practice. This, in turn, requires soldiers who are intelligent and mentally agile.

Air Power

With the decentralized nature of COIN warfare, airpower can play a decisive as well as a diverse role which can roughly be divided into three categories; direct support of COIN forces, isolation of the AO, and support operations such as airlift or reconnaissance. Air power can bring immediate fire-power to forces, and insert new or additional forces into the theatre by a variety of means of insertion. Large parts of the uninhabited countryside can be patrolled quickly and extensively with airpower.⁴⁰ This tactic has been used extensively by the Columbian Air Force, which has used air power to monitor Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Columbia (FARC) rebels and their coca plantations, as well as to constantly harass the rebels. By utilising air power, insurgents can be monitored along long vital roads, international borders and sea routes. In conjunction with ground patrols, air power allows vital troops, which would otherwise be tied up patrolling large tracts of countryside, to be freed up for urban operations and other operations where air power is less effective. Air power can be vital in transporting COIN forces into and out of battle, as it is far less susceptible to insurgent ambushes or mines that can be present along land routes.

Air power has been decisive during COIN operations when used in the right way, and in the right context, such as when the political implications of strikes are on the minds of both pilots and commanders. Although air power can be a definitive combat multiplier for COIN forces, it must be used judiciously. If air operations create unnecessary hostility

⁴⁰ Downs, W. (2005 Spring). *Unconventional Airpower*. Air & Space Power Journal. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj05/spr05/vorspr05.html>.

on the part of the people of the AO and if air strikes lead to unnecessary civilian casualties, then air power actually hinders the larger mission. Thus, it is essential that air power be used selectively in order to avoid creating more support for the insurgents. In order to maintain air-to-ground cohesion it is imperative that air liaison officers and tactical air controllers are well placed throughout a COIN force. Forward air controllers are also useful, as they are able to call in airstrikes and assaults when they encounter insurgent concentrations.

Media Manipulation

Publicly available information is critical in COIN operations. The primary purveyor of this information has been the media. According to T.E. Lawrence, ‘the printing press is the greatest weapon in the armoury of the modern commander.’⁴¹ In modern times this definition must be expanded beyond the printing press to the DVD recorder, the internet and the mass media, which can be a great weapon both for and against a COIN force. Insurgents and COIN forces both fight for media attention. If the insurgents can gain the attention of the media they can undermine the legitimacy of the HN government as well as the COIN forces. This is not to say that the media is a combatant or opponent of COIN forces, but it is definitely an important actor, as a tool which can be used by both the insurgency and the COIN forces alike.

COIN forces’ spokespeople must be able to get in contact with the media quickly. COIN commanders must be able to quickly give accurate information about significant events through the chain of command and to the media. This can pre-empt rumours which can come about if insurgents are able to make the headlines. Throughout the course of the insurgency, when significant events are not occurring, COIN spokespeople must develop and sustain narratives that work by continuously bringing these themes up in all forms of media.

⁴¹ Lawrence, T. E. (October 1920) *The Evolution of a Revolt*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.cgsc.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/Lawrence/lawrence.asp>.

Insurgencies are protracted by nature, and since the inception of modern mass media the home audience in the COIN country has become an active participant in whether or not COIN operations are successful. The technology driven globalisation which has resulted in the spread of the media has also fundamentally changed the nature of insurgency. Insurgents now have wide access to the internet and sympathetic media organizations, which has given them the ability to not only access these global media organs, but also to influence information flows and engage in dialogue with media by communicating successes, command themes and other messages.

There are a variety of ways for COIN forces to get their message out, including embedded media, press conferences, applying resources, and dialogue with network media outlets.⁴²

When COIN forces can manipulate the media correctly, the media can extend the COIN forces influence as well as delegitimize the insurgency.⁴³ When the media is not correctly manipulated, however, it can act as an impartial intermediary which will cover any story of value.

In the same way the information and digital revolutions have magnified the ability of modern insurgents to exploit their successes. The media has provided an outlet for insurgents to extend their influence and increase their credibility by flaunting small tactical successes out of proportion.⁴⁴ Insurgents can take advantage of public and private media, press releases, interviews and the internet; and have the added advantage that their messages need not be factual, but need only to resonate among sections of the population.⁴⁵

When insurgents gain media attention it gives them a means from which to get their message out to the people, excuse insurgent attacks through explanations, inflate public

⁴² U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, p. 5-29.

⁴³ Hoffman, F. (2007). *Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?* Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://smallwarsjournal.com/document/neocoin.pdf>, p.82.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.82.

⁴⁵ U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, p.3-98.

perceptions of the insurgents' capabilities and diminish the public perceptions of the capabilities of the COIN forces and their allies.⁴⁶ Further, it allows insurgents to generate public support broadcasting their own successes, as well as the failures and the excesses of the indigenous government and COIN forces.⁴⁷

Training

Forces which are trained and prepared specifically for COIN warfare have been critical in successful COIN operations. Forces undertaking COIN operations require a different training regime than if they were conducting conventional operations. Although certain standard training practices, such as patrolling and marksmanship, are applicable for forces conducting COIN operations, these training practices must be expanded with training which is largely COIN-centric, including improvised explosive device (IED) protocols, language training, contact drills, and convoy protection. Countries which have trained sections of their forces for the operational realities of COIN warfare have fared far better in the course of COIN operations than those which have not.

Logistics

Good logistical support, which provides the necessary supplies and equipment in a prompt and efficient manner, is critical to successful COIN operations. It should be noted that logistical support for COIN operations is far more complex and difficult than that required for conventional operations. Logistics and other support personnel, who during a conventional war conduct their work in what is often termed 'the rear', may find themselves at the centre of action during COIN operations, as insurgents see them as easy targets and also as a source of supplies. Further, COIN logistics units must be able to provide the necessary equipment and supplies across dangerous AOs to ensure that combat

⁴⁶ U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, p.1-12,1-13.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.3-97.

units can continue to function at peak performance, and that morale and combat effectiveness are maintained.

Morale

Historically, COIN warfare has posed exceptional challenges for the morale of forces having to fight it. COIN forces are often faced with a vague enemy who is invariably able to blend into the population. Conducting operations in this environment is extremely stressful for COIN forces, because the enemy can be ill defined and could potentially be anywhere. It is therefore essential that high morale is maintained among COIN forces to keep them fighting at their best. Forces with low morale generally do not conduct operations as efficiently as those with high morale: further, they are more likely to use excessive force, which will harm the overall strategic objectives of COIN warfare.

Chapter 2: The First Chechen War

“Everywhere there are mountains, everywhere forests,
and the Chechens are fierce and tireless fighters.”
John F Baddeley¹

History, Geography and Ethnography

The Chechen republic is a small landlocked nation encompassing approximately 15,300 square kilometres. Chechnya's natural geographic boundaries form a rough quadrangle between the Terek and Sunzha rivers in the West and North; the Andi mountain range, separating it from Dagestan, in the East; and the Caucasian mountain range to the South. The name 'Chechen' is derived from a Chechen lowland village where the Russians first encountered them; the Chechens refer to themselves as Nokhchii.² The Chechens have been living around their present-day territory for over 6,000 years. Chechnya has historically been a natural frontier dividing Europe from Asia. Today Chechnya is bordered by Ingushetia to the West, Georgia to the South, Dagestan to the East and Stravropol Krai to the North and North Ossetia in the North West. Northern Chechnya is comprised primarily of plains which gradually rise into hills, and the country is virtually bisected in half by the Terek River. South of the Terek is Grozny which is surrounded by hills. South of Grozny the geography quickly rises into vast mountain ranges and valleys.

¹ Baddeley, J. (1908). *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*. London, UK: Longmans Green & Co., p.268.

² Dunlop, J. (1998). *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press, p.1.



Figure 1. Chechnya: 1991-2010

(Source: <http://geography.about.com>)

The population of the Chechen Republic in 1991 numbered around 1.2 million, of whom 744,500 were Chechens. The Republic also comprised 229,500 Russians, 21,000 Ukrainians, 15,000 Armenians, 10,000 Nogayans, 6,000 Tatars and numerous other small groups of Caucasians such as Ingush and Georgians.³ In 1994 the Chechen people were almost exclusively followers of the Naqshbandi Islamic order, Islam having penetrated the Caucasus in the seventeenth century and generally accepted by the Chechen people by the

³ Dunlop, pp.3-4.

eighteenth century.⁴

Chechen society is a clan based society in which there is a primacy of three main philosophies; *Adat*, *Tiep* and Islam. Chechens fight for their *tiep*, which roughly translates as ‘clan.’ A *tiep* is made up of roughly two or three villages comprised of 600-1000 people per village, meaning each *tiep* can call upon the services of roughly 400-600 fighters. There is a total of 150 *tieps* in Chechnya, the majority of which send members to fight when there is external invasion.⁵ When there is no external threat Chechen *tieps* frequently fight one another. This clan warfare is governed through a traditional judicial system called *Adat*. *Adat* was created essentially to govern economic interactions; it concerns questions such as crime, family relations and inheritance, as well as the personal conduct and obligations of individuals who were part of a society based off an agricultural and nomadic animal rearing way of life.⁶ *Adat* governs the Chechen system of blood vendetta; if a Chechen is killed the system of *adat* demands that members of the Chechens *tiep* are sworn to avenge that death. This has often led to endless inter-clan warfare or, in the case of a wrong doing by a foreign invader, complete support of the *tiep* against that foreign invader. Despite constant blood feuds between Chechen *tieps*, an important feature in Chechen society has been egalitarianism and personal freedom. Historically Chechens have rarely created sustained political hierarchies.⁷ The need to reach consensus and the lack of strong political hierarchies has made it difficult for the Chechens to maintain dialogue with external actors, preventing reconciliation or negotiations.⁸

Historically, the Russians and Chechens have fought intermittently since the 1500s, and since that time the two peoples have had a poor relationship. Warm water ports in the Black Sea had always been a strategic objective of the Tsars, and as Chechnya lay along the path to the Black Sea it was one of the regions which bore the brunt of Russian ambitions.

⁴ Dunlop, pp.3-4.

⁵ Karasik, T. (2000, March, 15). *Chechen Clan Tactics and Russian Warfare*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/353>, p.2.

⁶ Blandy, C. (2003, July). *Chechnya: Normalisation*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from, <http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/documentlistings/caucasus/P40/view?searchterm=Chechnya:%20Normalisation>, p.45.

⁷ Trenin, D, & Malashenko, A. (2008). *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in post-Soviet Russia*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p.15.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.15.

The initial Russian seizure of Chechnya occurred during the reign of Catherine the Great, when the Russian commanders Alexander Surorov and Prince Grigorii Potemkin penetrated deep into the region. Chechen insurgency, however, pushed back many of these Russian gains.

The first major sustained Russian advance into Chechnya was commanded by General Yermolov in the early 1800s. In order to subdue the Chechens and constantly retain an Imperial Military presence in the region, Yermolov ordered the construction of three huge fortresses between 1818 and 1821: *Groznaya* (Menacing or Dread), *Vnezapanaya* (Sudden) and *Burnaya* (Stormy) in Dagestan.⁹ The Russians, having built these strategic fortresses along the Terek and Sunzha rivers, essentially cut off the fertile North from the mountainous highlands in the South, effectively creating an impenetrable line from which to suppress the Chechens and ensure their loyalty, much as the English had done when suppressing the Welsh. Yermolov implemented ruthless policies in order to subdue the Chechens, including burning crops, killing flocks, sacking or destroying whole villages, and killing all the men and enslaving the women and children.¹⁰ The Russians burned the Chechen forests in order to destroy one of the Chechen insurgents' primary refuges and to make Russian forces safer from attack. The Russians frequently used brutal methods in order to subdue resistance; between 1856 and 1864 the Imperial forces resorted to whole scale ethnic cleansing, where they created the conditions in which approximately 600,000 Muslims from the Caucasus, 100,000 of whom were Chechen, were forced to leave for the Ottoman Empire. Approximately 33% of those who left died on route.¹¹

In 1917, during the Russian civil war, the Muslim mountain people of the Northern Caucasus established a theocratic democracy. Although this state was initially supported by the Bolsheviks as they had received support during the civil war, gradually it was suppressed by the Bolsheviks following the seizure of the region by the Red Army in 1920. Throughout the early Soviet period the Chechens continued to rebel in small but popular uprisings. These uprisings were the result of attempts by the Bolsheviks to introduce the

⁹ Baddeley, pp.107-108.

¹⁰ Dunlop, p.15.

¹¹ Ibid, p.29-30.

brutal restrictions that were part of war communism and collectivization, as well as their move to exterminate a Kulak class in Chechnya which simply did not exist. In 1937, approximately 14,000 Chechens (approximately 3% of the population) were caught up in Stalin's Great Terror, either being exiled to Siberia or executed.¹²

The worst event in Russo-Chechen relations occurred during World War 2. Despite over 29,000 Chechens leaving their homes to fight the invading Germans, Stalin decided to deport the Chechen people.¹³ Approximately 425,000 Chechen and Ingush were exiled to the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and Kirgiz SSR,¹⁴ ostensibly in order to stop the Chechens from potentially rebelling and joining the German war effort.¹⁵ Roughly 30%-40% of those who were exiled died from typhus and other diseases while en route to Central Asia.¹⁶ According to the NKVD's Department of Special Settlements, 144,704 (23.7%) of the deported died within a year of arriving in Central Asia.¹⁷ The deportees were given nowhere to live and had no crops or livestock to feed themselves, and most of those Chechens who survived only did so because of the generosity of their new Central Asian neighbors or alternatively from stealing livestock from them.¹⁸ The Chechens were unable to return to their homelands until 1957 following Stalin's death, when Khrushchev denounced the policies of Stalin. Despite being allowed to return, the Chechens remained stigmatized people having no homes or jobs to go back to, as these had been given to Russian settlers. Gradually the Chechens were able to regain many of their lost homes, often intimidating the Russian inhabitants to leave the republic. Chechens remained second class citizens in their own republic until the 1980s, while Russians continued to occupy the majority of top positions in the republics political institutions and oil industry.¹⁹

¹² Dunlop, p.55.

¹³ Tishkov, V. (2004). *Chechnya Life in a War-Torn Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p.24.

¹⁴ According to Dunlop 239,768 Chechens and 78,479 Ingush arrived in Kazakh SSR and 70,089 Chechens and 2,278 Ingush arrived in Kirgiz SSR in 1944.

¹⁵ Thomas, T. (1995). *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: the Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1995/chechpt2.htm>, p.3.

¹⁶ Dunlop, p.68.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.70.

¹⁸ Tishkov, p.28.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.41.

The Chechens' historical experiences with the Russians had been very negative. In order to subdue the Chechens the Russians consistently relied on brutalization, which resulted in a string of Chechen insurgencies. In 1991, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, Chechen nationalists sought to take advantage of this and began agitations aimed at toppling the Pro-Soviet/Russian government and turn Chechnya into a sovereign independent republic. In August 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved, and as in most of the republics of the former Soviet Union (such as Georgia, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) a Soviet-era strong man remained in power in Chechnya.

On 6 September 1991 the Chechen Supreme Soviet was stormed by members of Dzhokar Dudaev's National Guard. Dudaev seized power the following day, at which time he declared the Chechen Republic an independent state. On 27 October, following an election, he was appointed President. Dudaev's election was not endorsed by large opposition groups in Chechnya or by the Russian government, both of which began working to overthrow the new president. Dudaev's time in office coincided with a Chechnya which was economically shattered, undergoing a complete Russian air and land blockade. Society was ruled by criminal syndicates directly related to segments of the *tiesps*, and the country was also politically divided with the opposition controlling large sections of the country, especially in the North.

The Russian government reacted to Dudaev's election initially by declaring a state of emergency in Chechnya, and shortly thereafter flew 600 Internal (MVD) troops into Khankala airbase outside of Grozny in order to regain control. The troops were overpowered by Chechen fighters who immediately surrounded the Russian planes and sent the MVD servicemen back to Russia in buses. Embarrassed, the Russian Supreme Soviet subsequently revoked the state of emergency in Chechnya.²⁰

Until the war began in 1994 the Russians utilized a covert campaign to overthrow Dudaev. Initially the Russians supplied arms and money to the various opposition groups

²⁰ Wallwork, R. (2004). *Artillery In Urban operations: Reflections On Experiences in Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA429031>, p.23.

but as time went on the Russians resorted to openly supplying servicemen to one of the opposition groups, the Provisional Council. In early November, 1994, 85 Russian soldiers and 170 tanks accompanied 5,000 Chechen opposition fighters in an attack on Grozny.²¹ The Russian servicemen taking part in the invasion had been paid between 5-6 million rubles each.²²

The Russians tried to take the city using a coup de main: columns of tanks drove for the centre of Grozny. The few accompanying infantry gradually dropped off as the tanks drove deeper into the city making them perfect targets for Dudaev's militiamen armed with RPGs.²³ The attack was a complete failure, with 67 Russian tanks destroyed,²⁴ 27 Russian soldiers captured, and the Russian involvement being made public.²⁵ The failure of the attack badly damaged the reputation of the Provisional Council. Although it was widely known throughout Chechnya that the Provisional Council was supplied with both equipment and money by the Russians, the use of Russian servicemen tanks and aircraft brought up distant memories of Russian repression. As a result, many apathetic Chechens joined Dudaev's militias, and the Provisional Council was widely perceived to be a Russian puppet government by most Chechens.

Following the failure of the November attack, the Russian security commanders responsible for helping the Provisional Council immediately began distancing themselves from the operation; and Defense Minister Grachev remarked, 'I would never have allowed tanks to enter the town since it is totally unprofessional.'²⁶ Despite these words, President Yeltsin and the Power Ministers decided to deploy regular Russian forces in an open bid to regain control of Chechnya using similar tactics as had been used by the Provisional Council.

²¹ Grau, L. *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle of Grozny*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1995/grozny.htm>. 1

²² Seely, R. (2001). *Russo-Chechen Conflict 1800-2000: A Deadly Embrace*. London, UK: Frank Cass, p.168.

²³ Ibid, p.168.

²⁴ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

²⁵ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.28.

²⁶ Seely, p.169.

On 30 November 1994, in accordance with Article 99 of the Russian Constitution, President Yeltsin signed Decree No.2137c entitled, ‘On steps to reestablish constitutional law and order in the territory of the Chechen Republic.’²⁷ With this order, Russian forces began crossing into Chechnya in order to reestablish constitutional order in Chechnya and to preserve the territorial integrity of Russia.

The Invasion and Occupation Plan

The North Caucasus Military District Command was ordered to organize an invasion around the following objectives; reestablish law and order in the Chechen republic in accordance with the enacted legislation of the Russian Federation, stabilize the situation in the Chechen Republic, disarm illegal armed bands, and confiscate their weaponry. Those offering resistance were to be crushed. The mission was developed primarily by the General Staff of the Armed Forces, with minor involvement from the Power Ministries: the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Security.

Russia’s invasion strategy and tactical approach was modeled on the initial occupation of Afghanistan’s urban areas by the Soviets. It was believed that Chechen urban centers would be easily captured, as had been the case in Afghanistan. The Russian invasion plan involved the rapid organization of three invasion groups situated in Mozdok, Vladikavkaz and Kizliar.²⁸ Just two weeks were provided for the Russian forces to be organized: from 29 November to 6 December 1994.²⁹

The invasion of Chechnya was scheduled to begin on 11 December 1994, at which time three Russian battle groups were to advance towards Grozny from the East, North and West, occupying all the major population centers along the way. It was expected these groups would reach the outskirts of Grozny by 13 December, at which time Grozny would

²⁷ Kulikov, p.17.

²⁸ Seely, p.223.

²⁹ Kulikov, p.23.

be surrounded and the siege would commence.³⁰ The assault on Grozny was to be conducted from North to South, and along the way key nodes, including radio and television stations, the presidential palace and other government buildings, were to be seized. Grozny was supposed to be under Russian control within one to three days. It was expected that the Chechen leadership and any resistance offered would be destroyed or simply dissolve in the face of the speed of the invasion and the superior firepower of the Russian Armed Forces.

Once Grozny was taken, the Russian Armed Forces in the city would immediately start disarming the population. By 21 December, Russian constitutional authority was supposed to be restored in Grozny; the Federal Counterintelligence Service (FSK) and MVD would take over security, disarmament and normalization. The armed forces would continue the campaign south, and after each area was secured it was to be handed over to the FSK and MVD to provide long term normalization and security. It was assumed that by between 23 December and 29 December, Russian constitutional authority would be completely reestablished throughout the Chechen Republic.³¹

The Invasion and Assault

From the outset of the Russian invasion of Chechnya the coordination of the three invasion groups was unsynchronised. The operation was scheduled to begin at 0500 hours on 11 December 1994, however, the day before at 2330 hours the Defense Minister received word from the commander of the Vladikavkaz group that his (the commander's) forces were not ready to move, and as a result, the start of the operation was pushed forward to 0800 hours on 11 December. The Vladikavkaz group did not start moving until 0900 hours, and was quickly forced to stop when unarmed North Ossetian locals blocked the road. It took two hours for the group to reach the border, badly throwing off coordination and killing any element of surprise there might have been.³²

³⁰ Kulikov, p.26.

³¹ Ibid, p.27.

³² Seely, p.226.

The Russian advance towards Grozny was protracted. All three groups were slowed down by sniper, artillery and mortar fire, as well as hidden explosive devices and mines. It was not until 20 December that the Mozdok group got into position, and the following day that the other two groups could reach their positions around Grozny. This was over a week behind schedule.³³

The initial Russian assault on Grozny occurred on New Year's Eve, 1994, ten days behind schedule. The primary target of this assault was the presidential palace, while secondary targets were other government buildings, TV and Radio stations, and other important infrastructures. The Russians attempted to take the city on the march with only tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs). However, due to lack of training and conflicting orders, infantry accompanying the columns which should have dismounted the APCs remained in the hulls.³⁴ The Chechens allowed the first columns to penetrate into the heart of the city, only impeding them with sniping and road blocks, and thereby funneled the Russian assault forces onto roads and alleys which had been pre-prepared as kill zones. To further complicate the Russians' movement in the city, the Chechens had boarded up first floor windows and doors to buildings. When the Russians were ambushed even the Russian soldiers who did dismount were unable to take cover within buildings and were at the mercy of Chechen snipers and machine gunners. The Russians initially considered their movement into the city as gains. Yet, the Chechens were holding off on major ambushes until the Russian columns were deeper into Grozny.³⁵

The Russians, advancing in armored columns or idling while awaiting orders, were easy targets for the Chechens laying in ambush in the urban canyons of Grozny. There were two primary reasons for this. Firstly, the Chechens had very good anti-tank capabilities, being armed with surplus Soviet RPGs and an assortment of other anti-tank weapons. Secondly, they understood the limitations of armour in confined spaces. The primary guns

³³ Kulikov, p.38.

³⁴ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

³⁵ Knezys, S, & Sedlickas, R. (1999). *The War in Chechnya. Texas: Texas A&M University Press* Orr, M. (1996 November). *The Current State of the Russian Armed Forces*. Sandhurst, U.K.: Conflict Studies Research Centre, p.107.

of the Russian tanks and APCs were unable to elevate in order to cover the upper stories and basements of the buildings.³⁶ Russian troops within the APCs had further difficulties; the narrow vision from within the APCs firing ports made it difficult for them to identify insurgents hiding within buildings. Further, the fields of fire for their small arms from within the confines of the APCs were even more limited than those of the main guns of the APCs, making it impossible for them to engage most targets.

The Chechen ambush centered around the Chechens in four or five man fighting cells. These cells consisted of a sniper armed with a Draganov or a high power scoped hunting rifle, a security man armed with AK-47 or 74, a machine gunner, and an anti-tank gunner armed with an RPG-7 or 18; with any other fighters assigned as ammunition bearers or medics.³⁷ Numerous hunter-killer teams would deploy in pre-prepared fortified basements, and second and third stories of buildings. They would communicate and coordinate their attacks with other cells in the area through the use of cell phones or Motorola type hand radios. The cells would coordinate the destruction of the Russian columns starting with the lead and rear vehicle, in order to box in the rest of the column within the narrow streets and alleys of Grozny. In coordination, Chechen anti-tank gunners from numerous cells would shoot at individual vehicles simultaneously to ensure their destruction.³⁸ Machine gunners and snipers would suppress any dismounted infantry, while the security man, often further armed with Molotov cocktails would throw them from the windows on the vehicles below. Further, the armored vehicles were unable to defend themselves very well even when within their firing ark as the Chechens were firing simultaneously from multiple scattered locations.

The Russian units entering Grozny on New Year's Eve were completely unprepared for what the Chechens had waiting for them and, all the units were heavily attacked and forced to withdraw. The units advancing from the East and West dug in when they were contacted by the Chechens. This spared them heavy casualties, but assured the group

³⁶ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

³⁷ Grau, L. (1997, January). *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability in Urban Combat: The Chechnya Experience*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://call.army.mil/call/fmso/fmsopubs/issues/rusav/rusav.htm>, p.1.

³⁸ Grau, *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability*, p. 2.

moving from the North would have no support once it was inside the city.³⁹ According to Thomas there are numerous accounts of how many Russian servicemen died in the first day of the assault on Grozny; according to Russian media sources over 200 were confirmed killed and 1,500 missing, while the Chechens claimed that 5,000 were killed or wounded out of 6,000 that entered Grozny. The 131st 'Maikop' Motorized Rifle Brigade took the worst of the ambush; the Brigade commander was killed, 102 of the 120 APCs and 20 of the 26 tanks were destroyed, virtually all of the soldiers within the vehicles were killed, and 74 soldiers including the corps operation officer were captured.⁴⁰

Grozny Conquered

Following the initial assault the Russians began a more systematic offensive, in which Grozny was taken sector by sector. Assaults were preceded by air and artillery strikes on individual sectors, followed up by house to house infantry assaults supported by APCs and tanks in reserve.⁴¹ Troops were dismounted and accompanied by ZSU23-4 and 2S6 self propelled antiaircraft cannons, neither of which were impeded by a restricted firing envelope like the tanks and APCs. The ZSU's 23mm barrels fired 3,200 rounds per minute, making them excellent in the counter gunner suppressive fire role.⁴²

Another development which the Russians included after the initial assault on Grozny was disbanding their large artillery combat formations outside Grozny; and utilizing small artillery subunits, individual artillery pieces and self propelled guns instead, which were pushed forward with the attacking infantry and tanks in order to provide direct fire support.⁴³ This was a large break from previous Russian artillery doctrine which recognized the smallest artillery formation as a battalion. This break in tradition had the

³⁹ Seely, p.244.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.31.

⁴¹ Faurby, I, & Magnusson, M. (1999). The Battles of Grozny. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.caucasus.dk/publication1.htm>, p.6.

⁴² Grau, L, & Thomas T. (1999, October). *Soft Log and Concrete Canyons: Russian Urban Combat Logistics in Grozny*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/softlog/softlog.htm>, p.3.

⁴³ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

advantage of allowing individual maneuver commanders to attack targets immediately without having to go back to headquarters for coordination and approval.⁴⁴ Direct fire from artillery proved far more effective than the massed artillery outside the city had, and now became the primary method of neutralizing Chechen strongpoint's and fortified buildings. It proved easier to control these smaller artillery units with the unskilled ad-hoc personnel and weak communications which the Russians possessed.⁴⁵ Another artillery improvement was the increased use of phosphorous rounds which were good for both obscuring Russian movement at night as well as incapacitating Chechens when fired into Chechen positions. Russian tanks and APCs entering the city were outfitted with mesh mounted between 25-30 cm around the hulls in order to protect the vehicles from Molotov cocktails and the shaped charges of the RPGs.⁴⁶ When stationary within the city, Russian tanks and APCs were protected by taking cover behind previously destroyed vehicles, sand bags and other battlefield debris.

Following the failure of the initial assault on Grozny, better-trained forces began replacing undertrained conscripts. In early January, nine battalions of naval infantry as well as some Speznaz units - all of which were trained in urban warfare - began arriving in Chechnya, accompanied by thousands more MVD servicemen.⁴⁷ Russian special combat units such as naval, infantry and Speznaz fighting in Grozny were smaller in size than the regular army units they replaced. These units were far more agile, and were also vested with more authority than regular army units which promoted greater operational freedom. The Russian special units were more tactically proficient in conducting urban operations.⁴⁸

These units were also better equipped than the conscripts they replaced, possessing night vision equipment allowing them to conduct night reconnaissance, rescue and assault. Further, these units were given greater firepower and specialty items useful for urban combat such as flamethrowers, RPO-A thermo baric rocket launcher systems, and AGS-

⁴⁴ Celestan, G. *Red Storm The Russian Artillery in Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://sill-www.army.mil/FAMAG/1997/JAN_FEB_1997_PAGES_42_45.pdf, p.2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.2.

⁴⁶ Grau, *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability*, p.2.

⁴⁷ Knezys & Sedlickas, p.110.

⁴⁸ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.39.

17s. Snipers were also added from MVD and FSK units; although they were not specifically trained for intensive urban combat and stalking, they were a vast improvement from the undertrained army marksmen.

Another change in Russian tactics was the redevelopment of storm detachments similar to those used by the Soviet Army during World War 2. Storm detachments consisted of an infantry battalion reinforced with a tank or engineering platoon, two mortar batteries, smoke generation equipment, a howitzer battery and a divisional artillery battery or ZSU 24-4. For utilitarian purposes each storm detachment was divided into six storm groups.⁴⁹

Despite these changes, the Chechen's mode of defense made the assault incredibly slow going. Even though the Russian storm detachments were a better use of troops, these smaller groupings were difficult to control due to the inexperience of many of the officers at the battalion level. The Chechens only conducted occasional static defense, and indeed the only place in Grozny continuously defended was the presidential palace. Instead the Chechens utilized a maneuverable defense strategy. They would hold a strongpoint one day, then melt away the next, making it very difficult for the Russians to pin down and annihilate them. Dudeav described these tactics to Russian television, stating, 'strike and withdraw, strike and withdraw...exhaust them until they die of fear and horror.'⁵⁰

On 19 January 1995, the Russians took the presidential palace in central Grozny. Two days later Russian forces from all three advancing fronts finally met in the center of the city.⁵¹ Once the situation in the city center became untenable for the Chechens they retreated over the Sunzha River into the Southern suburbs of Grozny. As Russian forces advanced the Chechens infiltrated through Russian lines and blew up the bridges leading over the Sunzha, severely hampering the Russians' ability to reinforce and supply the units

⁴⁹ Van Dyke, C. (1996). *Kabul to Grozny: A critique of Soviet Counter-insurgency Doctrine*. The Journal of Slavic Military Studies 9, no.4. pp.689-705, p.701.

⁵⁰ Seely, p.230.

⁵¹ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, pp.64-65.

over the South side of the river.⁵² The Chechens used this opportunity to briefly attack units which had crossed the river. On February 9th, 1995, the Chechen Defense Committee decided to withdraw the majority of its forces from Grozny. This decision was made because it became clear that the Russians had finally effectively blockaded the routes into Grozny.

Post-Grozny

On 26 January 1995, the armed forces handed over the role of securing Grozny and other 'liberated/cleared' areas to the MVD, who now proved completely unable to perform the security duties assigned to them. During the day the MVD only remained in the most tenuous control of these areas, conducting limited patrols and setting up check-points in the area just outside their outposts. At night they would retreat within their compounds, and behind their defenses. Thus, much of the time Chechen insurgents had freedom of movement, conducting sniping, bombings and raids almost at will.

Despite being constantly harassed by Chechen insurgents, the Russian armed forces were able to steadily advance South through Gudermes, Argun, Shali and Samashki. The Russians had changed tactics by this time, buying off Chechen villages to try to ensure they did not harbour insurgents, a tactic which enjoyed mixed success. When Chechen insurgents defended towns or villages, Russian forces would surround the settlement before engaging them. Initially, the Russians issued a call for surrender and civilian evacuation. An artillery and/or air bombardment would then commence at a specified time, followed by a house to house clearance by infantry, with tanks, APCs and artillery around the outskirts of the settlement for support.⁵³ This process of bombardment would usually last several hours and would only cease once the local area commander felt all resistance was quashed. A mounted patrol would then be sent in and if fired on the bombardment would commence

⁵² Celestan, G. (1996 August). *Wounded Bear: The Ongoing Russian Military Operation in Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1996/wounded.htm>, p.2.

⁵³ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p. 5.

again and the process would be repeated.⁵⁴ The downside of this method was that the Chechens quickly became wise to it; and would leave locations as soon as bombardment began, and return when it stopped to attack the mounted patrols.⁵⁵ This brutality also ensured that the Chechen insurgents retained nearly the complete support of the Chechen populace.⁵⁶

Although Grozny and many of the populated areas had fallen, the Chechen insurgents had not been firmly beaten on a tactical level, and retained the large majority of their forces. There is no doubt that the main Chechen insurgent body under Dudaev had lost personnel who, following the occupation of Grozny, had drifted back to their homes to defend them. The Chechens decided the best way to conserve their remaining forces was to move the bulk of their forces into the mountains, which were well suited for partisan warfare because the mountainous terrain mitigated the threat posed by Russian armor, artillery and air power. In the mountains the Chechens generally avoided major confrontations during the day, relying on a strategy of ambush, sniping, mining and bombing against advancing Russian forces. Behind the advancing forward troops, the Chechens attacked the Russians' extended logistical lines, laying ambushes along isolated roadways and mounting diversionary attacks on rail lines.⁵⁷

As the Russians penetrated further into Southern Chechnya their forces had to thin out in order to penetrate the maximum amount of mountain valleys, and before nightfall they would dig into combat outposts. They quickly learned that greater firepower was needed in these outposts because the Chechens would attack almost nightly, often overrunning the outposts which did not have enough personnel, firepower and support to fend them off. The Chechen strategy at this time was summed up by the Chechen Deputy Commander Khamzat Aslambekov, 'There is no winning we know that. If we are fighting we are winning. If we are not we have lost. The Russians can kill us and destroy this land.

⁵⁴ Celestan, *Red Storm*, p.2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Felgenhauer, P. (2000). *Russia's Forces Unreconstructed*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://www.ncoic.com/putin1_3.htm, p.1.

⁵⁷ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.39.

Then they will win. But we will make it very painful for them.’⁵⁸

The Chechen Raids

In the spring and early summer of 1995 the Russians seemed to have finally gained the upper hand.⁵⁹ Although Russian troops were continuously harassed by Chechen insurgents in the occupied areas of Chechnya, the Russians advanced steadily into Southern Chechnya. In June, 1995, the Russians had captured some of the southernmost mountain villages in Chechnya, including Noshi, Jurt and Shatoga, and were bearing down on the final Chechen stronghold of Vedeno.⁶⁰ In mid June, the Russian commander in Chechnya declared the last phase of the mountain war against the Chechens to be a success.⁶¹ During the same month Chechen insurgents under the command of Shamil Basayev infiltrated Russia in Russian Army trucks and entered the town of Budinovsk, where they attacked the post office, communication centre, city administration centre, police department, and marketplace. Following this rampage, the insurgents occupied the city hospital and took 1,500 hostages. The Chechens, using the hostages as human shields, repulsed several attempts by the Russian elite Alpha force to dislodge them: 125 hostages died in the course of these attempts.⁶² In order to end the standoff, the Russians were forced to commit to future peace negotiations and allow the Chechens to return to Chechnya under the protection of a cease-fire.

In January 1996, another Chechen unit under Salman Raduyev penetrated Russia. They seized over 3,000 hostages in the town of Kizlyar, loaded them on buses and drove them towards Chechnya.⁶³ They were stopped in the Russian town of Pervomaiskoya only to disembark with the hostages and dig in around the town. The Russian elite Special Forces, Alpha and Delta units, attacked the town several times over three days but were

⁵⁸ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Seely, p.274.

⁶⁰ Kulikov, p.49.

⁶¹ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.45.

⁶² Trenin & Malashenko, pp.23-24.

⁶³ Seely, p.282.

repulsed each time. Facing embarrassment, the Russians pulled back and pulverized the town with artillery. The Chechens, however, had already withdrawn through the Russians positions. The large amount of infrastructural damage and loss of civilian life as a result of both these Chechen attacks resulted in media and general public condemnation throughout Russia.⁶⁴

Over the winter of 1995-1996 Yeltsin began making serious moves towards peace in order to placate angry Russian voters in forthcoming presidential elections. Before any talks could be conducted, however, the Chechen leader, President Dudaev, was assassinated by a Russian smart missile which homed in on the signal of his satellite telephone.⁶⁵ Aslan Maskhadov who had been chief of the insurgent GHQ was elected the new Chechen separatist President.⁶⁶

The Final Act

Chechen forces returned en masse to Grozny on 6 August 1996. This was a bid for control of the city as well as a symbolic gesture of defiance, as it was Yeltsin's inauguration day following the 1996 presidential elections.⁶⁷ The Chechens had learned that during the night the Russians remained huddled in their guard posts and garrisons, and had also learned from Basayev's, Raduyev's and other Chechen raids that Russian security checkpoints throughout the country were easy to get through, due to an absence of personnel manning the checkpoints or, in cases where Russian soldiers were present, they could be bribed.⁶⁸ With this knowledge, the Chechens initiated an attack on 6 August, simultaneously attacking the garrisons in Grozny, Argun and Gudermes.

At 0600 hours on 6 August, Chechen fighters dressed as pro-Moscow militiamen infiltrated Grozny. They simultaneously attacked key defensive points and Russian

⁶⁴ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.46.

⁶⁵ Seely, p.286.

⁶⁶ Babchenko, A. (2007). *One Soldiers War in Chechnya*. London, UK: Portobello Books Ltd., p. x.

⁶⁷ Trenin & Malashenko, p.28.

⁶⁸ Seely, p.272.

strongpoints and garrisons within Grozny. The attack was led by Shamil Basayev, and carried out by approximately 5,000 Chechen fighters.⁶⁹ Chechen units advanced forward through the city laying siege to individual Russian strong points, while other fighters took up positions guarding the approaches along which there would likely be Russian counterattacks.⁷⁰ The insurgents were joined by over a thousand former pro-Moscow, Chechen militiamen, some of whom were double agents and had been passing them information and supplies for months, and others who changed sides when they saw how the tide of the war was turning. The Russians did not have adequate numbers to prevent or repulse the attack, despite having over 10,000 MVD personal permanently stationed in block posts and garrisons throughout Grozny; the Chechens took the majority of the city, overrunning MVD strong points and surrounding those that they could not break.⁷¹ In one day, Russian casualties amounted to 500 dead and 1,500 wounded: the Chechen assault had pushed them back to the pre-assault positions which they had held around Grozny in 1994.⁷²

The Russian counter-attack proved that they had learnt little from the initial New Years assault on Grozny. The Russians immediately commenced firing on the city, using artillery, tanks and mortars stationed outside the city perimeter, and helicopters hovering over the city. The bombardment did little damage to the Chechen force, but heavily damaged infrastructure and allowed the Chechens to shoot down four Russian helicopters.⁷³ The following day (7 August) a column of APCs and tanks were organized to relieve the beleaguered Russian units surrounded throughout the city. In an operation resembling the New Years assault, the Chechens, using RPGs, mines and Molotov cocktails repulsed the Russian relief force advancing in file down the primary roads and avenues of Grozny.⁷⁴ Three days later on 10 August, another relief force using similar tactics comprised of the 276th Motorized Rifle Regiment was repulsed. This time, 150 Russians died and 300 were

⁶⁹ Faurby, p.8.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.82.

⁷¹ Felgenhauer, p.1.

⁷² Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.47.

⁷³ Faurby, p.7.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.82.

wounded.⁷⁵

According to Felgenhauer, Russian Generals insisted they could ‘liberate’ Grozny but only using massive heavy gun and aerial bombardment. This would have left thousands of surrounded MVD troops to perish along with the Chechens.⁷⁶ As the bombardment began on 21 August, Alexander Lebed, Yeltsin’s personal representative, flew into the city and negotiated an immediate cease-fire between Russian and Chechen forces. Nine days later on 31 August, Makhadov and Lebed met and signed the Khasaviurt peace accord which withdrew Russian troops from Chechnya, established a five year cease-fire, and brought an end to the war.⁷⁷

The Final Tally

According to Russian General Staff estimates 3,826 troops were killed, 17,892 were wounded, and a further 1,906 were missing of which 90% were assumed to be dead.⁷⁸ These tallies are by no means accurate; many within the Russian military and political hierarchy had reasons for wanting the numbers of casualties to be decreased and were willing to use their power to have this done through the use of bureaucratic technicalities . Those wounded in Chechnya who died during or after being evacuated to Russia were not counted in official tallies of the dead. According to former Russian Parliamentarian Anatoli Shabad:

‘The regulation is that if there is no identified corpse, then the person is not considered dead. ..There are 100 corpses, If only three of them are identifiable and there are no documents on the rest, you report three dead, even if you can see many more killed...Everything was done to conceal the number of losses.’⁷⁹

According to outside observers, Russian military deaths were anywhere between 6,000 and 7,500. Chechen civilian losses were as high as 30,000 dead.

⁷⁵ Faurby, p.82.

⁷⁶ Felgenhauer, p.1.

⁷⁷ Seely, p.289.

⁷⁸ Gall, C, & de Wall, T. (1998) *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, p.399.

⁷⁹ Seely, p.261 .

Intelligence

The major deficiency in Russian COIN operations throughout the course of the First Chechen War was a lack of reliable intelligence. The former President of Ingushetia, Aushev, remarking on the unreliable information which the Russians were utilizing in preparation for operations in Chechnya stated, ‘if only you heard the information that is fed by the FSK, the main intelligence authority or the Interior Ministry intelligence sources, sometimes it makes your hair stand on end...If this is the information that is deposited on the President’s desk, no wonder he makes the decisions that he makes.’⁸⁰ The speed at which Russian forces were ordered to invade Chechnya resulted in inadequate intelligence preparation. As a result, the IPB was sorely lacking before operations commenced, and continued to be neglected throughout the course of operations.

The Russian soldiers entering Chechnya on 11 December 1994 were completely unaware of Chechen culture or the Chechen language, and most could not even speak cursory every day Chechen phrases. The Russians exacerbated this lack of cultural understanding by having few Chechen translators: indeed, there were not enough Chechen language speakers to process information let alone help Russian soldiers conduct day to day operations. They experienced difficulties garnering information from the Chechen people during day to day operations, and there were huge backups of incoming Chechen signals intelligence that was never interpreted or was interpreted too late to be of any use. The Russians could not even rely on their pro-Moscow Chechen allies to help them out. The Russian soldiers typically did not like these individuals and frequently mistreated them or refused to work alongside them. When they did work together it was not uncommon for Chechens to be undercover insurgents who would feed Russians bad information or inform the insurgency on any useful information they picked up.

Russian forces had a complete lack of information about the Chechens’ perception of past and current events, and no understanding of Chechen decision-making processes. At the outset of the invasion the Russians should have seen that Chechnya’s cultural history

⁸⁰ Seely, p.204.

and traditions indicated that they were always divided, and that the only historical factor that ever united them was Russian invasion. They had always reacted to the greater firepower which the Russians could bring to bear by spreading out their forces and relying on insurgent warfare. Russian forces entering Chechnya were briefed that the Chechen operation would be nothing more than a police operation, and that large columns of armor would simply scare the Chechens from resisting. Instead, when the Russians invaded, Chechens who had been opposed to Dudaev rallied around the President to defend their independent republic. The Russians could only rely on support from a few Northern *tieps*, which had historically been more economically and culturally tied to Russia. The independent highland Southern *tieps* were the core of the insurgency.

Due to their lack of cultural understanding, the Russians harassed the Chechen people as a whole. They had no consideration for the communal characteristics of Chechen society which tied every Chechen to their individual *tiep*, and throughout their COIN operations in Chechnya violated the Chechen code of honor, attacking Chechen towns and villages indiscriminately without regard to the people's *tiep* affiliation. This indiscriminate use of violence gave *tieps* reason to pursue blood feuds or *adat* against Russian forces. Even previously allied *tieps* or neutral *tieps* went over to the insurgency after their members were mistreated by Russian forces. The COIN policy pursued by the Russians can be described as an attempt to prevent the Chechens from joining or supplying the opposition through the use of intimidation. This was the wrong strategy to utilize against a people who had a history of violent opposition towards Russian rule. As a result of Chechen animosity towards the Russians, once Chechnya had been invaded the vast majority of *tieps* were prepared to supply men, rest havens and provisions to the insurgency.

The Russians appeared to have poor information regarding the operational environment their forces would encounter in Chechnya. Although the Russian FSK had been operating in Chechnya since 1991, and Russian soldiers who had joined the Chechen opposition in the November invasion of Grozny had since been debriefed by the FSK, the Russians were completely unprepared for the operational realities of Chechnya. Russian

ground units carried out little reconnaissance prior to the invasion of Chechnya. Throughout much of the war Russian unit commanders consistently made poor use of their attached reconnaissance assets, using them for convoy escort or guard duties.⁸¹ Very little air reconnaissance was conducted prior to the campaign, because of low cloud cover over Chechnya through much of November and December making aerial photography ineffective.

Russian forces appeared to be completely unaware of the geographic environment in Chechnya. Although Chechnya had been part of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Russian forces entering the republic were often unprepared for the winter cold. Many soldiers did not have heavy coats or gloves, and frostbite became a problem. Russian transport personnel often stayed in their cabs with the engines running, wasting huge quantities of fuel.⁸²

The invasion of Chechnya occurred at the worst possible time of the year, weather-wise. During this period, weather mitigated the threat posed by Russian air supremacy. Russian aircraft and helicopters did not have the equipment to navigate in fog so ground forces were often unable to call in close air support during the winter. The same was true when the campaign progressed into the cloud and fog covered mountains in Southern Chechnya.⁸³ Russian aircraft also had difficulty conducting aerial surveillance due to low lying cloud cover during the winter months.⁸⁴ The lack of aerial surveillance was made worse by the inability of the Russian commanders to make use of satellite imagery because Russian satellites had been turned off to save money.⁸⁵

The Russian picture of the operational environment was further complicated by their lack of accurate detailed maps of Chechnya. The Russian commanders who planned the Chechen invasion had extremely poor maps of the Chechen republic, and of Grozny in

⁸¹ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.98.

⁸² Ibid, p. 69.

⁸³ Finch, R. (1996) *Why the Russian Military Failed in Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://amina.com/article/whyrus_failed.html, p.2.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.2.

⁸⁵ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

particular. The maps that were used were Soviet era road maps, which lacked topographical information and omitted smaller settlements.⁸⁶ They were also far too large scale to plan urban operations, at only 1:50,000 or 1:100,000 these maps did not show anything in great detail nor did they even have street names.⁸⁷ Maps with a scale of 1:25,000 or 1:12,500 should have been used for the planning process. Platoon and company commanders generally did not have a map issued to them when the operation commenced, and as a result, many Russian vehicles became disorientated during the initial drive into Grozny. This situation was further complicated by the Chechens who moved road and street signs to confuse the Russians.⁸⁸ Despite these failings becoming apparent during the initial drive into Grozny, better maps were not provided to Russian units. Without proper maps the Russians found it difficult to delineate unit boundaries within the Grozny cityscape, resulting in frequent cases of fratricide. Russian forces continued to stumble down dark alleys in which they were ambushed by Chechens for the duration of the two month long battle.⁸⁹

Perhaps the greatest failure of Russian intelligence during the whole campaign was their inability to ascertain that the Chechens would resort to insurgent tactics in the face of a Russian invasion. At the time of the invasion, the prevailing Russian view was that the Chechens were nothing more than bandits in terms of their military potential. In reality, they were trained just as well as Russian troops, and in 1991 the majority of Chechen males over the age of 20 had been through the Soviet military system.⁹⁰ Dudaev and many of his key commanders had been in general staff positions in the Soviet Army, so they were all well aware of Russian tactics and capabilities.⁹¹

The Russians had even gone so far as to train and arm the Chechens to fight in the Abkhaz Battalion during the First Georgian Abkhaz War. The men in this unit were rotated constantly, so thousands of Chechens were trained and received combat experience in some

⁸⁶ Seely, p.231.

⁸⁷ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

⁸⁸ Thomas, T. (1999). *The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/99summer/thomas.htm>, p.2.

⁸⁹ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.38.

⁹⁰ Seely, p.229.

⁹¹ Finch, p.3.

of the most intense battles of the war. The Abkhaz Battalion took Sukhumi in October 1993, a crushing defeat for the Georgians which ultimately ended the war.⁹²

The Russians failed to conduct hearts and minds operations. COIN intelligence is driven by human intelligence: while remote intelligence from satellites and spy planes gives broad pictures of the movements or composition of insurgencies, only human intelligence can provide an accurate picture. The Russian forces consistently used an overwhelming amount of force regardless of the target; and this, along with the historical antipathy felt by Chechens towards Russians, meant that the Russians had great difficulty getting human intelligence from sympathetic Chechens. Even the small Chechen opposition was of little use for Russian intelligence as they were a small group, who were seen by the Chechen people as Russian pawns and were so riddled with insurgents that it was just as likely that the Russians would get misinformation as they would get actionable information.

Security

The primary reason as to why Russian forces failed to subdue the Chechen insurgents is that they could rarely achieve wide area security. Most of Chechnya could be penetrated by the Chechen insurgents who initiated raids, bombings and assassinations across the country and extending into the Russian Caucasus. There are numerous factors which led to the Russians' inability to provide security in Chechnya. From the beginning of the campaign, Russian forces made a series of miscalculations and errors which ultimately resulted in their failure and withdrawal from Chechnya in 1996.

Effective COIN security must begin with commanders recognizing that the mode of operations which they and their forces are fighting is different to conventional operations. The Russian military leadership who planned the invasion of Chechnya did not expect significant resistance.⁹³ Despite the significant degree of resistance Russian forces had

⁹² Dunlop, p.145.

⁹³ Ibid, p.222.

faced in their advance on Grozny, the Russian command continued to believe that Russian forces would be able to march into Grozny as liberators. Yet it took more than 40,000 Russian troops over two weeks to advance 120 Kilometres to Grozny, averaging less than 10 kilometres advancement per day. Oleg Lobov, the former Secretary of the Russian Security Council stated, ‘that Grozny would be liberated not stormed.’⁹⁴ One of the Deputy Brigade commanders who participated in the December 1994 advance into Grozny stated that his orders were to, ‘go into the city and then take the major buildings and hold them for the Interior Ministry troops to come in and take over.’⁹⁵ Most junior commanders and their subordinates had been told they were taking part in a ‘police action.’ The initial rules of engagement were for Russian troops to shoot only when fired upon; the Russian command believed that the capture of Grozny was going to end Chechen resistance.

The majority of Russian conscripts entering Grozny had not been informed of their mission and some had no idea where they were. An example of this confusion was seen by Russian television viewers during an interview between a VESTI news reporter ⁹⁶ and a captured Russian conscript following the initial Russian advance into Grozny on 31 December 1994, when the conscript was seen asking, ‘Can you please tell me who is fighting whom?’⁹⁷ As Russian forces were told not to expect significant resistance many unit commanders saw no reason to properly arm units or inform personnel what they were doing. Many of the tanks and APCs were without machine gun ammunition, some of the soldiers did not have ammunition for their personal weapons, and there were instances of Russian soldiers sleeping in the hulls of their APCs as they advanced into the heart of Grozny.⁹⁸ By contrast, the Chechens had been preparing for a Russian invasion for over 3 years and had turned the cities and towns into fortified battlefields, making any perceived weakness irrelevant.

A major impediment to ensuring effective security was that the Russian military

⁹⁴ Fowkes, B. (1998). *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crises: essays on Russo-Chechen Relations*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, p.120.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.120.

⁹⁶ A Moscow Russian Television Network

⁹⁷ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.4.

⁹⁸ Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*, p.2.

was structured around a rigid command and control system. Most Russian forces, with the exception of special units such as Spetsnaz or airborne, were trained to adhere to a strict command authority which resulted in a lengthy communication process; in effect, most Russian forces were trained to be reactive rather than proactive. Russian field personnel were given very little authority to pursue initiative, having to defer action until authorization could be obtained from higher authorities. This type of centralized control system is ineffective in fluid COIN combat, especially in urban and mountain combat which was so prevalent in Chechnya. An example of this occurred during the fighting around Pervomaiskaya, where a Russian artillery unit watched a Chechen tank move into position; the unit did not fire because they did not receive orders to do so.⁹⁹ The fact that Russian forces were not authorized or trained to act proactively to fluidly changing events on the ground was a huge impediment to conducting effective COIN operations. The lengthy communication process allowed the Chechens to get under Russian artillery and hug Russian forces, fighting them in close combat.¹⁰⁰

The difficulty that Russian forces already had acting proactively was exacerbated by the incompetent orders of the Russian Ministry of Defense. Before the invasion commenced Minister of Defense Grachev ordered that night operations were to be avoided in the interest of force protection. This directive was generally adhered to except by select Spetsnaz and Airborne units, which basically ensured that as night fell the Russians would withdraw behind whatever defenses they had.¹⁰¹ This directive hamstrung field commanders from acting proactively at night, such as taking a more advantageous position under the cover of darkness. Most Russian forces were effectively ordered to act completely reactively at night, simply returning fire when fired upon. This provided the Chechens with a predictable mode of operations to work around for the duration of the war, relegating the night to their control.

Throughout the campaign President Yeltsin and the Ministry of Defence went against the better judgment of the field commanders and the Presidential Security Council.

⁹⁹ Seely, p.232.

¹⁰⁰ Aldis, A. (2000). *The Second Chechen War*. Sandhurst, UK: Conflict Studies Research Centre, p.101.

¹⁰¹ Seely, p.281.

At a meeting of the Presidential Security Council on 26 December 1994, President Yeltsin informed the Security Council that Grozny should be stormed immediately. Certain members of the Security Council protested the directive as field commanders had insisted they would need at least two weeks to prepare Russian forces for urban combat.¹⁰² Another illustration of this type of planning based on political exigencies rather than realistic military possibilities is Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev insisting that the war should be ended by certain dates, including the 50th anniversary of the end of World War 2, in May 1995; President Yeltsin's attendance of the G-7 summit in June 1995; and the presidential elections of June 1996.¹⁰³

COIN is a personnel-intensive mode of warfare. One of the primary reasons that the Russians could not adequately secure the majority of Chechnya throughout the conflict is that they lacked the manpower to effectively check the movements of Chechen insurgents within large areas of Chechnya. According to the former Russian Defence Minister Grachev, the Russians initially committed 23,800 men, including 19,000 from the Army and 4,800 from the MVD. These units were accompanied by 208 APCs, 182 artillery pieces and 80 battle tanks.¹⁰⁴ In December these numbers increased to 38,000 men, 353 APCs, 388 artillery pieces and 230 battle tanks.¹⁰⁵ In March 1995, Russian troop strength in Chechnya reached its peak of 45,000 men.¹⁰⁶

The Chechens facing the Russians were not much fewer. According to the former commander of the North Caucasian Military District Major General I. Sokolov, on 1 November 1991, the Chechen forces comprised 62,000 men in the National Guard and a further 30,000 in the popular militia,¹⁰⁷ although this is probably an overestimation. By the time the Russians invaded in 1994, these men at arms were supplemented by a further 350 professional mujahedeen from Shamil Basayev's Abkhazian Battalion, a 250 man motorized 'commando battalion' under Ruslan Galayev, a Chechen MVD force of 200

¹⁰² Faurby, p.4.

¹⁰³ Finch, p.7.

¹⁰⁴ Faurby, p.2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ Felgenhauer, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Dunlop, p.116.

men, an artillery unit composed of 80 men with 30 assorted artillery pieces and a tank unit composed of approximately 15 tanks (either T-54 or T-62).¹⁰⁸

The Russians' 45,000 troops were insufficient to take their primary objective, Grozny, let alone go on to secure the whole country. Russian military doctrine dictated that cities should be bypassed, and when forced to conduct urban operations an attacker needed at least a 4:1 advantage in troops. For the assault on Grozny the Russians should have prepared roughly 50,000 troops, with (according to most sources) no fewer than 12,000 Chechens defending the city. As the campaign moved South of Grozny following the Russian occupation of the city, the Russians continued to have insufficient troops to effectively garrison 'pacified' Chechen cities such as Gudermes, Argun and Shali. The same was true for the assaults on large areas of Northern Chechnya and the mountains of Southern Chechnya against a largely undiminished Chechen insurgent force. Ultimately, the lack of personnel would be directly responsible for the August 1996 Chechen attack that ended the war. During this attack there weren't enough Russian troops to defend the city or counter-attack the Chechens who penetrated the city. According to Grau, the attack could have been prevented or fought off; the former MVD Minister Anatoliy Kulikov had repeatedly called for more troops in the months preceding the attack.¹⁰⁹

Russian forces never had sufficient numbers to effectively secure occupied Chechnya as well as maintain strong advancing forces deeper into the mountains of Southern Chechnya. As a result, it was difficult for Russian forces to maintain the initiative, and so they were forced into adopting a firebase strategy. Russian forces would advance along a given route, and having secured their lines of communication would dig in again before night fell. This provided the Chechens with the information to estimate what direction the Russians would likely be heading in and what time they would be leaving, allowing them to plan ambushes and place traps in advance.

¹⁰⁸ Faurby, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ Grau, L. (2000 April). *Russian Lessons Learned From the Battle For Grozny*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://smallwarlibrary.net/bitstream/handle/10383/164/Russian%20Lessons%20Learned%20From%20the%20Battles%20For%20Grozny.pdf?sequence=1>, p.3.

In the ‘pacified’ portions of Chechnya the Russians utilized numerous guard posts in order to counter the Chechens’ republic-wide insurgent campaign. These posts, however, were never numerous enough to pacify an area, and so the Chechen insurgents could still infiltrate any area in Chechnya. Each post had to be large enough to withstand insurgent raids, which meant that posts had to be consolidated into fewer relatively large posts, compounding the Russians problem of providing security across the country. Russian forces concentrated into relatively large units to preserve their forces, and created a situation whereby they had insufficient troops to respond promptly to major Chechen operations and to check the movements of the insurgents throughout the Chechen countryside.¹¹⁰ The problem of providing security was heightened during winter. During the winter of 1995 and 1996 Russian forces withdrew from the mountains to less exposed positions, which allowed the Chechens to travel around Southern Chechnya with relative impunity.¹¹¹

One further complication of Russia not having enough troops in Chechnya throughout the First Chechen War was that they were never able to adequately police the borders surrounding the republic. Lack of manpower combined with poorly fed, paid, supplied and led soldiers who were frequently drunk meant that they could not perform adequate security operations.

Throughout the war, Chechen insurgents were able to breach Chechnya’s borders with relative impunity. This occurred primarily because the Chechens, using basic disguises and forged documents or bribery, could easily make their way through checkpoints. The Russian troops manning the checkpoints were usually too drunk, corrupt or ill informed to even perform the most perfunctory of searches. The Chechens used the permeable borders to bring in supplies, ammunition, equipment and manpower. They also used it to widen the war into Russian territory when they seized hostages in the towns of Budennovsk, Kizlyar and Pervomaiskoya, which had a decisive impact on causing popular condemnation of the war among the Russian media and populace. Ultimately, this was a contributing factor to

¹¹⁰ Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.16.

¹¹¹ Seely, p.282.

the end of the war.

Due to insufficient manpower the Russian forces suffered in their ability to maintain area security in individual areas of operation inside Chechnya. During the initial siege of Grozny the Chechens continued to receive supplies, reinforcements and medical evacuations due to the negligence of Russian Command and the lack of forces. It was not until 15 January 1995, that Russian forces began trying to affect a blockade of Grozny. Despite Russian attempts to block exit routes out of Grozny, a number of exits from the Southern end of the city into the Chechen Mountains remained up until 23 February 1995, when Shamil Basaev and the remnants of his battalion finally left the Southern suburbs of Grozny.¹¹²

Russian forces acquired very little knowledge from other units when the units were rotated in and out of Chechnya, which was another obstacle to conducting effective security operations over the 20 month conflict. The vast majority of Russian servicemen in the Chechen theatre were conscripts. The yearly turnout of soldiers in a conscript system meant that every year veteran NCO's left the military to be replaced by a fresh batch of 17-19 year olds. Russian forces learned a bloody lesson in Grozny on New Years Eve of 1994, when seemingly every military mistake which could be made by the commanders and conscripts was made. Nevertheless, lessons were gradually learned from these mistakes and over the next few month's Russian forces implemented better tactics which resulted in better success as the campaign progressed South of the Sunzha River.

By 1996, however, the majority of these veterans, officers and conscripts alike, had been sent home as their rotation had ended only to be replaced by fresh conscripts and officers. These conscripts were completely unprepared for the intricacies of COIN operations or urban combat. The officers and their subordinates at the beginning of their rotation knew little about fighting COIN operations, having been sourced from one of the many units around the Russian Federation which trained personnel for conventional operations only. Units preparing to rotate into Chechnya continued training that was mostly

¹¹² Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, pp.64-64.

irrelevant to the operational realities being encountered in Chechnya, concentrating instead on conventional combat and parade routines.

Officers and commanders rotating into Chechnya rarely received notes or debriefings from the officers they would be replacing. It was not uncommon for officers entering Chechnya to be unaware of where their units would be sent in Chechnya until days before they were to be deployed. The negative impact of Russian forces not handing over information and acquired knowledge to forces taking over in Chechnya can be illustrated following the attack and seizure of Grozny by the Chechens in August 1996. When Russian forces counterattacked, Russian officers sent conscripts back into Grozny following the same predictable battle plan as was used in the assault on New Year's Eve 1994. Conscript infantry, which accompanied the columns, generally remained inside the APCs. Massed columns of Russian armor and APCs attempted to re-enter Grozny in herringbone formations without adequate infantry support, which made them easy prey for the mobile Chechen anti-tank teams.

One of the most significant failings of the Russian security strategy for subjugated areas of Chechnya was the lack of personnel available from the Russian Ministry of Defence (MOD) units, which led to security being delegated to the MVD. The MVD is designed for internal security, and was completely inadequate for the security needs in Chechnya. During the First Chechen War, the MVD was put into the position of having to provide security in a combat zone, yet was not organized for combat. The MVD did not regularly train with units from the MOD and, as a result, MVD and MOD forces fighting in Chechnya seriously lacked coordination.¹¹³ MVD conscripts underwent even less training than their MOD counterparts, and were also poorly equipped compared to MOD personnel: the majority of MVD units were equipped with small arms which had been handed down from obsolete MOD stockpiles.

Further, the majority of MVD units did not possess organic artillery or armor, without these assets the MVD simply could not push the Chechens out of building

¹¹³ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.4.

fortresses.¹¹⁴ While in Chechnya the MVD was put in charge of security of areas which had been ‘pacified’, when in fact the majority of these ‘pacified’ areas had not been thoroughly cleared of insurgents. The MVD was not well enough trained, equipped or organized to effectively combat well armed and organized Chechen insurgents. A good example of how unprepared the MVD was for security operations, is their performance as a garrison security force in Grozny from late January 1995, until the cease-fire which ended the First Chechen War in August 1996. Although the MOD handed over security duties in Grozny to the MVD late in January 1995, it was not until 23 February, that the final Chechen ‘battalion’ under Shamil Basayev withdrew from the city.

Between late January and 23 February MOD units were constantly being called back into Grozny to aid the undermanned and underequipped MVD in pushing the Chechens out of different neighborhoods around Grozny. From February 1995 until the cease-fire in August 1996 MOD units were called in numerous times to aid the MVD in putting down Chechen insurgency, and large numbers of MOD troops were called to come to the aid of the MVD in Grozny in March and in August of 1996. The MVD had such weak control of Grozny and other ‘pacified’ areas that the Chechens were able to infiltrate and attack these areas, constantly bombing, ambushing and assassinating Russian forces. They were able to assassinate the Russian General in charge of negotiations, bombing the motorcade of General Romanov while it drove through central Grozny.

The continued use of the MVD as a guard unit was one of the primary reasons why the Russians eventually sued for peace. On 6 March 1996, Chechen insurgents infiltrated Grozny, seizing between one third and one half of the city. It took two days for the Russians to assemble the necessary tanks, artillery and troops to initiate a counter attack, by which time the Chechens had already withdrawn. The purpose of the raid had not been to conquer the city, but to test the defenses and to demonstrate that the Russians were not in control and could be attacked anywhere in Chechnya at anytime.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.4

¹¹⁵ Faurby, p.6.

Following the raid there were no changes made to the defenses of Grozny. The MVD remained in charge of security and despite calls for more troops from MVD Generals no additional troops were made available. This had a telling result in August 1996, when the Chechens invaded Grozny again. Due to the continued use of the MVD and the lack of reinforcements, the Russians simply could not monitor or man the 123 roads in and out of Grozny, and were unable to defend, repulse and subsequently effectively counterattack the Chechens.¹¹⁶ The loss of Grozny a second time was really the last straw when it came to Russian public opinion of the war. The impossibility of Russian forces retaking the city without massive bombardment, which would cause catastrophic casualties to the Russian forces and civilians trapped within the city, forced the Russian leadership to sue for peace.

The primary reason as to why the Russian security measures ultimately failed throughout the First Chechen War was that the Russians' injudicious use of force served to alienate most Chechens. Russian tactics often pushed Chechens who were ambivalent or friendly towards the Russians into the arms of the insurgency. The Chechen insurgents were often aided by Russian bombs and artillery strikes on Chechen communities, in that while these strikes rarely neutralized actual insurgents, they did cause large numbers of civilian casualties and collateral damage, which drove Chechens into the arms of the insurgency.¹¹⁷ According to Finch:

'Chechnya was not going anywhere, in the sense that it is geographically and economically tied to Russia. If the Russian government was intent on winning the hearts and minds of the Chechen people, and convincing them to remain a part of Russia, then carpet bombing and massed artillery strikes on civilian targets were the wrong tools.'¹¹⁸

The massive indiscriminate bombardments were truly devastating to any support the Russians might have gotten from the inhabitants of Chechnya. Russian forces would frequently lob shells into points where they encountered even minimal resistance, this included populated towns and villages throughout Chechnya. Rather than effectively targeting the Chechen leadership, the Russians pursued a tactic of killing individual fighters, approaching Mao's maxim by attempting to drain the water from the fish. The

¹¹⁶ Grau, *Russian Lessons Learned From the Battle For Grozny*, p.3.

¹¹⁷ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.95.

¹¹⁸ Finch, p.4.

Chechens often sought to exacerbate this situation by firing on planes that flew over their positions. This tactic was designed to have the Russian aircraft turn and attack; it was unlikely that the Chechen weapon system would be destroyed, as it was a dug in point target, but it was not uncommon for the aircraft to destroy houses or infrastructure.¹¹⁹

Once major military operations in the cities and towns of Chechnya had ended, the MVD took over security duty in occupied areas. The MVD was devastating to achieving hearts and minds. The MVD pursued an objective of destroying all ‘enemy’ forces through calling in air support and artillery strikes in order to kill individual Chechen snipers.¹²⁰ The MVD security strategy consisted of employing frequent cordon and search operations, setting up ‘filtration points’ in which they tortured Chechens and frequently kidnapping Chechens in order to demand ransom from the families.

The indiscriminate slaughter seemed to confirm most Chechens’ worst fears that they were dealing with the same Russians who had deported them and slaughtered them en masse during World War 2. Throughout the First Chechen War, Russian forces committed serious violations of human rights as well as international humanitarian laws including targeting hospitals, markets and cultural landmarks, preventing civilians from evacuating areas of imminent danger, grossly mistreating detainees and tolerating acts of murder, rape, extortion and theft conducted by their own forces.¹²¹ According to human rights groups anywhere between 60,000 and 100,000 Chechen civilians were killed, while there are no reliable figures as to how many Chechens were wounded or psychologically traumatized.

Reconstruction & Hearts and Minds

The preparation for war in Chechnya did not include concrete plans for Russian forces to aid in reconstruction or conduct hearts and minds operations of any kind. At the beginning of the invasion Russian forces in Chechnya did not contain either civil affairs or

¹¹⁹ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.56.

¹²⁰ Finch, p.4.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.8.

psychological operations units.¹²² The Russian plan was for hearts and minds operations and reconstruction to begin following the pacification of Chechnya. As the Russians were not expecting resistance, let alone a full blown COIN war, they were not prepared for hearts and minds operations and reconstruction to run concurrently with security operations and throughout the course of the conflict they continued to neglect both. Instead, the Russians pursued a COIN policy of grinding out the Chechen insurgency until they submitted; they attempted to physically exhaust the Chechens' will to resist.

Indigenous Allies

Throughout the course of the First Chechen War Russia had difficult relations with their indigenous allies. Before the war began the FSK did a very good job of cultivating Chechen allies who were opposed to Dudaev. The intelligentsia, economic leaders, the majority of entrepreneurs, former communists, and many Northern Chechens were opposed to Dudaev. As time went on and the economy and security situation began to deteriorate in Chechnya, even more Chechens began to criticize the Dudaev government, according to Gall and de Wall only, 'one third of the population (supported Dudaev), two thirds were against him.'¹²³ As a result, between 1991 and the December 1994 war a sizeable proportion of Chechnya was in the hands of Pro-Moscow Militias. Most of these Pro-Moscow militias and political organizations were located in Northern Chechnya. The *tieps* which inhabit Northern Chechnya are traditionally more co-opted with Russia, due to historical economic links, than the more independent highlanders that made up Dudaev's support base.¹²⁴ The Russians supported large segments of the Chechen opposition, with the understanding that if the opposition was brought to power Chechnya would either join the CIS or return to Russia as an autonomous republic.¹²⁵

There were two major pro-Russian Chechen opposition groups, the Justice

¹²² Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya*, p.31.

¹²³ Hughes, J. (2007). *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, p.114.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, pp.9-10.

¹²⁵ Finch, p.5.

Movement and the Provisional Supreme Council. The Justice Movement was actively set up and supported by the Russians. Underneath these two groups was an umbrella of armed formations with various names. The city of Argun and parts of Shali and Vedeno were controlled by the Justice Movement headed by Ruslan Labazanov, a gangster. The larger group, the Provisional Supreme Council, controlled much of Northern Chechnya and was led by Khasbulatov, the former speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.¹²⁶ The Provisional Supreme Council was set up in the months preceding the 1 November 1991, Chechen presidential elections. It was sponsored by Moscow and was adamantly opposed to Dudaev's government.¹²⁷ When Dudaev won the November 1991 election the Provisional Supreme Council declared the election to be unconstitutional.¹²⁸ The North Western Chechen district of Nadterechny, headed by the former MVD major Umar Avturkhanov, almost completely supported the Provisional Council. Avturkhanov received men, arms and up to 40 billion rubles from the Russians in order to build up anti-Dudaev militia.¹²⁹ The Provisional Council received the majority of Russian support, and its forces were armed and trained by the Moscow FSK.¹³⁰

Due to vast quantities of Russian support the Chechen opposition was able to consistently try to assert control over Chechnya between 1991 and 1994. During August of 1991, forces loyal to anti-Dudaev leader Bislan Gantamirov attempted to assassinate Dudaev by firing RPGs and Machine guns into his presidential offices.¹³¹ Throughout 1992, the different opposition groups ramped up their attempts to depose Dudaev. On 30 March 1992, a group supported by intelligentsia, dubbing itself the 'Coordinating Council for Establishing Constitutional Order' attacked Grozny, and seized the telecommunications and radio buildings and others.¹³² Members of Dudaev's National Guard were able to dislodge the rebels from the buildings and end the attack. In January 1994, forces from the anti-Dudaev Committee of National Salvation of Chechnya, led by Commander Ibragim

¹²⁶ Seely, pp.139, 165.

¹²⁷ Toft, M. (2003) *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity Interests, and the Invisibility of Territory*. USA: Princeton University Press, p.72.

¹²⁸ Dunlop, p.115.

¹²⁹ Seely, p.164.

¹³⁰ Ibid, pp.161-162.

¹³¹ Dunlop, p.152.

¹³² Seely, p.118.

Suleimenov, attacked Grozny in an attempt to take power in a coup.¹³³ This crisis was averted when the Chechen MVD arrested Commander Suleimenov. On 26 November 1994, the forces of the Chechen Provisional Council attacked Grozny, this time with overt Russian support: four Russian helicopters and an armored column manned by Russian soldiers attacked Pro-Dudaev forces around Grozny.¹³⁴ This attack failed, and the defensive tactics used by Dudaev's forces during the battle were a major indication of the tactics the Chechens would use in the upcoming war against Russia. Dudaev had been warned of the attack, the Provisional Council's forces were allowed to penetrate deep into the heart of Grozny before Dudaev's forces ambushed them from adjacent fortified buildings using RPGs, petrol bombs, heavy machine guns and small arms. The Provisional Council and Russian force were soundly defeated, with forty-nine of their armored vehicles destroyed or captured, four helicopters and one aircraft shot down, 300 soldiers killed, and 200 captured.¹³⁵

When the Russians decided to stop using Chechen proxies in their bid to regain control of Chechnya, and began using their own forces this actually damaged their Chechen allies. Chechens who had been apathetic towards politics during the political troubles in Chechnya, as well as many Chechens who had been part of the anti-Dudaev opposition, changed sides when a Russian hand was seen to be involved with the Chechen opposition. When Russian forces invaded Chechnya in December 1994, the perception of many pro-Russian Chechens changed. According to Ruslan Khasbulatov, the head of the Provisional Supreme Council, Dudaev's forces, 'now became not bandit formations but rather the armed opposition of a people to foreign occupation...the pride of the Chechen-mountaineer had come awake.'¹³⁶ The pro-Moscow forces were relegated to the Northern provinces of Chechnya, while the highland tieps in the South were nearly completely on the side of the Chechen insurgency.¹³⁷

Throughout the First Chechen War the Russians failed to support the authority of

¹³³ Dunlop, p.153.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.157.

¹³⁵ Knezys & Sedlickas, p.49.

¹³⁶ Dunlop, p.206.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.151.

the Chechen opposition who were technically put in charge of areas which had been subjugated. To make matters worse, the Russians consistently undermined their Chechen allies. Even before the campaign began, between 29 November and 2 December, Russian aircraft bombed strategic objects including bridges, airfields, and tank repair facilities, but also bombed several towns with no real strategic significance. The bombings of Shali and Urus Martan, both of which were bases to the Russian financed Chechen opposition, had extremely negative consequences on the partnership between Russian forces and the Chechen opposition.¹³⁸

The Chechen Presidential Elections, which were held in December of 1995, infuriated Chechens. The Chechen opposition refused to go on the ballot and did what they could to undermine the election. Even neutral Chechens felt that balloting could not be conducted in an atmosphere of such chronic insecurity. The Russians further delegitimized their Chechen allies by allowing the 40,000 Russian servicemen in the republic to vote as well as stuff the ballot boxes. To add insult to injury, the Russian candidate was the former Chechen-Ingush communist regional party leader Doku Zavgayev, who was able to garner 93% of the vote, confirming that he was merely a Russian puppet.¹³⁹ Zavgayev's presidency would be spent almost solely inside Severny Airbase under heavy Russian guard.

Throughout the campaign, Russian forces were generally hesitant to work side by side with Pro-Moscow Chechen Militia, as they did not trust the fighting capabilities or allegiances of the Militia.¹⁴⁰ This meant that information brought to the Russians through their Chechen allies was often disregarded, due to the fear that it was misinformation designed to lead Russian forces into a trap. This fear was not wholly misplaced, as large sections of the Pro-Moscow Chechen militia were insurgents, feeding information and supplies back to the insurgency.

The lack of legitimate Chechen allies hurt the Russians, without indigenous support

¹³⁸ Faurby, p.3.

¹³⁹ Trenin & Malashenko, p.25.

¹⁴⁰ Seely, p.268.

they were unable to get very much usable human intelligence since they had very few Chechen speakers, if any, among their forces. Without legitimate Chechen allies they had no force with which to conduct operations with some form of cultural sensitivity or a force which would not be seen as invaders. Further, without trustworthy Chechen allies, there was no hope for any kind of security normalization.

Unity of effort

It is extremely important to the success of counter-insurgent operations for all elements within a counter-insurgent force to be well synchronized. The various Russian forces fighting in Chechnya were not well coordinated. There was a wide spectrum of Russian forces operating in Chechnya, so a Joint Grouping of Forces was created to implement and promote unity. The grouping was comprised of units from the Army, MVD, Navy, Border Guards, Railroad Troops, as well as the FSK, Federal Agency of Government Communication and Information (FAPSI) and Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Natural Disaster Relief (MChS). These organizations and the units therein had never been combined in a joint command, and as such had no prior training and no experience in conducting joint coordinated operations. The Joint Grouping of Forces would suggest a joint force structure, yet, in reality the different force structures did not have an ongoing staff planning relationship. Each force had separate command and control, receiving orders from their own specific power ministry, rather than via a direct chain of command sourced from the Joint Grouping of Forces.¹⁴¹

In actuality, each of the force structures having a constant presence at the headquarters in Mozdok served to slow the command process. The different forces continued their inter-service rivalries, and instead of cooperating they were frequently working at odds with each other, which meant the headquarters could not coordinate the activities of the various forces operating in Chechnya.¹⁴² For example, MVD intelligence,

¹⁴¹ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.4.

¹⁴² Seely, p.231.

FSK and Army intelligence rarely shared information with one another during the First Chechen War. This ensured duplication of information and slower action when actionable information was received as it would only be shared within force structures.

Inter-service rivalries were so bad in Chechnya that injured Russian soldiers from army units were turned away from MVD medical posts.¹⁴³ These rivalries contributed to the wider problem of having no specific command chain, with the individual forces seeking orders from their superiors rather than through the actual operational hierarchy of the Joint Grouping of Forces. The result of all of this was that Russian forces conducting operations in Chechnya enjoyed little mutual support. According to former Ingush president and ‘Hero of the Soviet Union’ recipient Ruslan Aushev, ‘there was no coordination between the paratroops, interior forces, and regular troops. They had no clear orders and no idea what they were doing.’¹⁴⁴

The lack of coordination between Russian forces in Chechnya meant that it was often difficult to tell friend from foe, as the Chechens could speak perfect unaccented Russian and were also equipped and clothed in the same style as the different Russian forces. An example of this occurred in January 1995, when there was a six hour battle between a Russian MVD unit and a Russian tank unit which only ended at daybreak when the units were able to visually identify one another.¹⁴⁵

The lack of coordination between forces ensured that the Russians were unable to utilize counter-battery radar systems. The Russian forces lacked a unified command centre which could identify the precise position of Russian forces so there was no way of verifying friendly firing locations. In order to successfully coordinate counter-battery fire, friendly firing locations must be known and there must be a clear controlling authority that can coordinate counter-battery operations as well as resolve any difficulties that can arise.¹⁴⁶ Without adequate central control and with no means of ascertaining where

¹⁴³ Finch, p.6.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.12.

¹⁴⁵ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.10.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.7.

friendly artillery batteries were located, the Russians had no means of even correctly massing artillery effectively. M.J Orr best sums up the state of affairs occurring at the time:

‘The war had shown just how deeply divided the Russian Armed Forces are. It is not only a lack of cooperation between the troops of the MOD, the MVD and the FSK.....It is the backbiting between unit and senior commanders within the army itself.....the Russian command is no ‘command of brothers’ but a squabbling group of careerists.’¹⁴⁷

In COIN operations it is important for all levels of forces to be unified towards a common objective, and that all the members of a COIN force understand what strategies and tactics will be used to accomplish the mission. This was not the case in Chechnya. Those high enough in the military hierarchical order, the Field grade officers, the President or the Power Ministers, seemed to follow no strategy beyond what was politically or personally advantageous. Yeltsin was often at odds with his Defence Minister and Generals, and there were frequent occasions during the war that he saw little headway being made in the conflict and wanted to prevent further civilian and military casualties. Yeltsin, on occasion, attempted to pursue a possible political solution to the conflict and declared numerous cease-fires and suspensions of bombings. However, field commanders continued combat operations, and bombs and artillery fire would continue to rain down on Chechnya in defiance of Moscow’s political will. General Tikhomirov insisted that he would obey the President’s orders to have federal troops commit to a cease-fire, although operations continued as usual and he simply renamed them as special operations: ‘...as long as I am here, the only dialogue will be about the militants putting down their weapons.’¹⁴⁸

The lowest echelons of Russia’s military force, the privates and NCOs, generally had no idea what the actual strategy being employed in Chechnya was. Most troops entering Chechnya were briefed that they would be conducting peacekeeping operations, while some had not been briefed at all. As they were conducting ‘peace operations’, the troops had been given very restrictive rules of engagement in which they could only fire if fired upon. This exacerbated the difficulties faced by the initial wave of Russian forces entering Grozny on New Year’s Eve. After the humiliation of this event these rules of

¹⁴⁷ Orr, M. (1996 November). *The Current State of the Russian Armed Forces*. Sandhurst, UK: Conflict Studies Research Centre, p.11.

¹⁴⁸ Seely, p.286.

engagement were thrown out.

The Chechens were aware that the Russians were not proactive and lacked unity of effort. According to one of the Chechen commanders, Abdurkharimov, 'The soldiers had commanders who had no brains. The commander of the *rota* got his instructions from the commander of the battalion. He got his from the commander of the regiment, he got his from the commander of the brigade and he from the commanders in headquarters, and so forth.'¹⁴⁹

Airpower

Airpower should have been a decisive factor throughout the course of the First Chechen War; yet, Russian airpower achieved very mixed results. Russia used its airpower effectively before the ground invasion began. On 1 December 1994, Russian aircraft bombed Chechen aircraft on the ground neutralizing the threat posed by aircraft in Chechen hands.¹⁵⁰ Although the Chechen air force posed a limited threat, Dudeav had warned that Chechen aircraft could be used as airborne suicide bombs, effectively turning aircraft into cruise missiles. Despite this success, Russian airpower did not follow up the destruction of the Chechen air force by neutralizing other strategic targets. Chechen communications centres, radio relays and TV stations all remained undamaged throughout the course of the war as they were used by the Chechens for propaganda as well as military purposes.

Throughout the war Russian aircraft found providing close air support to ground forces problematic. Mi-24s were used with great effect during the course of urban operations for close air support. Although Mi-24s were vulnerable inside the Grozny cityscape, once appropriate tactics were devised they could be used in a direct fire support role; the helicopter concealed itself behind secured friendly buildings, quickly rose up to fire on a target, and then descended behind the buildings again. Problems arose because

¹⁴⁹ Seely, p.247.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas, T. (1997). *Air Operations in Low Intensity Conflict: The Case of Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/chechnya.htm>, p.2.

Russian ground forces generally could not communicate directly with aircraft, and as a result of bombing runs going awry, fratricide became common. The Chechens frequently broke the Russian military radio operational security. On these occasions they were able to communicate with the Russian central air commanders and have them bomb coordinates where Russian forces were present. During the war close air support had to be largely curtailed for fear of Chechen breaches.

The real limiting factors for Russian air operations through the course of the First Chechen War were the obsolete aircraft, which were in a constant state of disrepair, and the poorly trained pilots.¹⁵¹ Many Russian pilots had less than 20-to-30 hours of flying time per year since 1991.¹⁵² The Russian gunships, the Mi-24, Mi-8 and Mi-6, were essentially obsolete at the time of the war. All three models lacked standoff firing equipment, requiring the helicopter to be close in order to engage targets. This meant that Chechens could also engage them. The result was that each sortie flown resulted in 10% losses and 25% damage to participating aircraft. Most Russian aircraft were unable to navigate at night or in heavy weather or fog. These factors meant that Russian aircraft simply could not safely perform the tasks assigned to them.

Media Manipulation

In COIN war both the insurgents and COIN forces fight for the attention of the media, as whoever controls the media can control the flow of propaganda. During the First Chechen War the Russians did very poorly at controlling the message portrayed by the media, both domestically and internationally. From the time the decision was made to invade Chechnya, Russian political and military forces should have been working to explain the motives and objectives of the Chechen invasion. This did not occur, with the result that neither the Duma nor the Russian people as a whole were informed through the media or official media organs exactly why Chechnya was being invaded and what the

¹⁵¹ Faurby, p.8.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 8.

objectives were short of restoring federal authority. The decision to use the military against Chechnya was never put to the Russian Duma as was constitutionally necessary. Therefore, from the beginning, the invasion did not have the support of large sections of the Russian political body or the Russian people, as neither had been adequately prepared for the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁵³

Before the invasion began, the Russian military awarded control of the media to the insurgents by completely shutting out the media from its soldiers and officers. Vague statements on the progress of the campaign were given during official media briefings. These statements were often completely contrary to the realities on the ground that were being reported by journalists embedded with the insurgents. One such example occurred on 1 December 1994, when Russian aircraft began bombing Chechen targets; despite the bombings clearly being conducted by Russian aircraft, Defence Minister Grachev denied any Russian involvement in the bombings until 7 December.¹⁵⁴ In the age of the 24 hour news cycle this was unacceptable. As a result, the media went over to the Chechens who were all too happy to accept press and TV crews. This enabled the Chechens to show scenes that they could control, causing the media to relay messages which were beneficial to them. The result was that the international and Russian news prominently featured destroyed Russian equipment, dead Russian soldiers and the atrocities committed by Russian forces on the Chechen people and their infrastructure.

The performance of the Russian military's handling of the media can best be summed up by the former head of the FSK Sergei Stepashin:

‘we were totally unprepared for ideological propaganda work. The journalists at first were not allowed to come here (Mozdok) so they went over there....How splendidly Chechen Information Minister Movaldi Udugov is operating, how skillful and adroit he is at feeding the press with all kinds of lies, distortions, and misrepresentations of the facts.’¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Finch, p.4.

¹⁵⁴ Seely, p.223.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas, T. (2000). *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness: Russian & Chechen "Information War" Tactics in the Second Chechen-Russian Conflict*. Retrieved October, 2, 2009, from <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/pmt/exhibits/2351/Thomaschap9.pdf>, p.2.

Training

The majority of Russian forces were far too unprofessional and undertrained to conduct conventional operations let alone complicated COIN operations. Russian forces entering Chechnya had very little training: they had no specialized COIN training, and many Russian servicemen had barely received the fundamental soldiers training given in the basic training course.

Deficient training was a long standing factor within the post-Soviet Russian military. This was largely the result of a small amount of the military budget being allocated towards training. It was also the result of the breakup of the Soviet Union in which many of Russia's key training areas fell outside of its jurisdiction in the new countries that arose. This particularly affected the artillery as the majority of artillery schools were located outside RSFR. Russian forces entering Chechnya had not taken part in any divisional exercises since 1992, which meant both divisional and corps commanders were not fully prepared in coordinating large scale combined arms operations. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the inception of the Russian Army, key Russian generals had been warning that the military was falling into disrepair and was unprepared to counter international or regional security threats.¹⁵⁶

Due to funding shortages after the Soviet Union collapse, the new Russian Army was forced to reduce 'all' of the tank and motor-rifle divisions to cadre or near cadre state, which meant they could not be used in combat operations as whole units.¹⁵⁷ According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, during the planning stages of the Chechen invasion none of the combat units which the Russian Ministry of Defence could call on were at more than 75% of their full strength, and approximately 70 divisions were under 50% strength.¹⁵⁸ Based off these statistics there was not a single combat-ready division within the entire Russian force structure at the time of the Chechen invasion.

¹⁵⁶ Finch, p.3.

¹⁵⁷ Felgenhauer, p.2.

¹⁵⁸ _____. (1995). *The Military Balance 1994-95*. London, UK: Routledge, p.109.

The majority of the units sent into Chechnya were not whole units; most had been banded together from an assortment of units from regiments all over Russia. The majority of units sent into battle had never trained together. This phenomenon held true throughout the Russian invasion force, according to the Chief of Staff of the 805th Guards Artillery Regiment, his regiment only received a small portion of its trained members, including officers. In order to fill out the unit, servicemen had been taken from all over Russia. There was no pre-deployment training, and the servicemen learned the trade on the fly.¹⁵⁹ Recruits called in to fill the unit shortages had not yet finished basic training and in some cases had not learned how to handle their personal weapons correctly.¹⁶⁰ Many Russian servicemen had very poor physical conditioning because of the insufficient training regimes, with the result that when the invasion commenced, many of the soldiers going into Chechnya were noted for their lack of stamina and physical preparedness.¹⁶¹

Despite the majority of Russian personnel having no previous training as units, an immediate crash-course COIN training program could not be implemented prior to the invasion due to the time constraints imposed on the invasion planners to form composite units before the commencement of operations. There was no time to correctly form, train or equip these composite units into a combat ready force.¹⁶² According to former Russian Deputy Defense Minister, Colonel-General Boris Gromov, ‘the operation was carried out without the relevant study and in a hurry because any other result was hardly possible. And the considerable forces that were mustered piecemeal across Russia were simply unable to collaborate without training.’¹⁶³ According to Thomas, eleven Generals on the military council of the Russian Ground Forces appealed to the Duma that the army was not ready for hostilities, arguing that Russian forces were undertrained.¹⁶⁴ Colonel-General Vorobyov, who refused the opportunity to command the Russian forces invading Chechnya, stated, ‘the troops we had were just not prepared for this. The truth is they

¹⁵⁹ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.9.

¹⁶⁰ Faurby, p. 9.

¹⁶¹ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.69.

¹⁶² Finch, p.2.

¹⁶³ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.24.

would have needed a month, even three months, to prepare. To throw them into battle – which is what was done, finally – was a crime.’¹⁶⁵

Within the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian military, most forces, except units such as Spetsnaz and airborne, had never been trained for urban combat and as a result, Russian forces were completely unprepared for urban operations. The Soviet Army had no doctrine on how to take a well defended city. Russian urban tactics were directly inherited from the Soviets and were based on the assumption that offensives would be conducted on foreign territory, in which the defending nation would leave a city open rather than see it destroyed in urban fighting. If encountered with the rare case of a city being defended, Soviet doctrine recognized two distinct ways of taking a city. A weakly defended city should be taken by surprise through a quick entry in force with the objective of occupying key strategic positions.¹⁶⁶ A heavily defended city requires a far more systematic approach, and should be divided into sectors which are assaulted by storm groups and storm detachments working in close coordination with artillery and air support.¹⁶⁷

Due to the assumption that no foreign enemy would wish for a major battle to occur in their own cities, Soviet and Russian forces did not conduct any training on urban warfare scenarios. Going back to the 1980s the Soviet Military planners had disregarded urban operations, and the belief was that cities would be taken on the march.¹⁶⁸ By 1994, there were no troops in the Russian Armed Forces beyond Special Forces and select naval infantry units who were specifically trained in urban operations. The last Russian Army unit trained for this scenario was transferred to the MVD in February 1994. In protest of this, 400 of the 430 officers resigned their commissions, forcing the MVD to disband the unit.¹⁶⁹ As a result, when the Russians seized cities in Chechnya they had to resort to using overwhelming firepower. This caused more civilian casualties than had the Russians been using soldiers trained in basic urban warfare tactics.

¹⁶⁵ Seely, p.224.

¹⁶⁶ Faurby, p.10.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁶⁸ Only Naval Infantry and Special Forces conducted urban operations training.

¹⁶⁹ Seely, p.243.

Despite Russian forces being severely undertrained, Russian commanders decided to send their forces into Grozny, a city that even in the most optimistic Russian assessments would have appeared to be moderately well defended. Even when the invasion was imminent, Russian forces did not conduct theatre appropriate training such as convoy security, urban ops training or mine booby-trap awareness. Rather, they continued training basic soldier skills such as range firing, weapons assembly/disassembly, driver training and other rudimentary skills which some of the servicemen lacked.

Snipers can be valuable assets in COIN warfare. A single sniper team can maintain security over a relatively large area, as has been the case with American snipers in Iraq. Although Russian forces had squad based marksmen, these men did not receive the same training as snipers who can make a major difference in counter-insurgency warfare. Russian marksmen trained to fight as part of a combined arms team that would advance against conventional defending forces. The Russians had few specialized snipers, let alone marksmen, who had trained for urban counter-insurgency combat. The only trained snipers were MVD and FSK snipers, trained for static SWAT type situations rather than modern urban combat in a destroyed city, so they were not equipped for counter-insurgent or counter-sniper operations.¹⁷⁰ The Chechens conversely, had marksman that were part of the five man fighting cell, as well as trained snipers who would stalk the ruins in solitude or in pairs. The importance of the Chechen sniper was paramount; Russian casualty statistics show that the majority of Russian servicemen killed in Grozny were killed by a single bullet. Chechen snipers were very effective in the countryside and in mountains, operating with three man security teams stationed a couple of hundred meters in reserve. Snipers would fire one or two shots at the Russians from 900-1000 meters, and if the Russians fired back the reserve team would fire at random to try and draw the Russian fire away from the sniper so the sniper could get away.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Cutshaw, C. & Grau, L. (2002). *Russian Snipers In the Mountains and Cities of Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/search/LessonsLearned/chechnya/snipers.pdf>, p.3.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.3.

Logistics and Equipment

Throughout the First Chechen War, the Russian forces fighting potential, morale and health were negatively affected by the inability of logistics to deliver the support necessary for effective COIN operations. Russian support services were consistently unable to keep up with the demand for ammunition, maintenance, supply, transport and medical support by Russian forces let alone the needs of displaced civilians.¹⁷² This was the case despite the relatively close proximity of Russian territory, and the ability to transport the majority of, if not all, supplies to 110 Kilometres away from Grozny along the pre-existing rail network via the Mozdok rail head.¹⁷³

Forward operating Russian troops rarely received fresh or hot rations because there were difficulties bringing food forward from the collection points. Much of the difficulty was due to a lack of hard logistical trucks in which to bring supplies forward. Their soft skin trucks were capable of bringing food to rear areas, although they were incredibly vulnerable in areas with heavy insurgent presence. To get around this, food was ladled into thermite containers that were loaded into APCs so they could be brought forward to frontline troops.¹⁷⁴ The use of APCs in a logistical capacity meant they could not be used for combat missions. Instead of performing combat tasks, APCs were used to carry ammunition, food, water and to serve as ambulances.¹⁷⁵ One APC would take several trips to carry the same amount of supplies as a heavy truck. As a result, only primary supplies necessary to keep troops fed and fighting could be transported, this meant sleeping bags, tents, kitbags and an assortment of others items had to be left behind.¹⁷⁶

Equipment was a major issue throughout the War; Russian units entering Chechnya were often ill-equipped. Many Russian tanks entering Grozny on New Year's Eve 1994 were not issued with machine gun ammunition, and MVD forces entered with less than

¹⁷² Grau & Thomas, *Soft Log and Concrete Canyons*, pp. 1-6.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

50% of their allotted weaponry and equipment.¹⁷⁷ Russian forces invaded Chechnya during the winter and soldiers frequently lacked thermal underwear, thermal mittens, foot wraps and felt boot liners. Throughout the winters of 1994 to 1996, due to lack of necessary cold weather equipment, frostbite became one of the highest reasons for non-combat medical evacuation. Soldiers often slept in running trucks to avoid the winter cold, which wasted millions of rubles worth of petrol.¹⁷⁸

Most Russian servicemen were not issued with bulletproof vests, and vests issued were often missing protective plates; many preventable deaths and injuries occurred because of this deficiency. Perhaps the major problem with regard to the equipment used by the Russians during the First Chechen War was that it was substandard, much of it was vintage or pre-digital age stock. A good portion of the equipment was the same as that used by the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and some equipment originated from well before that conflict.

As the post-Soviet military underwent budget cuts, much of the equipment in Russian inventories became poorly maintained. The result of this was that during the First Chechen War there were major performance problems with certain pieces of Russian equipment. Russian tanks used in Chechnya were in poor condition, on the march towards Grozny, 2 out of every 10 Russian tanks were forced to move to the side of columns as a result of mechanical breakdowns.¹⁷⁹ Most of these tanks were T-72's rather than the newer T-80's, and most of these T-72's had been completely overhauled at least two or three times.¹⁸⁰ The firing records of many of these tanks showed that the weaponry had not been tested since 1989 at the latest. As complex systems such as automatic loaders and electronic firing devices were not tested, many Russian tanks suffered firing malfunctions throughout the war.¹⁸¹

These tanks were completely unprepared for urban combat. Most of them had not

¹⁷⁷ Knezys & Sedlickas, p.56.

¹⁷⁸ Seely, p.231.

¹⁷⁹ Faurby, p.8.

¹⁸⁰ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p. 6.

¹⁸¹ Seely, p.231.

been fitted with reactive armor, making them incredibly vulnerable to anti-tank fire. Sixty-two tanks were destroyed in the first month of fighting, of which, over 98% were knocked out by rounds impacting the areas where reactive armor had not been installed.¹⁸²

Russian helicopters used during the First Chechen War had been built in the 1970s and 1980s and had not been retrofitted after the digital revolution. They were not able to navigate during bad weather because they had obsolete navigational equipment, and were ineffective during the night because they lacked night flying equipment.¹⁸³ Poor maintenance of obsolete helicopters resulted in heavy attrition among Russian helicopters; over half of those that went down did so as a result of mechanical malfunction.¹⁸⁴

Although much of the equipment used by Russian forces during the First Chechen War was antiquated, there was modern equipment within the Russian arsenal. At no point did the Russian high command take the war seriously enough to provide the most high tech weapons systems to troops fighting the only ongoing war. The lack of smart bombs that were dropped despite the ample amount possessed in Russian arsenals illustrates this point. This fateful decision can be put down to two reasons. Primarily, the Russian high command retained a Cold-War mindset, and was retaining the best weapons systems for a large European war. Secondly, many of the newest weapons models, such as the MIG which had night vision and bad weather navigational equipment, were not used because they were potentially going to be exported. If they were shot down or were shown to be lacking while operating in Chechnya, it may have effected exports and taken much needed money away from the Russian economy and armed forces.

Maintenance was also a major issue during the war. The speed at which Russian maintenance crews could fix equipment was far outpaced by the amount of broken or damaged equipment they received. The largest strain on maintenance crews came from APCs. Far more APCs than expected broke down or needed maintenance. During the first month of the campaign 621 APCs were repaired in depots or by forward maintenance

¹⁸² Grau, *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability*, p. 4.

¹⁸³ Faurby, p.8.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p.8.

crews, and 225 were written off, which was 10.23% of the APCs initially committed to the campaign.¹⁸⁵ This meant that 846 out of 2,221 APCs, roughly 38%, were out of action at some stage. So, between maintenance and the use of APCs for shuttling logistics materiel, combat commanders were lucky to have 40% of the APCs available for combat.¹⁸⁶

Much of the communication equipment that was issued to Russian forces during the First Chechen War was completely substandard. There were problems with the interoperability of communication equipment being used by the different forces conducting operations in Chechnya. An example of this occurred between Russian ground forces and aircrews when their inability to communicate with each other caused multiple cases of fratricide as planes mistook Russian servicemen for Chechen insurgents. This occurred despite many Russian units having employed forward air controllers. Communication was so difficult that the Russians stopped using air assets close to the front lines because of multiple cases of fratricide.¹⁸⁷ Russian forces from different branches including the MVD, armed forces and FSK, could not communicate with one another. The Chechens used this lack of communication to insert one of their units between the seams of two Russian units. They would then fire in both directions, and retire after having triggered a firefight between the Russian units which could not be stopped until the morning when the units could identify one another.

Russian communications were also susceptible to interception by the Chechens. This is revealing because despite having antiquated communication equipment, Russian personnel should have been communicating with encryption.¹⁸⁸ The Chechens were able to tap into and transmit over the Russian battle net, which was used to great effect for both tactical and propaganda purposes. The Chechens often hunted down forward air controllers or artillery spotters by tricking them into revealing their location or simply by listening to them broadcast their location. Another tactic that was used was to threaten individual Russian officers. Chechen insurgents were able to transmit the exact locations of the

¹⁸⁵ Grau, *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability*, p.1.

¹⁸⁶ Grau & Thomas, *Soft Log and Concrete Canyons*, p.5.

¹⁸⁷ Celestan, *Wounded Bear*, p.8.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.8.

families of Russian officers through their contacts in the Chechen mafia in Russia.

The Chechens were very well armed for insurgents, as they inherited whatever the Russians left behind. In 1992, when the Russian army evacuated Chechnya, they left approximately 80% of their equipment behind. Half of the equipment was turned over to Dudaev's forces as a result of a directive signed by Defense Minister Grachev on 28 May 1992.¹⁸⁹ According to the Govorukhin Commission which was appointed by the Duma to investigate weapons missing in Chechnya, Dudaev's forces succeeded in appropriating 260 airplanes, 42 tanks, 48 armored vehicles, 44 light armored vehicles, 942 automobiles, 139 artillery systems, 89 anti-tank devices, 24,737 automatic weapons, 10,119 pistols, 1,682 machine guns and 1,257 rifles.¹⁹⁰ The other half of the Chechen inventory was acquired by Chechen forces, who took from stocks left behind in the haste of the Russian withdrawal or simply bought from corrupt soldiers or officers.¹⁹¹

Morale

Professional military discipline within the post-Soviet Russian Military tended to be either arbitrary or non-existent. Russian soldiers were generally mistreated through a military hazing ritual called *dedovshchina*. The brutality experienced by most conscripts during the early stages of their conscription period led to a very high desertion rate among Russian servicemen during the early 1990s. During the First Chechen War, *dedovshchina* resulted in poor morale among the conscripts and led to a great deal of friction between the conscripts and their NCO's. Russian conscripts that were captured by the Chechens frequently told Russian news crews that the Chechens treated and fed them better than their own regiments.¹⁹²

The NCOs in the Russian NCO corps were highly unprofessional. Most were

¹⁸⁹ Dunlop, p.165.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p.167.

¹⁹¹ Knezys & Sedlickas, p.37.

¹⁹² Seely, p.229.

conscripts in their final months of mandatory military duty. Without the supervision of a professional NCO corps, teenage soldiers and NCOs alike frequently sold arms and ammunition for food, drugs and alcohol.¹⁹³ The mood and behavior of the military only got worse once the war in Chechnya began. Servicemen who were frequently drunk or on drugs could not be trusted to perform complex COIN operations.

Russian troops frequently lacked clean drinking water, clean clothing, hot rations and bathing facilities, so they often suffered from skin diseases and lice.¹⁹⁴ Russian support services could not provide adequate field sanitation to the men in the field. This resulted in 95% of all diseases contracted by Russian servicemen in the Chechen Theater being transmitted via a fecal-oral route.¹⁹⁵ Water testing found E. coli contamination, as high as 55.8 parts per 1000, in 43.8% of all water trucks, trailers and lister bags.¹⁹⁶ Of the soldiers contracting illnesses, 53.2% had one of the strains of viral hepatitis, 27.7% had shigellosis and 20.1% had enterocolitis, other waterborne diseases were also contracted including malignant anthrax, plague and in 1994 alone, 400 cases of cholera.¹⁹⁷ The problem was exacerbated because it was not until 1995 that Russian medical field staff had the diagnostic tools necessary to differentiate between the different types of hepatitis, A,B,C,D or E, a necessary distinction for treatment. Until this diagnostic equipment was provided, servicemen had to be sent back to Russia for diagnosis and treatment.¹⁹⁸

Disease was one of the largest impediments to the ability of Russian combat units to maintain their strength. The strength of many of the brigades fell below 60%, rendering them combat ineffective as they were barely able to muster 1,500 men.¹⁹⁹ In less than a month just under 20% of the Russian servicemen serving in the Chechnya had some form of viral hepatitis.²⁰⁰ It became very difficult for the forces to operate because diseases such as these don't target a unit evenly, they tend to affect concentrated pockets, and so a unit

¹⁹³ Finch, p.8.

¹⁹⁴ Grau, L. (1998, September). *Viral Hepatitis and the Russian War in Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA435004>, p.2.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.1.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.3.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p.1.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p.1.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.2.

²⁰⁰ Grau, *Russian Lessons Learned From the Battle For Grozny*, p.2.

would have an entire section out of action, a headquarters unit or an important maneuver section for example.²⁰¹

Throughout the conflict, sicknesses among Russian forces were aggravated by not having access to hot food: this was especially true for the front line forces. Food was generally in short supply for front line troops, it would come irregularly and when it did, troops were forced to wait in long lines to get it. The food was often inedible and many soldiers resorted to eating dogs rather than the greasy food they were given.²⁰²

The morale among much of the Russian military leadership was very poor leading up to the campaign. When military budgets fell during the early 1990's Russian officers increasingly found that they had insufficient funds to maintain their arsenals, continue professional training regimes, pay their soldiers and in some cases to ensure housing for themselves, which meant they had to live in large communal barracks with other officers and their families. When the decision was made to invade Chechnya, large sections of the upper military hierarchy were dissatisfied with the decision. Russian political hawks were angry that the decision to invade had not been made in 1991 when the situation arose, and reformist minded officers disagreed with breaking their officers' oath to not take up arms against the citizens of Russia. Before the start of the campaign, when commands were being assigned, key Russian generals turned down appointments on the invasion force and resigned from the military. When General Vorobyov turned down his appointment to lead one of three invasion groups into Chechnya he stated, 'I believe that it is criminal to use the military against one's own people.'²⁰³ He further stated, 'the operation was badly thought out, a sheer adventure.'²⁰⁴

In general, Russian morale throughout the campaign was very poor. At the beginning of the campaign, as Russian forces advanced on Grozny, some troops went so far

²⁰¹ Grau, *Viral Hepatitis and the Russian War in Chechnya*, p.3.

²⁰² Seely, p.254.

²⁰³ Remnick, D. (1995, July, 24). *In Stalin's Wake*. The New Yorker, p.58.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, pp.58-59.

as to inform local inhabitants how to disable their vehicles.²⁰⁵ Frequent truces, unclear orders, unclear objectives and a lack of understanding as to who was actually in charge of the campaign only added to the moral failings that debilitated the Russian forces. As the campaign progressed, the troops on the ground felt they were consistently ‘stabbed in the back’ by a government intent on throwing them into combat. They were unprepared at the start of the campaign then cease-fires were ordered when they seemed to finally gain the advantage.

This sentiment was confirmed following the abortive attempt by Russian Alpha and Delta groups to retake the Budennovsk hospital. The Russian government blamed the whole fiasco on the elite units, claiming they had acted without government consent; they also negotiated a settlement which allowed the Chechens to return to Chechnya unharmed. This created widespread resentment among the Russian military, especially in elite units which felt betrayed by the government’s deception and concessions which gave hard fought territory back to the insurgents.

Conclusion

Overall the Chechens’ triumph over the Russians was made possible by their ability to use conventional tactics in an unconventional way alongside classic insurgent tactics, thereby concentrating on attacking the Russians weaknesses while avoiding their strengths. The Chechens chose the cities as their primary battleground, engaging the Russians in urban combat using the advantage of urban defenses to inflict severe losses, while negating the vastly superior firepower which the Russians could bring to bear. When the war entered the mountains, the Chechens avoided open battle with the better armed Russians, and instead relied on ambushing smaller Russian detachments when the opportunity presented. In order to control the initiative they targeted the Russians’ major weakness, public opinion. Hostage raids into Russian territory and daring raids into Grozny enabled the Chechens to use the media to portray a war without end. A message that the Russians were

²⁰⁵ Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security*, p.3.

unable to control because of their massive failures on the ground along with their huge failures in spin control and media manipulation.

Through the initial stages of the operation, it became clear to the Russians that they were unable to bring mass to bear with the Chechens in a large confrontation, as the Chechens were content to bleed them. The rigid centralization of the Russian military system meant that poorly trained and disciplined Russian soldiers, who generally lacked a commitment to fight, were simply unable to handle the mobile Chechen insurgents. In order to extricate themselves from this situation, the Russians changed strategy and sought to engage the Chechens from a distance, utilizing their superior firepower as a substitute for surgical infantry operations. This went against the basic COIN strategy of separating insurgents from the population through hearts and minds, however, in a country the size of Chechnya with a small population, the Russian tactic of battering the Chechens into submission was nearly successful.

Yet, despite their definitive materiel advantages the Russians were defeated. Their poorly trained, poorly led conscripts, whose morale was low before the war and essentially nonexistent throughout it due to fighting an unseen enemy for uncertain reasons, were largely to blame. Other key players in the Russian defeat were the Russian command, who lacked a coherent strategic vision and were unable to work amongst themselves, and the Russian political leadership, who continuously undermined the Russian command.

The political leadership did not provide the necessary funds before the war, set unrealistic objectives in the build up for war as well as during the war, and committed to cease-fires and temporary truces that the Russian command were adamantly opposed to. The performance of the Russian military in the First Chechen War is well summed up by a Russian intelligence officer, 'There are an awful lot of bosses here, and they have brought in more than enough troops, but no one knows how to give a sensible order.'²⁰⁶ Any advantage the Russians may have enjoyed was lost when fighting against committed

²⁰⁶ Finch, p.7.

warrior patriots in their homeland.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Finch, p.5.

Chapter 3: The Second Chechen War

“Condescension in the eyes of Asiatics (Caucasians) is a sign of weakness, and out of pure humanity I am inexorably severe. One execution saves hundreds of Russians from destruction, and a thousand Mussalmans from treason .”¹
General Ermolov

The Roots of the Second Chechen War

The roots of the Second Chechen War can be traced to events that occurred in Russia and the Caucasus during the summer and autumn of 1999. On 2 August 1999, over 2,000 Chechen fighters led by Shamil Basayev and his Saudi lieutenant Khattab entered the Western Dagestani *Rayons* of Botilikhskiy and Tsumadinskiy in order to assist Dagestani Islamist insurgents in their separatist insurgency.² The aim of Shamil and his Dagestani allies was to establish an Islamic Caliphate espousing Wahhabist Sharia law over the lands of the Caucasus.³ The insurgents seized a number of high mountain villages and began conducting guerrilla operations against Russian forces that had been sent to repulse them. As these events were occurring, the insurgents sought to spread fear among the Russian public and initiated a bombing campaign within the Caucasus and European Russia. On 31 August 1999, a bomb ripped through a mall in Moscow, and on 9 September and 13 September bombs planted in the basements of apartment buildings in Moscow exploded, destroying the buildings. These five bombings killed a combined total of over 300 people, and injured 2,100.⁴

The Russian public was outraged by the bombings, which allowed the new Prime

¹ Meier, A. (2005). *Chechnya To the Heart Of A Conflict*. W.W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, p.40.

² Blandy, C. (2000, January). *Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions An Interim Comparison and Assessment*. Retrieved October, 2, 2009, from se2.isn.ch/serviceengine/Files/RESSpecNet/87334/...936E.../00_jan.pdf, p.30.

³ Kramer, M. (2004). *The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War In Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/kramer.pdf>, p.7.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.7.

Minister, Vladimir Putin, to quickly build the political will for a new invasion of Chechnya. Before the MVD or FSB forces were prepared to engage the insurgents, the Russian government began to arm former and reserve servicemen to form Dagestani village militias, in order to stop further insurgent advances. Russian artillery and aircraft bombarded routes of insurgent advance as well as areas within Dagestan which the insurgents had occupied. A combined MVD and FSB force began advancing towards the insurgent occupied villages, to push the insurgents back over the Chechen border. The insurgents constantly harassed the advancing Russian forces by detonating IEDs, sniping, and raiding behind Russian lines. They even ambushed Russian aircraft, and shot down three helicopters in the first three days of the Russian attack.⁵ Despite a massive advantage in manpower and firepower, the Russians had great difficulty in driving out the insurgents. It was not until late September that the main insurgent body was repulsed.

Before Russian forces invaded Chechnya there was a pause in offensive land operations in order to give Russian forces time to prepare for the upcoming conflict. During this period, the Russian military was given time to prepare the Chechen battlefield by bombing and conducting artillery strikes throughout Chechnya on high value targets such as communications facilities and Chechen bases.⁶ Along with the bombardment of military targets, infrastructural targets such as dams, water treatment and water storage centres were destroyed, and Grozny and most of the towns and villages were battered nightly.⁷ This was done in an attempt to break the will of the Chechen people.

The Invasion Plan

The aims of the Second Chechen War gradually evolved as the campaign gathered public support. Initially Russia's aims were limited to driving the insurgents from Western Dagestan, as the public at that time simply did not support another war in Chechnya.

⁵ Kramer, p.33.

⁶ Thomas, T. (2000, September). *A Tale of Two Theaters: Russians Actions in Chechnya in 1994 and 1999*. Retrieved October, 2 2009, from <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/chechtale.htm>, p.2.

⁷ Blandy, *Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions*, p.40.

However, following the September 1999 Moscow bombings, public support grew for a campaign to retake Chechnya.

Initially the invasion was limited to Russian forces advancing to the Terek in order to create a buffer zone by which to protect Russia. By January 2000 the aim was the complete destruction of all opposition within Chechnya and the subsequent reintegration of Chechnya into the Russian Federation. In January 2000, acting President Vladimir Putin said that the forthcoming war would be, 'fought for the territorial integrity of Russia'.⁸ Thus, the aims of the Second Chechen War had become the same as those in the First War; the reintegration of Chechnya into Russia, to ensure Russia's territorial integrity.

The resulting Russian invasion plan was divided into three phases. The initial phase of the campaign was the preparation of the battlefield as well as the creation of a cordon surrounding the country.⁹ Chechen positions were hit by artillery situated in the surrounding Russian republics and airstrikes neutralized targets deeper within Chechnya. Targets for the preparatory phase of the campaign included insurgent forces, electricity creation and distribution facilities, telecommunications facilities, water distribution and purification facilities, oil installations and fuel dumps. During this phase Russian troops from the MOD, MVD and Federal Border Service would create a cordon surrounding Chechnya from all sides.

The second phase involved a land invasion of Northern Chechnya up to the Terek River in order to create a buffer zone between Russia and Chechnya.¹⁰ As the operation went on, the aims of the second phase evolved into the complete seizure of Northern and Central Chechnya. This was to be accomplished by seizing Chechnya's second cities, Argun and Gudermes, followed by an advance on Grozny, which would be surrounded and systematically taken suburb by suburb.¹¹

⁸ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.3.

⁹ Blandy, *Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions*, p.40.

¹⁰ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, pp.2-3.

¹¹ Blandy, *Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions*, p.40.

Following the seizure of Grozny, the third phase of the operation would commence. This involved an advance through Southern Chechnya to eradicate the insurgent remnants.¹² Phase three of the operation would be completed when the MOD was able to hand over control of operations in Chechnya to the FSB and MVD. The FSB and MVD would be tasked with restoring law and order, hunting down any remaining insurgents and establishing conditions by which a functioning pro-Russian government could be installed.

During the First Chechen War Russian commanders were under constant pressure to capture objectives on specific and usually unrealistic deadlines. This imperative was not present during the planning of the Second War: rather, Russian commanders were given the leeway to take their time. This allowed their forces the ability to advance cautiously, as well as the time to provide adequate reconnaissance and artillery support.¹³

The Second Chechen War, 1999-2009

On 30 September 1999, Russian troops began entering Chechnya. The following day on 1 October, Russian Prime Minister Putin declared war on Chechnya and officially ordered Russian troops to reassert control of the wayward republic by ‘all available means.’¹⁴ Russian forces initially moved into the Northern lowlands of Chechnya, occupying what was at the time described as a “security zone”, comprising of the lands North of the Terek River and around the adjacent Russian borders.¹⁵ Simultaneously, Russian troops began to seal the Chechen-Georgian border. However, they were initially only able to create the most tenuous of cordons along this line, especially in the Argun Gorge, where they would continue to fight insurgents well into the new millennium.

As the Russians occupied Chechen towns and villages a pro-Russian Chechen government was installed to replace the existing administration. During the initial phase of

¹² Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.3.

¹³ Aldis, p.94.

¹⁴ Kramer, p.7.

¹⁵ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.2.

the conflict it was clearly the aim of the Russian Command to ensure that the occupation of Northern Chechnya would be as bloodless as possible, for the sake of Russian soldiers as well as the civilians in the area.¹⁶ Despite these measures, as the war became more savage as the hostilities approached Grozny, the Russians increasingly utilised excessive firepower to suppress insurgent activities.

Although the Russians occupied Northern Chechnya with relative ease, they were constantly harassed by insurgents who were planting IEDs, and conducting raids, assassinations and sniping. Chechen insurgents were difficult to attack directly because they blended in easily with the refugees that were present in droves throughout Northern Chechnya. By some estimates, within the first month of the war over 200,000 refugees had been created.¹⁷ As a result, in order to save Russian lives, the operation began emphasizing a non-contact mode of operations, in which large amounts of artillery were used to destroy or disperse areas of insurgent concentration.

On 16 October 1999, Russian forces crossed the Terek and began to establish a security zone north of the river. The Russian Defence Minister Marshal Igor Sergeyev, assured Russian troops that this campaign would be successful and Russian would ‘never leave Chechnya again.’¹⁸ The Russians continued their attempt to limit their losses, and tended to bypass built up areas and fortified locations, instead establishing strong-points with the intention to control the movements of the insurgents from within newly acquired and previously pacified territory.¹⁹ Although this tactic worked well, Chechen resistance strengthened as the war progressed closer to Grozny. Artillery and air strikes were used to destroy areas where Chechen insurgents were believed to be present and negotiations began to fall to the wayside. According to retired Russian Major-General Vorob’yev, it took an average of 7,500 bullets and seventy rounds of artillery to kill one Chechen insurgent.²⁰

¹⁶ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.2.

¹⁷ Blandy, *Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions*, p.40.

¹⁸ Kramer, p.11.

¹⁹ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.2.

²⁰ Blandy, C. (2001). *Chechnya: Dynamics of the War Brutality and Stress*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from, <http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/caucasus/P35/view>, p.13.

Using these tactics, Russian forces were able to make slow but steady progress through Northern and Central Chechnya. By December 1999, Chechnya's second and third largest cities, Gudermes and Argun, had been occupied and Russian troops had surrounded the periphery of Grozny. While the Russians prepared for urban combat in Grozny their troop strength in Chechnya reached over 100,000 personnel. This was to ensure that adequate numbers of servicemen would be available to conduct the siege of Grozny as well as protect the rest of occupied Chechnya. The Russians paused before commencing their assault on Grozny to issue a call to the civilians of the city to evacuate before it was leveled, to reorganize the forces which would advance into the city into storm groups, and to continue utilizing artillery and air power to prepare the city. During the pause Russian sniper teams began infiltrating into Grozny at night, conducting reconnaissance and calling in air and artillery strikes on Chechen forces, turning Grozny into a free fire zone.²¹

When the assault on Grozny commenced, Russian storm detachments advanced methodically, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, clearing each building of weapons and insurgents before moving on to the next. Key points in Grozny were garrisoned which limited the ability of the insurgents to move. The Russians continued to advance their area of control of Grozny. Utilising a mode of advance that resembled a spider web, they slowly occupied Grozny from the outside in.²²

Grozny was largely occupied by late March 2000, and as the siege progressed into mid-February the Russians had occupied the majority of strategic locations within the city. In order to save their remaining forces, the insurgents began conducting a phased withdrawal from the city in February. As was the case in the First Chechen War, the main body of the insurgent force retreated into the mountains of Southern Chechnya. This time, however, the insurgents were unable to escape Grozny or make it into their mountain sanctuaries without receiving heavy casualties.

²¹ Thomas, T. (2000, July/August). *Grozny 2000: Urban Combat Lessons Learned*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2000/07/grozny2000.htm>, p.3.

²² Olikier, O. (2001). *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons From Urban Combat*. Santa Monica, CA. RAND, p.45.

Instead of charging after the insurgents, Russian commanders held the majority of Russian troops back to pacify Grozny while Russian aircraft, helicopter gunships and artillery maintained constant pressure on the insurgents. The Russians utilized fire sweeps, which bombarded whole sectors, to suppress and harass the retreating insurgents. Airborne forces were often dropped into positions behind insurgent bands on the receiving end of Russian bombardment in order to ambush the insurgents as they fell back. The insurgents suffered severe casualties and gradually became demoralized and disorganized, and as a result, a number of moderate insurgent commanders defected to the Russians.²³ According to the former Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff, Valery Manilov, the primary objective of the Russians at this stage of the campaign was to, ‘annihilate the bandit units in the foothills and the mountains while restoring a system of governing bodies and improving socio-economic aspects of life.’²⁴

The insurgency, while depleted, was by no means subdued and continued fighting. Throughout the spring and summer of 2000 the insurgents broke down into a number of disparate bands. These bands communicated and coordinated via satellite phones and were able to pull off a series of highly publicised raids and ambushes. On 2 March, the insurgents ambushed an OMON unit outside Grozny and killed 37 OMON police, and a few days later the 104th Paratroop Regiment was ambushed and lost 86 men.²⁵ In 2001 the insurgent command changed its strategy and began to conduct a pure guerrilla campaign. The mountainous terrain was perfect for this sort of warfare, and fulfilled the same function at it had in the First Chechen War, allowing the insurgents to conceal themselves and their weapons within the many mountain caves that make up the region. When the insurgents were pressed by Russian forces, they would generally withdraw to safe havens over the Ingushetian, Dagestani or Georgian borders.²⁶

The insurgents sought to inflict slow but steady damage on Russian forces to

²³ Shenfield, S. (2001) *Chechnya at a Turning Point*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from, <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/bjwa/archive/8.1/Chechnya/Shenfield.pdf>, p.2.

²⁴ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.3.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.4.

²⁶ The majority of this reduction accounted for those that were displaced, only 50,000 of which were displaced internally the other roughly 250,000 have spread out within the Caucasus, Russia and the wider world.

degrade their morale, decrease their combat efficiency and make them more susceptible to attack. Former Chechen President and Commander Aslan Maskhadov explained the outcomes of the strategy: ‘...exhausted morally and physically...it deteriorates...soldiers turn marauders, sell everything from their weapons to food...different structures of the invading force...fight among themselves.’²⁷ While maintaining radio silence, small units of insurgents were sent down from the mountains and infiltrated through the Russian cordon, and began reinforcing, reorganizing and linking, existing resistance cells which had survived the occupation.²⁸

In order to widen the war, insurgent cells infiltrated Dagestan, Ingushetia and the wider North Caucasus, bolstering existing Dagestani and Ingush insurgent units. In a press release issued in 2003 by the insurgent commander, Shamil Basayev, he stated:

‘Praise be to Allah, this year will be commemorated with the widening of the zone of combat operations and territories, where the Jihad will be conducted against the aggressor, and the creation of new military sectors. In particular, the Ingush sector, the Ossetian sector, the Aukhovskiy sector, the Stravropol sector have been formed and the Daghestan operational direction has also been activated.’²⁹

The insurgents in all three republics directed a campaign of suicide bombings, assassinations and armed insurrection against Russian forces, local security forces and the republic government’s infrastructure, personnel and supporters. In 2003 alone, there were over 600 bombings in the North Caucasus.³⁰ According to the head Chechen public prosecutor, between 2000 and 2006 71 administration heads in Chechnya were either killed or kidnapped.³¹ Some of the easiest targets for the insurgents were the oil pipelines which passed through all three republics. In April 2004, a bomb destroyed oil and gas pipelines just outside Makhachkala forcing the complete halt of all energy shipments into Azerbaijan for well over a week.³²

²⁷ Maskhadov, A. (2000 September-December). *Open letter to the French philosopher Andre Glucksman*” Central Asian survey, Vol. 19 Numbers 3-4, pp.309-314.

²⁸ Shenfield, p.2.

²⁹ Blandy, C. (2004, May). *Chechnya: Centre of Unabated Instability & Conflict*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from [www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../04\(11\)-CWB.pdf](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../04(11)-CWB.pdf), p.8.

³⁰ Kramer, pp.51-52.

³¹ Blandy, C. (2006, December). *Chechnya: Continued Violence*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from [www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../06\(54\)CWB.pdf](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../06(54)CWB.pdf), p.12.

³² Kramer, p.48.

Although the insurgents continued to pose a significant security threat, by mid-2000 the mode of Russian operations in the majority of Chechnya had changed from strictly combat based COIN operations to a more broad-based COIN strategy. According to Kramer this new strategy was aimed at ‘maintaining control of urban areas, isolating and eliminating guerrillas, preventing suicide bombing attacks, restoring a semblance of normal life in major towns, bolstering the pro-Russian government and consolidating long term military presence.’³³ In January 2001, President Putin declared the military phase of the Chechen campaign over; thereafter, the FSB took over command of security operations in Chechnya from the military, which remained in Chechnya but was now subordinate to the FSB.³⁴

Simultaneous with the change in command, a phased reduction of troop levels began. In January 2001 there were over 90,000 Russian troops in Chechnya: this was brought down to just over 25,000 by January 2006.³⁵ These 25,000 troops consisted of 10,000 men from the 46th Brigade of the MVD and 15,000 men from the 42nd Motorized Infantry Division of the MOD, as well as 3,000 border guards and an unspecified number of airborne and special forces.³⁶ The primary role of these troops was to support the pro-Russian Chechen militia as well as combat the remaining insurgent formations. In 2003, command of Russian operations was transferred from the FSB to the MVD. This change in command, along with the withdrawal of the military signaled a ‘gradual end of counterterrorist actions in favour of more routine maintenance of public order.’³⁷

Although the change in command was designed to signify a normalisation of the situation in Chechnya, a high level of violence continued to exist in the country. Following the change, the former First Deputy Commander of the MVD Internal forces in the North Caucasus, Lieutenant General Evgenii Abrashin, complained that the government was ‘rash and premature in declaring an end to counterterrorist operations...the missions assigned to

³³ Kramer, p.8.

³⁴ _____. (2000-01). *Military Balance*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p.107.

³⁵ Simonov, P. (2006, July). *New Chechen Army Threatens Moscow*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.axisglobe.com/article.asp?article=983>, p.1.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.1.

³⁷ Kramer, p.9.

our troops in Chechnya far exceeds their capabilities...forces are so busy just trying to ensure their own security that they almost never can counter the resurgent guerrillas.’³⁸

The Chechens’ most deadly weapons during the Second Chechen War were mines and IEDs. According to Colonel Vladimir Trushkov, the head of the engineering forces of the Russian Airborne commando staff in Chechnya, over 40% of all Russian casualties during the Second Chechen War were caused by IEDs.³⁹ The insurgents’ primary tactic was to detonate an IED next to a Russian patrol or convoy. In some cases, following the detonation of the IED, while the Russians were disorientated, the insurgents would move in and attack with small arms, machine guns, RPGs and sabers. If the attack was successful, the insurgents would gather all the weapons, documents, equipment and prisoners they could find and then withdraw into the surrounding woods and mountains.⁴⁰

In order to contend with the threat posed by IEDs, the Russians deployed over 1,000 minesweeping personnel to Chechnya. These personnel were thinly spread on the ground, having to sweep over 450 kilometres of road used extensively by the Army and MVD, 500 kilometres of railway, as well as the perimeters of airfields, outposts, army bases and other military sites.⁴¹ The number of IEDs and mines the Russian troops had to dispose of was overwhelming; on an average day in February 2004, bomb disposal units would discover over 100 explosive devices.⁴² IEDs were harder to disarm than mines: mine clearing engineers claimed to have neutralized 90% of discovered landmines while their rate of success when dealing with explosives created from salvaged bombs or shells was markedly lower.⁴³ To make the task of mine and IED clearing more difficult, Russian engineering and mine clearing units were frequently assigned the duties of a motorized rifle unit. This severely hampered the ability of these units to conduct the tasks that they were created and sent to Chechnya for.⁴⁴

³⁸ Kramer, p.9.

³⁹ Ibid, p.25.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.19.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.26.

⁴² Ibid, p.27.

⁴³ Ibid, p.26.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.31.

In 2000, because of the pressure put on the insurgency by the success of the Russian military campaign in Chechnya, the insurgency resorted to conducting terrorist attacks in the hopes that these devastating attacks would turn the situation around on the ground as it had in the First Chechen War. Initially, these attacks consisted of bombings throughout the Caucasus and European Russia. However, this did little to shake the Russian public's support of the Chechen campaign. On 23 October 2002, 53 insurgents stormed the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow and seized over 980 civilians who were attending a *Nord-Ost* musical.⁴⁵ The insurgents threatened to detonate explosives which they had planted on the buildings support columns and on many of the civilians unless their demands were met. They demanded the immediate and complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya, at which time Chechnya would be recognized by Russia as an independent state.⁴⁶ The Russians were unable to resolve the situation through negotiations, and resorted to seizing the theatre by subduing the hostage takers with an opiate based gas while Special Forces simultaneously stormed the building. In the course of the operation, 41 Chechens were shot on the spot, and 130 hostages were overcome by the gas and died as a result of respiratory complications.⁴⁷

Another major terrorist incident occurred on 1 September 2004. During the traditional first day of school celebration, 33 insurgents took control of Middle School No.1 in Beslan, North Ossetia. They took 1,300 students, parents and teachers hostage.⁴⁸ Following two days of negotiations, the Russians chose to free the hostages by force. During the botched rescue attempt, explosives which had been laid on the support columns of the gymnasium, in which the hostages were being held, were detonated and brought down the roof. Gun fire between insurgents in the school carried on for hours. When the dust finally settled, 470 hostages had been killed and over 700 had been injured.⁴⁹

Despite the widening of the insurgency, its effectiveness in actually fighting the Russians had significantly decreased since 2004. In 2004, insurgents conducted several

⁴⁵ Kramer, p.50.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.50-51.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.51.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp.53-54.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.54.

large scale ambushes and numerous terrorist attacks, yet, by and large, since the beginning of 2004, they increasingly relied on the use of IED and mine warfare and shoot and scoot raids. The former Commander of Federal Forces in Chechnya, Lieutenant General Valeriy Baranov, commenting on Russian operations and the capabilities of the insurgents at the beginning of 2004, stated:

‘In the mountains our subunits work mainly on the basis of searching for bandit bases and dumps. Bandits strive not to participate in open clashes with our special forces, but put the main stress on working with explosives in different territories... Today the basic tasks of troop subunits in Chechnya is reconnaissance and mine clearance of transport communications.’⁵⁰

Since nearly the beginning of the campaign political power in Chechnya was exercised through Akhmat Kadyrov, and following his assassination his son Ramzan was given the power to run Chechnya. The Chechen insurgent opposition became increasingly irrelevant in shaping the political future of the country by about 2005. Although monthly bombings and raids within Chechnya and the wider Caucasus continue even today, the effectiveness of the insurgents operations has significantly decreased since the end of the military phase of the campaign in January, 2001. The death of Maskhadov in March 2005, and of Basayev just over a year later in July 2006, meant that the insurgents in Chechnya no longer appeared to have the means or leadership to make a strategic impact in Chechnya. The succession of electoral victories of Kadyrov and Ramzan is representative of the political dominance of pro-Russian administration in Chechnya.

The Final Tally

The number of servicemen who were sick, wounded or killed during the Second Chechen War is a subject of some debate. Russian spokesmen have only intermittently briefed the press on casualties and access to official statistics is closely restricted. Further, both Russian scholars and journalists have been threatened with blacklisting and far worse if they make too many enquiries or publish anything on the subject.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Blandy, *Chechnya: Centre of Unabated Instability & Conflict*, p.5.

⁵¹ Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, pp.8, 11.

During a press conference held on 17 February 2000, the former First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, General Manilov, stated that Russian forces had ‘lost some 1,500 servicemen in the course of the anti-terrorist operation in Dagestan and Chechnya.’⁵² This statement was blatantly untrue: according to the Soldiers Mothers Committee, in the same time frame (August 1999-February 2000) stated by General Manilov no fewer than 3,000 soldiers had lost their lives in the course of operations in Dagestan and Chechnya.⁵³ The official figures quoted by military spokesmen have consistently been well below what experts believe them to have actually been. A perfect example of such dissonance can be seen in official data which was presented in 2002. According to federal casualty lists, there were more than 4,572 soldiers killed in action between August 1999 and December 2003.⁵⁴ According to unofficial statistics however, the number of soldiers killed and wounded was perhaps two to three times higher than the official data.⁵⁵ This statement was also made in the face of another announcement by a Russian General Staff spokesman, who told the media that between 2003 and 2004, 100 Russian servicemen were killed every month in Chechnya.⁵⁶ It is hard to believe that if 1,200 servicemen were killed in 2003, that only 3,530 Russian servicemen were killed in the preceding three years of war. This is improbable because well over 1,000 Russians were killed in the assault on Grozny alone.⁵⁷

Despite the difficulty in accurately recording the true statistics, most experts on the subject have largely questioned any statistics that have been officially provided. The Russians used a number of concealment methods to cover up their casualties. In an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Sergei Tsygankov, the head doctor at the Russian Military’s morgue in Mozdok, conducted by an American journalist, Andrew Meier, Lieutenant Colonel Tsygankov stated:

‘They’re lowering the figures... for every ten soldiers we get, only three have been killed in battle. All the rest have frozen to death, or died because someone wasn’t careful with a weapon, or died from disease, especially in winter. (The dead fall into two categories) killed and deceased... killed meant they had died in battle, deceased meant they had died in the hospital. And if a wounded man died in the hospital, he was not included in the casualty figures.’⁵⁸

⁵² Felgenhauer, p.4.

⁵³ Ibid, p.4.

⁵⁴ Blandy, *Chechnya: Normalisation*, p.7.

⁵⁵ Kramer, p.10.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.10.

⁵⁷ Felgenhauer, p.4.

⁵⁸ Meier, p.104.

Although there is debate as to the number of Russian servicemen killed in Chechnya, there is no debate that since 2004 the level of Russian casualties has decreased significantly. The Russians' dwindling losses can be attributed to the declining fortunes of the insurgents, as well as the "Chechenisation" of the conflict, whereby security duties have been handed over to the Chechen MVD or FSB. Further, the Russian forces conducting combat operations have generally been highly trained Russian Spetsnaz or airborne forces.⁵⁹

Intelligence

There continued to be major failings in Russian intelligence operations, however, Russian intelligence during the Second Chechen War was substantially more effective than it had been during the First War. Russian intelligence provided key information which aided their forces in overcoming the insurgency and finding Chechen allies who could eventually provide for their own security.

The beginning of the Second Chechen War seemed to be marked by a major intelligence failure on the part of the FSB. The FSB failed to anticipate and consequently prepare federal forces for the August 1999 Chechen incursion into Dagestan. However, according to Abdrashid Saidov, the founder of the Islamic Democratic Party, 'anyone who traded on the Grozny market in May-June 1999 was taking account of the imminent war in Dagestan.'⁶⁰ This suggests that Russian intelligence was probably aware of the impending incursion and allowed it to happen in order to garner public support for a renewal of hostilities in Chechnya.

Certainly the war did not catch the Russian command by surprise. According to Timothy Thomas, the Russian Officers planning the operation in Chechnya had done a great deal of study on the lessons learnt, not only in the First Chechen Wars, but also in the

⁵⁹ Blandy, *Chechnya: Centre of Unabated Instability & Conflict*, pp.5-6.

⁶⁰ Trenin & Malashenko, p.35.

wars and uprisings going back to the time of Imam Shamil.⁶¹ The lesson they seem to have learnt was that the Chechen insurgents had been previously defeated by brutality alone, brutality that had been directed against the insurgents as with the Chechens as a people. To this end, Russian commanders planned to devastate Chechnya, forcing the Chechen people to capitulate due to war weariness, as they had in the distant past.

As was the case during the First Chechen War, the FSB, and to a lesser extent the MOD and MVD, were initially reluctant to employ Chechens in the Second Chechen War. Despite having studied the Chechens to a large extent, without working side by side with them they could not get to understand the Chechen culture. Throughout the conflict the FSB was reluctant to recruit Chechens, because they simply did not trust Chechens. According to Alexander Litvinenko, a former FSB officer who was later assassinated, 'In the FSB they naturally fear and know that at any moment (a Chechen recruit) might elude their control and turn against them. The damage from his actions would then vastly exceed the benefits they might have gained.'⁶² As a result of this reluctance, the FSB had a severe lack of Chechen agents at the outset of the Second War, and also lacked Chechen translators.

The situation was the same within MOD and MVD units, both of which had difficulty gathering intelligence during operations, as they had few Chechen speakers within their ranks. According to Russian journalist, Vadim Rechalov, 'during the many times I have been to Chechnya over the past several years I have never met a single Russian soldier or FSB official who knew the Chechen language.'⁶³ The Russians were reluctant to share intelligence with their Russian allies. They initially contended that local militia, MVD and government were riddled with insurgents or insurgent sympathisers. According to Blandy, 'up to 30% of the Chechen MVD were accomplices of the boyeviki (insurgents).'⁶⁴

⁶¹ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.1.

⁶² Kramer, p.55.

⁶³ Ibid, p.55.

⁶⁴ Blandy, *Chechnya: Continued Violence*, p.9.

Russian intelligence during the Second Chechen War had a much better understanding of the decision making processes of the Chechens and the social grievances within Chechen society. Instead of installing a pro-Russian Chechen such as Alu Alkhanov or Said-Magomed Kakiyev, who had remained faithful during the inter-war years, Akhmat Kadyrov was installed as the head of the pro-Russian provisional administration. This was very astute of the Russian intelligence organs; although Kadyrov (a devout sufi) had been the former Grand Mufti of Chechnya and fought the Russians in the First War, during the inter-war years he had gradually become disillusioned with the mismanagement and lawlessness within Chechnya and the growing influence of the Wahhabis within Chechen society. Many Chechens, also angered by the spread of extremist Islam and the mismanagement of the Maskhadov administration, joined Kadyrov who appeared to be a more traditional, moderate leader. Further, Kadyrov was the head of one of the largest *tieps* in Chechnya, the Benoi, which meant that the Benoi came along with him, taking insurgents off the battlefield and replacing them with newly loyal Chechen militia.⁶⁵

During the Second Chechen War the Russians appeared to have a better awareness of the operational environment in which they were fighting than they had had previously. A perfect example of this can be seen in the Russians' approach to urban environments: instead of being lured into urban fighting as they had been during the First Chechen War, they simply flattened urban areas to avoid encountering insurgents in close combat. Appreciating that even ruins could be excellent defensive positions, as had been the case in Stalingrad and Monte Cassino, the Russians did not send armour into the close confines: rather, snipers were sent out to stalk the ruins⁶⁶ and small, mobile, heavily armed infantry storm squads were formed to methodically storm and seize urban areas grid by grid.

Ultimately, the strength of Russian intelligence operations during the Second Chechen War played a great role in the pacification of Chechnya. Although mistakes were made early in the conflict, the huge mistakes that caused calamities during the First Chechen War which good intelligence would have prevented, were not evident in the

⁶⁵ Blandy, C. (2004, July). *Chechnya: The Search for a Strong Successor*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc>, p.2.

⁶⁶ Cutshaw & Grau, p.3.

Second Chechen War.

Security

During the Second Chechen War Russian forces were far more effective at fighting COIN operations than they had been during the First War. The primary reason for this was that prior to hostilities the Russian command had prepared plans for fighting a COIN operation in Chechnya. They understood that resistance to their re-entry into Chechnya would take the form of an insurgency and therefore, Russian forces had to be prepared to fight asymmetrically.

The Russians altered their approach to urban combat; commanders began utilizing a system, called the zonal territorial method, to delineate between individual units' areas of operation. According to General Karatuyev:

'the zonal territorial method envisages every troop entity from battalion upwards will have a defined zone of responsibility for reconnaissance and fire destruction, which will be controlled by the corresponding combined-arms commander. As a result inertia is reduced and decentralization feasible. Lower level commander can develop possibilities of showing initiative and using artillery more actively in the interest of their own sub units.'⁶⁷

Having clearly defined zones of operations allowed Russian units to rapidly call down large amounts of artillery fire in order to create fire walls between themselves and advancing insurgent units.⁶⁸ Further, this clear delineation of boundaries cut down on incidents of fratricide, as units in the field had relatively clearly defined zones in which to operate.

During the First Chechen War the majority of tactical units utilized by the Russians were too large and cumbersome to be truly effective during small unit operations. Further, these units lacked sufficient readily available artillery to enable them to rapidly respond to changing developments on the ground. During the Second Chechen War the Russian

⁶⁷ Aldis, p.93.

⁶⁸ Grau, L, & Thomas, T. (2000 April). *Russian Lessons Learned From the Battle For Grozny*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://smallwarlibrary.net/bitstream/handle/10383/164/Russian%20Lessons%20Learned%20From%20the%20Battles%20For%20Grozny.pdf?sequence=1>, p.5.

command replaced traditional divisions, brigades and battalions with combined operational groupings. These combined operational groupings were built around battalions with attached artillery batteries, additional logistical support and engineers with flamethrowers or thermo-baric weaponry.⁶⁹

The breaking down of Russian artillery units into smaller components allowed far more decentralized command of artillery assets. These smaller units were far more flexible and allowed Russian commanders on the ground much more latitude to conduct small unit operations quickly and with adequate fire support. According to Michael Orr, these combined operational groupings, 'represent a significant modernization of the cumbersome Russian command system.'⁷⁰ Despite the improved unit design, the Officers and soldiers manning the units were not professional enough or well trained enough to attack without massive artillery and air support.

The Russian command, having realised that undertrained conscripts had been ill-equipped to successfully combat insurgents during the First Chechen War, endeavoured to utilise more proficient contract mercenaries called *kontrakti*. According to Russian Officers, soldiers returning to Chechnya immediately after their mandatory military service in Chechnya were good fighters who were knowledgeable in small unit tactics from having already fought under those conditions.⁷¹ Although the Russian command attempted to create a rapid reaction force of *kontrakti*, little change occurred in the composition of Russian forces between 1996 and 1999. In October 1999, only 7% of privates and sergeants within MOD and MVD consisted of *krontrakti*.⁷² The value of these limited numbers of *kontrakti* was dubious; *kontrakti* often came from bad backgrounds, they were frequently alcoholics, drug addicts, in bad debt or criminals on the run. Although these men had served in the military sometime within the last ten years, they had had no formal military training since. These men were sent to Chechnya without further training or pre-screening and were often worse than conscripts in their ability to carry out efficient COIN operations

⁶⁹ Coffey, M. (2006). *Military Learning Between the Chechen Wars*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://www.ras.org/military_learning_between_the_chechen_wars, p.5.

⁷⁰ Felgenhauer, p.2.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.4.

⁷² Ibid, p.5.

and in their conduct towards the Chechen civilians. According to a former Russian Officer, *kontrakti* were ‘highly unreliable in battle and badly disciplined.’⁷³

The Russians’ strategy for achieving security and combating the insurgency was to attack the insurgents’ strategy. As the insurgents’ strategy was to kill as many Russians as possible, this meant the Russians had a two part strategy, to kill the insurgents and to protect Russian servicemen.

The Russians’ strategy during the Second Chechen War clearly took into account the lessons which had been gleaned from their failures during the First Chechen War, as well as NATO experiences in the Balkans in 1999. During the First Chechen War, the Chechens consistently outfought Russian soldiers at close quarters. In order to prevent this from occurring during the second conflict, the Russians mirrored NATO’s strategy during the Kosovo war, which was to bomb until victory and win without heavy casualties.⁷⁴ According to Kipp, ‘Russian commanders sought to inflict serious damage upon the enemy with indirect fire to reduce the risk of close combat and Russian casualties.’⁷⁵ When Russian units were on the move and came under contact, they would pull back 300 metres⁷⁶ and call in an artillery or air strike on the insurgent positions until nothing moved.⁷⁷ This strategy was particularly effective in cities in which the Russians utilised their firepower to level the battlefield. With large infrastructure levelled, a three dimensional battlefield became a two dimensional battlefield, creating a safer environment for Russian troops to advance through.⁷⁸

Another force protection measure implemented by the Russians was base protection. During the First Chechen War the Russians had to concentrate large quantities of personnel in bases to ensure their defensibility. They concentrated additional artillery

⁷³ Felgenhauer, p.5.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.3.

⁷⁵ Kipp, J. ‘*Putin and Russia’s Wars in Chechnya*’ in Herspring, D. (2003). *Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*. U.S.A.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p.191.

⁷⁶ The Maximum effective range of the AK-74 and well out of the effective range of RPG’s.

⁷⁷ Coffey, p.5.

⁷⁸ Ackerman, R. (2000, May). *Echoes of Chechnya resound in Moscow*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.afcea.org/signal/archives/content/May00/echoes-may.html>, p.4.

units within bases, and areas around many Russian bases were free fire zones. During the Second Chechen War to protect bases, the Russians expanded the use of minefields, explosive barriers, remote detonated mines, and utilised older ad hoc techniques such as laying out glass, tin cans, slate and other materials in order to protect the approaches to bases and to impede the insurgents' ability to penetrate the base areas.⁷⁹

One of the primary reasons the Russians failed to destroy the insurgency during the First Chechen War was that beaten insurgents frequently avoided complete destruction by escaping into some inaccessible area, which allowed them to reform and continue the insurgency. During the second conflict, to ensure the destruction of the insurgents, Russian forces generally isolated built up areas and areas of suspected insurgent concentration from outside support by creating a cordon which cut off key points off access.⁸⁰ Once the area was isolated, detailed reconnaissance into the sectors would be conducted followed by the area being prepared from the outside in. This was accomplished primarily through the use of artillery, with the aid of air bombardment and tank fire. It was only following this that Russian forces would be committed to flush out the remaining insurgents.

The initial thrust of the Russians security operations was to secure areas in northern Chechnya from which further operations could be conducted. In Northern Chechnya, due to the weight of Russian security forces in the area, near continuous security was accomplished which was only marred by low levels of violence in the form of daily bombings and sniping. Due to sufficient levels of security being achieved relatively early in the campaign, the Russians were successful in establishing a local Chechen provisional government. This government has played a key role in the aid of the Russians in their combat as well as the rebuilding of Chechnya's infrastructure and economy.

Although high levels of violence continued in Southern Chechnya, the Russians were able to pacify the insurgents more effectively in Northern Chechnya, which allowed them to gradually lower troop levels and to Chechanise their security apparatus in the area.

⁷⁹ Kramer, p.20.

⁸⁰ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.3.

At the height of the war in 2000 the Russians had over 100,000 troops in Chechnya.⁸¹ In September 2000 the Russians had 500 battalions of MVD, border guards, OMON, as well as 15,000 men in the 42nd Motorized Infantry Division of the MOD.⁸²

The Russians were quite successful in providing security throughout much of Northern and Central Chechnya. In order to provide security over wide areas, most Russian units were broken down into smaller groupings of reinforced battalions, platoons or companies operating out of security block posts, combat outposts and patrol bases. Although these smaller groupings were more vulnerable to insurgent attack, due to the sheer number of Russian troops in Chechnya during the initial stages of the campaign, the Russians were generally able to ensure that their units in Northern and Central Chechnya had friendly units nearby to reinforce them. The mountainous terrain in Southern Chechnya ensured that only small units could manoeuvre through the narrow valleys and reinforcements could easily be blocked from coming to the aid of an ambushed unit in an adjacent valley. Instead of gaining their respect or trust the Russians brutalized the local population in order to pacify the region. Chechen mountain villages were constantly subjected to bombing and vicious cordon and search operations. This tactic made it easier to identify and target the insurgents, as they no longer had a civilian population to hide amongst.

One of the most successful aspects of the Russian campaign in Chechnya was the emphasis on neutralizing key insurgent commanders. The Russians' success in neutralizing top insurgents meant that many would-be insurgents were unable to join larger established groups and were forced to conduct attacks in isolation or join smaller groups. Chechen leaders and their key lieutenants tended to be the only members of the insurgent group who were able to contact urban based middlemen who were responsible for coordinating the reinforcement of established insurgent groups.

Federal forces have consistently targeted insurgent leaders and lieutenants with

⁸¹ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.1.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.4.

success; on 19 March 2002, Khattab was killed by a poisoned letter,⁸³ and on 8 March 2005, Maskhadov was killed in an airstrike as a result of a tip off by a Chechen who was apparently paid \$10,000,000 by the FSB.⁸⁴ On 17 July 2006, Maskhadov's replacement, Abdul-Khakim Saydulayev was killed, and the following month on 10 July Shamil Basayev was killed.⁸⁵ Doku Umarov, the former Defence Minister of the Chechen republic of Ichkeria and the Vice-President at the time, replaced Saydulayev and became the new Ichkerian President.

A trend affecting the Russians' ability to provide security during the second conflict was the consistent, serious breaching of discipline. Russian soldiers and Officers stationed in Chechnya frequently used their tours for personal financial gain; inevitably this had negative implications for the Russians overall security campaign. Russian servicemen were frequently linked to the sale of arms, ammunition and other supplies which almost inevitably ended up in the hands of insurgents.⁸⁶ An example of this occurred in 1999, when 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade was held back from being deployed into Chechnya after it was discovered that that soldiers had sold explosives from their tanks' reactive armour.⁸⁷

Probably one of the largest, long term security concerns for the Russians came as a result of their brutalization of the Chechen population. Throughout the conflict Russians continuously humiliated Chechen society. The treatment of the Chechen civilian population in The First and Second Chechen Wars has in turn resulted in the radicalization of Chechen society. This radicalization has given rise to a new security threat which the Russians did not contend with during the First Chechen War, suicide bombings. Initially, this campaign used human suicide bombers who detonated themselves next to small, isolated groups of Russians conducting patrols or guarding checkpoints.⁸⁸ The campaign changed in the spring of 2000 when the Chechens began using suicide vehicles which had the advantage of

⁸³ Blandy, *Chechnya: Continued Violence*, p.5.

⁸⁴ Politkovskaya, A. (2007). *A Russian Diary*. Great Britain: Vintage Books, pp.214-215.

⁸⁵ Blandy, *Chechnya: Continued Violence*, pp.1-5.

⁸⁶ Shenfield, p.3.

⁸⁷ Orr, M. (2000, March). *Some Provisional Notes on Current Russian Operations in the Second Chechen War*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/docs/JIRArticle.htm>, p.4.

⁸⁸ Kramer, p.44.

carrying far more explosives, more rapidly, with greater defences than a human. Car and truck bombings continued at a relatively steady pace throughout the Second Chechen War, and according to official reports, by 2004, suicide bombings had accounted for over 1,200 deaths and thousands of injuries.⁸⁹

Reconstruction & Hearts and Minds

In early December 2000, former Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, emphasized the non-military aims of the new campaign, which were, ‘to rebuild the entire structure of local government...to restore the region’s economy...to provide heat and electricity to their homes...to create the necessary conditions for the return of displaced persons, to open schools and hospitals, and to begin paying pensions and social benefits.’⁹⁰

Along with the initial advance into Northern Chechnya, the Russians employed hearts and minds operations in the area in order to make Northern Chechnya a showcase of what could be provided. The Russians installed the Kadyrov administration in every town and village, built schools, hospitals and clinics and went about providing “rule of law.”⁹¹

Once the Russians neared Grozny and subsequently crossed the Terek, the campaign took on a different tone. In order to limit their own casualties, the Russians relied on mass bombardments to neutralize areas where they encountered resistance. The majority of Central and Southern Chechnya’s urban centres were reduced to rubble, and what had remained of Grozny at the end of the First Chechen War had been completely flattened by March 2000. Since that time, reconstruction in Chechnya has been slow. Initially, aside from areas in Northern Chechnya, little reconstruction was conducted during the first three years of the war. Russian servicemen plundered the majority of economic assets that remained in Chechnya. Various Russian Officers took nearly complete control of the burgeoning Chechen refinement industry, which had (illegally) been tapped into by

⁸⁹ Kramer, p.44.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.3.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.2.

Chechens at various points along the Russian pipeline running through Chechnya. The oil from these tapped points was then sent back to Russia under heavy guard provided by the military or MVD.⁹² Russian Officers also had their soldiers scour the ruined remains of Chechen industrial enterprises for scrap metal, which was also sent back to be sold in Russia.⁹³

Since 2003, the Russian government has supplied a minimal amount of aid to the reconstruction of Chechnya. Instead of providing money directly, control of the Chechen oil industry was gradually transferred from the various Russian security services to the hands of the Chechen government and the Kadyrov clan. Although sales from this oil were supposed to go towards the reconstruction and economic reinvigoration of the republic, in the event it was largely squandered or siphoned into personal accounts.⁹⁴ Apart from those residing in the area of Chechnya surrounding Tsentoroy, the home region of the Kadyrov clan and the showpiece capital Grozny, the majority of Chechens to this day do not have adequate housing, and those with housing often go without natural gas, electricity or water supplies.⁹⁵ This is in stark contrast to Federal forces stationed in Chechnya who have been given permanent housing with full utilities.⁹⁶ The lack of reconstruction has meant that Chechnya has experienced little economic revival, with the result that high levels of unemployment pervade Chechnya.

Lack of wide spread reconstruction and economic progress, combined with the traumatising effects of nearly 10 years of insecurity has left many young Chechens devoid of hope for the future. These same factors have led to the rise of non-traditional fundamentalist Islam which, with its promise of a better life in paradise as well as material benefits in this one, has encouraged some young Caucasians to carry or lay explosives for as little as 50 rubles.⁹⁷

⁹² Shenfield, pp.3-4.

⁹³ Ibid, pp.3-4.

⁹⁴ Blandy, C. (2004, September) *Chechnya After Beslan*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from [www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../04\(27\)-CWB.pdf](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../04(27)-CWB.pdf), p.10.

⁹⁵ Kramer, p.6.

⁹⁶ Blandy, *Chechnya: Centre of Unabated Instability & Conflict*, p.5.

⁹⁷ Blandy, *Chechnya After Beslan*, p.1.

Throughout the campaign, the Russians resorted to brutal means in order to deal with security problems. Innocent Chechen civilians have suffered brutal treatment at the hands of the Russians; they have been subject to a litany of crimes of war and crimes against humanity. According to a briefing delivered by Human Rights Watch to the 59th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2003, among other things, ‘Russian troops were committing hundreds of forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and widespread acts of torture and ill-treatment... (as) the armed conflict in Chechnya continues...humanitarian law violations appear to be increasing.’⁹⁸ Far from seeking to rectify these abuses, commanding officers have frequently condoned them or turned a blind eye.⁹⁹ The consequences of this behaviour have been mixed.

As was the case in the First Chechen War, young Chechens have been given a motive for decent and revenge; the current generation in Chechnya have known nothing but conflict. The brutality used by both the Russians and their Chechen allies against the Chechen population to some extent has led to war weariness among the people. They have been beaten out of the practice of resisting. If wide scale reconstruction and economic revival does not occur however, the next generation of Chechens, who have not experienced war and repression, may be willing recruits in a renewed insurgency.

Indigenous Allies

During the course of the Second Chechen War, the Russians were gradually able to implement a form of colonial rule in Chechnya, whereby Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation, yet Chechens govern themselves and for the most part provide for their own security. At the beginning of the Second Chechen War, the Russians installed a pro-Russian provisional Chechen administration in Russian secured areas. Instead of installing a member of the existing pro-Russian Chechen opposition as head of the new Chechen

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch. (2003, April). *Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper To the 59th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights On the Human Right Situation in Chechnya*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/russia/chechnya/>, p.2.

⁹⁹ Kramer, p.9.

provisional government, the recently surrendered Akhmat Kadyrov was put into the top position. Kadyrov possessed traits which the Russians respected and sought in a man that would preside over Chechnya:

‘President Kadyrov... (was) determined, ruthless and strong: attributes prized and respected by Russians... President Kadyrov displayed uncompromising obduracy, toughness and brutal single-mindedness in striving to achieve those objectives which he believed would bring about a cessation of separatist and extremist activity in his republic.’¹⁰⁰

Kadyrov was appointed head of the pro-Russian civil administration in Chechnya in June 2000. This granted the pro-Russian civil administration a sense of legitimacy among Sufis and more moderate Chechens.

The Russians were quite successful at reaching out to more moderate insurgents while continuing to battle the irreconcilables. To these Chechens who had become repelled by the excesses of the fundamentalists, Kadyrov represented a more moderate form of Islam, and his departure from the insurgency created a split within the insurgents’ ranks. The Russians offered amnesties and incentives for moderate commanders to defect, while pursuing a tough line towards any negotiation with the insurgency. Many moderate commanders left the insurgency, taking advantage of Russian amnesties, and joined the pro-Russian administration.¹⁰¹ Two of the most prominent insurgent commanders to take advantage of these amnesties were the Yamadayev brothers, Khalid and Dzhabrail. The two brothers were the insurgent commanders in Gudermes, and were given amnesty in return for handing over the city to the Russians.¹⁰²

For the Second Chechen War the Russians immediately sought to “Chechenise” the conflict. In 1999, the Russians created two Chechen special task companies, Vostok (East) and Zapad (West). As the war continued, these two companies were expanded with former Chechen insurgents who had volunteered following their amnesty.¹⁰³ Vostok and Zapad gradually became full strength battalions, and in order to ensure their proper training, in 2003 the two were attached to the 42nd Motorized Infantry Division.¹⁰⁴ These battalions

¹⁰⁰ Blandy, *Chechnya: The Search for a Strong Successor*, p.1.

¹⁰¹ Trenin & Malashenko, p.36.

¹⁰² Blandy, *Chechnya: Centre of Unabated Instability & Conflict*, pp.2-3.

¹⁰³ Blandy, *Chechnya: The Search for a Strong Successor*, p.3.

¹⁰⁴ Simonov, p.4.

were joined by many other Chechen units, including various Chechen OMON and police units, oil protection regiment, a special regiment of police (PMON), as well as two more battalions, *Youg* (South) and *Sever* (North). The *Youg* and *Sever* battalions, along with the PMON regiment, Vostok battalion and oil protection regiment, have been led and manned by amnestied former insurgents.¹⁰⁵ As Chechen troop strength grew, Chechen units took over security, allowing the Russian units to be withdrawn. Today, the Chechen security forces number over 20,000, the majority of whom are part of the Chechen Interior Ministry.¹⁰⁶

The insurgents targeted the Chechen government, aiming to terrorise and kill its members and supporters, along with destroy its facilities. The insurgents' campaign of assassinations, suicide bombings and raids targeted the Chechen government as much as it did the Russians. In October 2002, a suicide bomber destroyed the Chechen MVD headquarters in Grozny, killing 25 people. In December the insurgents drove two truck bombs, each carrying over a ton of explosives, into the Chechen government's main complex, destroying the buildings, killing 85 and injuring hundreds.¹⁰⁷ Kadyrov was killed on 9 May 2004 while viewing a Victory Day Parade at the Dinamo Grozny Football Stadium. Two IEDs, created from 152 mm artillery shells, were planted by Chechen insurgents in a concrete pillars underneath a viewing platform reserved for government officials.¹⁰⁸ When the IEDs exploded they killed numerous Chechen and Russian officials, including Kadyrov, two of his bodyguards and the head of the Chechen Republic State Council; and injured over 60, including the Commander of the OVG and the military Commandant of Chechnya.¹⁰⁹ Kadyrov's son, Ramzan, became the heir apparent, and has since become president.

Although the pro-Moscow Chechen security forces generally did a good job of enforcing security, Russian military officers complained that they had been closely linked with the insurgency, and accused them of selling arms and equipment as well as potentially

¹⁰⁵ Simonov, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ Kramer, p.45.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.45.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.45.

participating in attacks on Russian forces. Russian officers have also complained that information which was shared with their Chechen counterparts frequently ended up helping the insurgents to flee before being attacked, or to place bombs or ambush points along known routes of Russian advance.¹¹⁰ Following the November 2002 assassination of Lieutenant General Igor Shifrin in Grozny, in which the Chechen security structure or government were implicated, the Russian command warned all Russian officers that ‘all information pertaining to the deployment of federal forces, is a military secret and must not be divulged to Chechen authorities.’¹¹¹

Although there is no doubt that the Kadyrov government largely secured Central and Northern Chechnya, it has not been a particularly popular government. The Kadyrov administration revealed itself to be a criminal regime; the pro-Moscow, Chechen security forces that Kadyrov controlled were basically his own, highly armed mafia. Kadyrov and the Chechen security forces consistently utilised brutal force to dominate Chechen society. They have been involved in numerous crimes, including ‘kidnapping, mass tortures and extrajudicial liquidations, rapes; illegal confiscations or destructions of civil property; in rendering pressure on opponents of the clan of the Kadyrovs from among the pro-Russian Chechen politicians; in racketeering; in participation in the illegal oil trade.’¹¹²

The Russians successfully utilised their Chechen allies during the Second Chechen War, and today, a Russian sponsored Chechen regime and Chechen security force governs and controls Chechnya. Although many Chechens have welcomed an end to the fighting, many have submitted only due to sheer exhaustion. The Kadyrov regime’s corrupt practices and daily brutality, as well as slow economic growth and lack of reconstruction within Chechnya, create the perfect conditions for many brutalized, dissatisfied and unemployed young Chechens to fall into the arms of the insurgency.

¹¹⁰ Kramer, p.10.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp.47-48.

¹¹² Simonov, p.3.

Unity of Effort

During the initial intervention, until January 2001, the Russian military was in complete control of operations. Russian military commanders were given carte blanche to pursue objectives based upon their own deadlines and perceptions of momentum; the military was given a guarantee that politicians would not interfere with operations as had been the case during the First Chechen War.¹¹³ This allowed military commanders to focus solely on the task of defeating the insurgency, without having to be concerned with the pace of political developments.

One major improvement, which aided the unity of effort between the various Russian force structures, was the reorganization of the NCMD before the war. A joint headquarters called the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces was created in the NCMD; this combined command of the military, MVD and various other security forces into a single headquarters.¹¹⁴

The Unified Grouping of Federal Forces operations were overseen by the Regional Operational Staff for Control of Counterterrorist Operation in the North Caucasus which was initially under the command of the MOD.¹¹⁵ Within the framework of the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces, Chechnya was divided into four operational sectors; North, East, South and West. The command structure of each operational sector took orders from the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces.¹¹⁶ At the beginning of the war, the Defence Ministry's units accounted for the majority of troops committed to the conflict; Army units took the lead during the initial operations in Chechnya. In order to improve coordination between the Army and MVD, military Officers were put in command of large parts of the MVD structure, including many underperforming MVD units.¹¹⁷

The performance of the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces at unifying the efforts

¹¹³ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.2.

¹¹⁴ Kramer, p.12.

¹¹⁵ Orr, p.2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.2.

¹¹⁷ Thomas, *A Tale of Two Theaters*, p.4.

of the various security structures has been very mixed. Despite a joint headquarters, inter-service rivalries between the various Russian security organizations continued to exist. Anna Politkovskaya highlighted the problem, ‘all the federal troops are supposedly on the same side, but the reality is quite different. The soldiers under the Ministry of Defence are at daggers drawn with the FSB, and the Interior Troops are at loggerheads both with their own Interior Ministry and the Army.’¹¹⁸

A by-product of the two changes of command that occurred within the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces has been that Russian units and friendly Chechen forces have generally had conflicting chains of command. The MVD currently directs all planning and security operations for the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces. Despite this, the FSB and the MOD continue to conduct independent planning and operations in Chechnya, especially in the mountainous Southern areas.¹¹⁹ In 2001, the FSB took over command of operations for the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces from the MOD, and all the while, the MOD continued to control the Mountain Grouping of Forces. General Arkadii Bakhin was put in charge of this mountain force, which was responsible for the continued combat operation in Southern Chechnya.¹²⁰

When the MVD took over command of the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces from the FSB in July 2004, there was a complete reluctance between the organizations to share any information or pursue joint operations. According to the former President of Chechnya, Akhmat Kadyrov, ‘the entrenched problem of coordinating Russian forces has still not been resolved, and there is still no unified command structure set up. Each of the power ministries goes off and does whatever it wants.’¹²¹ The MOD continued to operate independently of the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces in the Southern areas of the country. According to the Former Commander of the North Caucasian Military District, Vladimir Boldyre, in order to ensure deconfliction, zones of influence were created whereby ‘the part of the republic with flat terrain is controlled by the Internal Forces,

¹¹⁸ Politkovskaya, pp.50-51.

¹¹⁹ Kramer, p.13.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.13.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.15.

whereas in the mountains a 33,000-strong Defence Ministry grouping has been established.¹²²

Despite the improved coordination of Russian forces during the Second Chechen War, significant problems in managing the various security structures in Chechnya remained. Perhaps the greatest problem in unifying the efforts of the Russian security services was that there were over a dozen independent security organizations operating in Chechnya, and each had its own personnel who operated under their own command umbrellas.¹²³

Airpower

In complete contrast to its role during the First Chechen War, Russian airpower played a decisive role during the Second Chechen War. Airpower was used to soften targets before the war, once the war began it was used to attack and push the insurgents back, and finally it was used to destroy and harass isolated insurgent groups. However, as was the case in the First War, Russian airpower has had serious drawbacks. Although the insurgents only possessed meagre air-defence assets, Russian aircraft remained extremely vulnerable to insurgent attack, although ‘with regard to air defence it was mainly luck rather than well-prepared defence, which enabled them to shoot down some helicopters and aircraft.’¹²⁴ Although Russian airpower was useful in COIN, it has been proven to be of limited use in a COIN role.

Russian airpower was utilised extensively throughout the Second Chechen War. Its primary offensive uses were to isolate insurgents in remote mountain valleys, prevent new

¹²² Kramer, p.14.

¹²³ Ibid, p.14. (These include MVD troops plus MVD special operations contingents, OMON, FSB Spetsnaz, paratroopers units from the airborne forces, reconnaissance units from the Foreign Intelligence Service, reconnaissance and Spetsnaz units from the GRU, Army aviation, missile and artillery units from the army, the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, military transport regiments from the Federal Service of Railroad Troops and search-and-rescue units from the Ministry of Civil Defence.)

¹²⁴ de Haas, M. (2003, January) *The Use of Russian Airpower In the Second Chechen War*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/documents-listings/russian/B59>, p.7.

insurgent strongholds from being established in conquered territory and strike suspected insurgent targets. The main way this was conducted was through employing a strategy called ‘free hunt’, in which pairs of ground attack aircraft or gunships roamed the countryside firing on targets.¹²⁵ Russian aircraft also provided airlift for troops throughout Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus. Air and helicopter-borne troops proved to be invaluable by creating blocking forces ahead of the insurgents along their route of retreat into the mountains following their withdrawal from Grozny.¹²⁶ Russian aircraft provided valuable reconnaissance with the addition of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) during the inter-war years. The Pchela-1t UAV allowed the Russians to collect remote real time intelligence, and to direct air or artillery strikes against targets that were uncovered.¹²⁷

The major issue affecting the performance of Russian airpower during the war was lack of funding. For instance, Russian airfields in the North Caucasus were in an archaic state, having not been modernized since Soviet times. According to Lefebvre, 80% of runaways utilized by the Russian Air Force in 2005 would be in of modernisation, repairs or reconstruction.¹²⁸ The Russian MOD warned that ‘if fundamental improvements are not made urgently, Russian military aviation by 2010 will present a greater threat to its own country (to pilots, passengers and other) than to a likely adversary.’¹²⁹ Due to the dilapidated state of airfields and maintenance facilities, between 1999 and 2001 the air force was limited to as few as 50 sorties a day, and possibly none at all during winter or inclement weather.¹³⁰

Lack of funding also continued to affect pilot training. Whereas Army Aviation Pilots trained for roughly 150 hours per year during the Soviet period, this fell to 14 hours per year in the 1990s, and then rose to 21 hours in 2002 and to 28 hours in 2003.¹³¹ Because flying time is primarily allocated to first class pilots, second and third class pilots

¹²⁵ de Haas, p.13.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.13.

¹²⁷ Lefebvre, S. (2002, July). *The Reform of the Russian Air Force*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from: <http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Russian/B57>, p.13.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.2.

¹²⁹ Kramer, p.38.

¹³⁰ Baev, P. (2000). *Will Russia Go For a Military Victory in Chechnya?* Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/pm_0107.pdf, p.4.

¹³¹ Kramer, p.36.

barely clock enough hours to keep their qualifications, let alone be promoted to a higher qualification.¹³² Due to their poor training, poor living conditions and low wages, Russian pilots often sought more safe and lucrative work as civilian commercial pilots.¹³³ This meant that many of the pilots that remained were young and inexperienced; very few pilots who flew in the First Chechen War were still flying in the second. The lack of training not only resulted in higher aircraft attrition but also a less effective fulfilment of missions.¹³⁴

Lack of funding has meant that despite there being newer models of aircraft and helicopters available, there is little money to purchase them and introduce them into Russian air units. According to Lefebvre, 'In 2002, 50% of the aircraft were more than fifteen years old, 20% ten to fifteen, 30% five to ten and less than 1% less than five.'¹³⁵ The lack of funding had disastrous effects on the ability of Russian helicopters to effectively complete missions. Between 1995 and 2004, Russian Army Aviation did not receive a single new helicopter, with the result that roughly 70% of the helicopters deployed in Chechnya were in urgent need of repair.¹³⁶ The majority of the helicopters had been manufactured in the Soviet era, and had not received any upgrades since. This meant that they had no night vision capabilities, all-weather navigational devices or infrared engine exhaust suppressors, and had communications devices which were open to Chechen intercept.¹³⁷

Due to the antiquated and dilapidated state of Russian helicopters, the insurgents were frequently successful in downing them. In the first three years of the war, insurgents shot down and destroyed 36 Russian helicopters. This constituted 55% of all helicopters committed to the Chechen theatre, or 65% of the helicopters actually in service at any one time.¹³⁸ Things were no better three years on. During 2003 and the first half of 2004, the Chechen insurgents shot down at least one Mi-8 or Mi-24 helicopter every month.¹³⁹ Due

¹³² Lefebvre, pp.2, 11.

¹³³ Ibid, p.36.

¹³⁴ de Haas, p.15.

¹³⁵ Lefebvre, p.15.

¹³⁶ Kramer, p.37.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.37.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.35.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.35.

to the insurgents' early success at downing or badly damaging the Russians helicopters, there was a chronic shortage of helicopters within the Army Aviation Corps during the first five years of the war. According to a GRU Spetsnaz Officer who was interviewed in June 2004, 'the total number of helicopters deployed by all Russian Spetsnaz forces in Chechnya...is smaller than the number assigned to just a single Spetsnaz reconnaissance detachment in Afghanistan...the dearth of assault helicopters...has prevented Spetsnaz forces from undertaking airborne assault operation.'¹⁴⁰

Although it was noted that airpower used the wrong way could undermine the overall COIN strategy by turning civilians against the counterinsurgent, the Russian strategy in the Second Chechen War was to force Chechens who were not totally for the insurgency to become refugees by bombing and intimidating them. Bombing played a large part in the creation of refugees during the first year of the war, by forcing Chechens living in the Southern mountains to migrate to urban centres or out of the republic. Despite being a brutal tactic, depopulating areas has made it easier for Russian forces to identify, isolate and attack insurgents.

Media Manipulation

During the Second Chechen War Russian policy makers manipulated the media, and consequently Russian public opinion, far more successfully than they had in the first war. It became clear during the Second Chechen War that Russian spokesmen had learned the great value of a successfully manipulated media as a force multiplier. According to the former director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Research branch of the Russian External Security Service, Yevgeniy Kozhokin:

'real time TV can impart an instantaneous and powerful emotional impulse. It is directed both at the consciousness and the subconscious...further, it allows a producer to focus attention and concentrate on a specific emotion...(this made the media) a component of combat operations.'¹⁴¹

The First Chechen War began before the Russian media and public had been

¹⁴⁰ Kramer, p.19.

¹⁴¹ Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, p.8.

adequately prepared for the outbreak of hostilities. Throughout the first conflict, Russian policy makers and security spokesmen lost media attention by shutting off contact with media or providing unreliable information. During the Second Chechen War Russian policy makers worked quickly to ensure that the picture seen within Russian and largely around the world would be one of Russia's choosing. In order to accomplish this, former president Boris Yeltsin signed Russian Federation Resolution Number 1538 in December 1999.¹⁴² Resolution Number 1538 was designed to filter military information coming out of Chechnya and to dictate what foreign broadcasters could show about the new war in Chechnya to a Russian audience. Through this resolution the Russian Ministry of Press was given the ability to cut out media organizations with any dissenting views from official media briefings of any state entity as well as ban travel into Chechnya.¹⁴³ Sergei Yastrzhembskiy, the former chief Russian spokesman, commented on these issues: 'never in a territory where such operations are going on can there be full freedom of action for representatives of the mass media.'¹⁴⁴

The Ministry of Press worked in conjunction with the MOD press centre in Mozdok. The press centre was specifically designed to filter information about the war before it could be disseminated to the media, and exercised high levels of control as to what could be written and said within the media.¹⁴⁵ The press centre created guidelines as to the descriptive language that could be used, for instance, 'aircraft are not bombing and artillery is not firing on towns...they are working on towns.'¹⁴⁶ The change in language used by the media had a great influence on changing many of the Russian people's conceptions of the war. Pavel Felgenhauer said with respect to these tight state restrictions: 'this was not journalism. You can't even call it one-sided. This is propaganda. But it keeps up the popularity of the war.'¹⁴⁷

Russian news agencies were explicitly barred from showing Russian losses or

¹⁴² Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, p.5.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.8

¹⁴⁵ Pain, E. (2000, July/August). *The Second Chechen War: The Information Component*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from, <http://www.cgsc.army.mil/milrev/english/JulAug00/love.asp>, p.3.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.2.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, p.5.

instances of Russian soldiers looting even when these events had been filmed.¹⁴⁸ Media organizations that would not comply with the Ministry's restrictions were simply barred from the combat zone; the left wing newspaper, *Zavtra* conducted an interview with Akhmad Zakayev, the separatist Chechen representative to Europe, and was subsequently issued with an official warning and was no longer given access to Chechnya.¹⁴⁹ In order to silence some media organizations state controlled organisations bought them out, as was the case with NTV, which was bought out by the Russian state oil company Gazprom in April 2001.¹⁵⁰ Some media organizations were forced to shut down as they were receiving threats; in early 2002, TV6 simply went off the air.¹⁵¹ Other media organizations were shut down following acts of arson; in the city of Syktyvkar, the offices of the newspaper, Stefanov Boulevard, were burnt down in 2002, and in 2005 the building of the opposition newspaper, Courier Plus, met the same demise.¹⁵²

Independent reporters who were able to make it into Chechnya were subject to kidnap and potential murder. Between 1992 and March 2000 almost 1,800 people had been kidnapped on or near Chechen territory, some of whom were returned for ransom while others were executed.¹⁵³ These numbers have effectively dissuaded many reporters from entering Chechnya and many parts of Ingushetia and Dagestan. The result of this was that Chechens had difficulty attracting the independent media, which forced them to largely resort to using internet websites to get their version of events out.

The restrictions placed upon and the danger of reporting in Chechnya essentially lead to a repeat of the Russian government's version of events by the media, 'TV coverage of the war was described as entertainment, since there were no dead bodies, only missiles flying and tanks moving. No casualties were shown. Russian media shaped the flow of information out of Chechnya and onto Russian TV screens in a manner unprecedented

¹⁴⁸ Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, p.11.

¹⁴⁹ Blandy, *Chechnya: Normalisation*, p.6.

¹⁵⁰ Trenin & Malashenko, p.147.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.147.

¹⁵² Politkovskaya, p.272.

¹⁵³ Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, p.2.

since the time of the USSR.¹⁵⁴

Russian security forces have attacked the Chechen media apparatus more effectively than in the First Chechen War. Before Russian troops entered Chechnya, the Chechen radio and TV transmitters were destroyed by missiles. Since the occupation of Chechnya, specialized Russian security personnel and independent Russian hackers have successfully hacked into and shut down or monitored websites disseminating pro-Chechen information.

The Russians promoted a free but controlled press in occupied Chechnya, which quickly spawned numerous Chechen run newspapers, including one government run newspaper, *Svobodnaya Chechnya* (Free Chechnya). These newspapers went a long way towards gaining the support of the Chechen civilian's for the Chechen administration, and sowing the seeds of doubt and division amongst the insurgents.

In the Second Chechen War the Russians enjoyed near complete media dominance. Winning the media war greatly minimized the public's reaction to both the duration of the war as well as to Russian casualties.

Training

During the First Chechen War, one of the primary limiting factors in Russian COIN operations was the degree to which the majority of Russian personnel were unprepared for COIN. Russian servicemen had not received COIN specific training before the commencement of hostilities, but rather they learnt their lessons in the heat of combat. In the interlude between the two Chechen wars, major budget cuts meant that little could be done to upgrade the level of training that Russian soldiers received. In 1997, less than 10% of the annual military budget was spent on training.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Thomas, *Manipulating the Mass Consciousness*, p.10.

¹⁵⁵ Main, S. (2000). *The North Caucasus Military District 1996–August 1999*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2000/A101-sjm.htm>, p.7.

By 1997, still seething from their defeat in the first war, the leaders of the North Caucasian Military District (NCMD) and the General Staff of the Russian Federation had come to believe future war with Chechnya was inevitable. In order to prepare for this eventuality, the NCMD was given priority in requisitioning and training its units. Further, units trained in the NCMD received counter-terrorism and anti-guerrilla warfare training.¹⁵⁶ In an attempt to overcome the inadequate nature of the previous training facilities in the NCMD, a new training base was built outside of Mozdok that was geared towards teaching servicemen COIN. Along with facilities to conduct live firing exercises and vehicle training, the base housed areas for servicemen to learn mine and IED awareness, and how to dispose of these explosives. Although the base was a great improvement it had limited facilities for urban operations training, which meant the majority of Russian forces entering Chechnya were not trained for urban operations.¹⁵⁷

Although this base provided an excellent training regime for servicemen within the NCMD, the training system across the rest of the Russian forces remained antiquated. The majority of the servicemen in the remaining districts of the Russian military were trained for conventional operations. This being the case, when the Second Chechen War began the new Mozdok base was designated for PDT.

In the First Chechen War, soldiers who were fresh out of basic training, and had not even undergone corps training, were thrown into combat. Having learnt from this mistake, the Russians utilised increasing numbers of *kontrakti* during the Second Chechen War. Further, Yeltsin increased the length of service required before a soldier could be sent to Chechnya to six months; however, most units still had more than 50% of their troops having served less than three months.¹⁵⁸

In 2000, after fighting for over a year and facing increased insurgency in Dagestan and Ingushetia, the Russian high command began preparing a new training regime by which forces throughout the Russian Federation would be prepared for small wars. New

¹⁵⁶ Trenin & Malashenko, p.111.

¹⁵⁷ Orr, *Provisional Notes on Current Russian Operations in the Second Chechen War*, p.3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.2.

combat regulations were issued as well as a new military doctrine which specifically addressed small wars and COIN.¹⁵⁹

Logistics and Equipment

The logistical preparations prior to the Second Chechen War were no better than those carried out before the first war. The basic equipment that a soldier should receive while in a combat zone could not be provided to Russian servicemen during the war. The soldiers infrequently received much needed flak jackets, and once in Chechnya, the only source of replacement uniforms, boots or equipment was typically the dead.¹⁶⁰ Combat necessities were often inadequately supplied; ammunition was frequently in short supply and units habitually lacked fuel for their vehicles.¹⁶¹ Soldiers were even forced to scavenge equipment on the battlefield to fix damaged weapons or vehicles.¹⁶²

Much of the equipment utilised by Russian forces during the Second Chechen War was the same obsolete equipment that had been used in the first conflict. The difficulty of supplying front line servicemen was encountered again in the Second Chechen War because Russian train cars and transport vehicles frequently lacked armour. At the time the Russians possessed armoured trains and logistics vehicles, yet the majority of the transport used in Chechnya was of the obsolete, soft-skinned variety and was extremely susceptible to insurgent IEDs and ambush. Commenting on the antiquated state of the equipment being used, the former Commander of the NCMD, General Vladimir Boldyrev said: ‘we don’t have enough modern weapons...our existing equipment needs to be comprehensively modernized and replaced.’¹⁶³

The majority of the weapons systems and equipment used by the Russians in Chechnya was manufactured during the Soviet era. Although much of the communication

¹⁵⁹ Trenin & Malashenko, p.121.

¹⁶⁰ Babchenko, p.203.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.175.

¹⁶² Kramer, pp.23-24.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.22.

equipment, including radio nets, used by the Russians during the Second Chechen War was encrypted, it remained susceptible to skilled Chechen signals operators. The majority of Russian troops in Chechnya lacked the types of equipment which have proven to be invaluable in the COIN campaigns being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. Very few Russian units possessed night vision equipment, global positioning systems or secure communications equipment, and the Russian artillery did not have advanced targeting systems.¹⁶⁴ Much of the equipment utilized by the Russians was of inferior quality to the commercial equipment which the Chechens possessed. According to the former commander of the Federal Border Guards stationed in Argun, Colonel Yurii Radionov, 'The results of many of the armed clashes have shown the guerrillas are equipped a lot better than our own troops.'¹⁶⁵

One major difference between the two conflicts was the utilisation of every weapons system, with the exception of nuclear weaponry, within the Russian arsenal during the Second Chechen War. Precision guided munitions were used throughout the conflict to take out concentrations of insurgents and to assassinate insurgent commanders. Another piece of equipment which was provided to Russian forces was thermo-baric weaponry. This weaponry was provided to artillery, armour and infantry units alike, thermo-baric weaponry was exceptionally effective at neutralizing insurgent strongpoints.

The largest problem associated with Russian logistics and equipment is the complete lack of a modern digital industrial base within some sectors. This is illustrated by the continued difficulty that the Russian forces have had clearing IEDs which have been the greatest cause of Russian casualties throughout the Second Chechen War. According to General Serdtsev, this is because:

'Russia's scientific and industrial base is incapable of meeting the tactical and technical requirements we now have for the latest types of armaments. Russia is lagging far behind technologically in the production of minesweeping equipment, devices to safeguard troops against explosives, engineering munitions, and robotic engineering gear.'¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Grau & Thomas, *Russian Lessons Learned From the Battle For Grozny*, p.5.

¹⁶⁵ Kramer, p.23.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.31.

Morale

In the interlude between the two Chechen wars, the various Russian security services had done little to improve the pay or the conditions under which servicemen lived, trained and fought. The factors which contributed to poor moral among Russian servicemen before and during the First Chechen War, continued to be present at the beginning of the second war, and to a large extent are present today. *Dedovshchina*, poor nutrition and health care, irrelevant training, and outdated equipment were causes for poor morale within the Russian security services before and during the Second Chechen War.

Poor morale has continued to be one of the major reasons for the poor performance of many of the Russian units serving in the Northern Caucasus. According to Kramer, 'Russian commanders in Chechnya have argued that without troops who are highly motivated to conduct non-traditional forms of warfare, it will be impossible to carry out the complex, wide-ranging tasks needed to crush the resistance.'¹⁶⁷ Drug and alcohol dependencies, which were common-place amongst servicemen in Chechnya, compounded the problem.

Dedovshchina has been the single worst phenomenon to affect the morale and health of Russian servicemen in the modern Russian security services. Although *Dedovshchina* has been around since Soviet times, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 it has consistently become more vicious and depraved. Since 1994, almost as many Russian servicemen have died or been badly injured as a result of *Dedovshchina* as have been killed in combat operations in both the Chechen wars combined.¹⁶⁸ During the Second Chechen War it has had a truly debilitating affect on the morale, and in many cases on the lives of Russian personnel. According to a study conducted on the effects of *Dedovshchina* in Chechnya by Mikhail Khodarenok, *Dedovshchina* has accounted for '50 percent of the casualties suffered by Russian troops in Chechnya and up to 80 percent in some units.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Kramer, p.18.

¹⁶⁸ Trenin & Malashenko, p.210.

¹⁶⁹ Kramer, p.16.

One issue that has affected the morale of Russian servicemen throughout the Second Chechen War is the hardships that they have had to face outside of those expected to be faced in a combat zone. As in the first war, Russian forces have suffered from poor health throughout the Second Chechen War. There are many factors which can be attributed to this, including poor nutrition, poor living conditions, lack of access to medical facilities and antiquated medical supplies. Russian servicemen across the Russian federation have tended to have been fed very poorly in terms of variability and nutritional content of meals. Servicemen in Chechnya have subsisted for the most part off thin barley porridge, and have supplemented their diets with whatever they have been able to purchase with their meagre wages; in extreme cases Russian servicemen have been known to kill dogs to supplement their diets.¹⁷⁰ The Russian forces had a long standing shortage of antibiotics, and when antibiotics were present, they were frequently well past their expiration date, rendering them ineffective.¹⁷¹ As was the case during the First Chechen War, Russian troops fighting in the second conflict infrequently had access to clean water, which led to outbreaks of waterborne diseases.¹⁷²

Russian servicemen were continuously unpaid for long periods of time during the Second Chechen War. In a survey conducted by the Russian Ministry of Defence in 2005 only 5% of Russian officers felt their material situation was satisfactory.¹⁷³ Even *kontrakti* faced long delays in receiving pay or combat bonuses. In August 2004, 71 OMON officers filed a suit against the MVD because they had not received their combat bonuses for their service in Chechnya. Although the lawsuit was dropped following the Beslan hostage crises, the group of officers continued to complain about the endless delays in receiving their wages.¹⁷⁴ This situation with paying soldiers appears to be a long term problem; in 2005 the Russian MOD announced that officers' pay will not go up in line with inflation, despite the fact that between 2004 and 2005 inflation in Russia went up by 25%.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Babchenko, pp.22-23, 175.

¹⁷¹ Politkovskaya, p.58.

¹⁷² Babchenko, pp.328-329.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.200.

¹⁷⁴ Kramer, p.17.

¹⁷⁵ Politkovskaya, p.216.

One major issue that has affected the morale of the Russian troops serving in the North Caucasus has been the striking degree of hypocrisy between the official briefing and the reality of the security situation in the area. The Russian government widely stated that security in the North Caucasus had been in a rebuilding or policing phase of operation. Russian servicemen in the area have frequently been targeted by IEDs and periodically engaged by large groups of insurgents in Southern Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. Russian military expert, Vadim Solovev, highlights the situation, ‘On the one hand, the official line is that a peaceful situation exists in Chechnya and adjoining regions. On the other hand, the troops are obliged to conduct full-scale combat operations and must be constantly ready to fend off the mountain warriors.’¹⁷⁶ Russian newspapers reveal that the troops in the North Caucasus were attacked almost fortnightly and received at least a dozen casualties per attack.¹⁷⁷

As the campaign lengthened and expanded into a North Caucasian wide COIN operation, the Russian command worked to improve the moral of the troops serving in the North Caucasus. According to Lieutenant General Baranov, the Commander of Federal forces in Chechnya in 2004, permanent housing had been built in Russian bases, and schools and kindergartens were built for the children that accompanied their families to garrisons.¹⁷⁸ Despite this effort however, to this day the conditions that the majority of Russian servicemen in Chechnya and the North Caucasus have lived and fought in have tended to be substandard.

Conclusion

Many of the deficiencies displayed by the Russian forces during the First Chechen War were still present during the Second Chechen War. Little attempt was made to remedy these deficiencies through comprehensive reforms during the inter-war years, and the Russian security services entered Chechnya in 1999 essentially unchanged and unreformed

¹⁷⁶ Kramer, p.17.

¹⁷⁷ At the very minimum 250-260 casualties a year in the North Caucasus.

¹⁷⁸ Blandy, *Chechnya: Centre of Unabated Instability & Conflict*, p.5.

from what they had been in 1994. Although the Russians were undertrained, underequipped and underfunded for their second assault on Chechnya, they were able to gain the upper hand. They had learned a few lessons from the First Chechen War and had implemented some successful changes during the course of the second conflict. They had better cooperation with their Chechen allies, they successfully manipulated the media, and most importantly, better use of their existing advantages which included, domination in the air, massive firepower and greater numbers. Grau and Thomas best sum up the performance of the Russian forces fighting COIN in the Second Chechen War, 'If the Russians received an F for their first fight..., they earned a C for... 2000.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Grau & Thomas, *Russian Lessons Learned From the Battle For Grozny*, p.4.

Conclusion: Russian COIN in the Future

‘Our entire generation may have died in Chechnya, a whole generation of Russians. Even those who stayed alive – can they really be those same laughing boys who got sent off to the army by their loved ones? No, we died. We all died in that war’

Arkady Babchenko¹

Russian Performance in COIN through the Chechen Wars

The two wars that Russia fought in Chechnya clearly illustrate the deficiencies that existed within the Russian security services. These deficiencies greatly reduced the efficacy by which Russian forces conducted COIN operations. The First Chechen War was a complete catastrophe for Russia. There were massive failures at every level, from the command level down to the equipment utilized. Following the First Chechen War the Russian command were not able to gather many positive lessons when reviewing the performance of the Russian forces. Few changes were made and the Second Chechen War was marked by many similar deficiencies. Notwithstanding, there were sufficient improvements made to result in Russian victory.

A major factor detracting from the effectiveness of Russian COIN operations throughout the course of the First Chechen War was a lack of reliable intelligence. The speed at which Russian forces were ordered to invade Chechnya precluded adequate intelligence preparations. As a result, before the campaign commenced, Russian forces were not prepared to fight COIN operations. They were completely unaware of the geographic environment in Chechnya and were so ill-prepared that the troops lacked detailed maps of Chechnya. The majority of Russian soldiers had a limited understanding of the Chechen people, their culture and the country. Most of the servicemen could not

¹ Babchenko, p.162.

even speak cursory every day Chechen phrases, there were few Chechen translators, and as a result, there were great difficulties in gaining and processing information. Further, because of their lack of understanding of the social dynamics within Chechen society the Russians mistreated most *tieps*, which gave many Chechens cause to pursue *adat* against Russian forces.

Russian intelligence preparations during the Second Chechen War were substantially more effective. Although the FSB failed to anticipate and consequently prepare federal forces for the August 1999 Chechen incursion into Dagestan, this was probably an intentional oversight in order to garner public support for the renewal of hostilities in Chechnya. Russian Intelligence Officers had been planning a renewed operation in Chechnya and had done a great deal of study on the lessons learned, not only in the First Chechen War, but also in previous wars and uprisings which had occurred in Chechnya. Clearly the Russians did learn lessons and subsequently applied these lessons in the planning of the renewed invasion and in the utilisation of their forces during the war. During the Second Chechen War Russian intelligence had a better understanding of the decision making processes of the Chechens, and they had the foresight to install Kadyrov as the head of the pro-Russian provisional administration. It was this single act that won many Chechens over to the Russian cause. Additionally, due to the intelligence preparations conducted before the Second Chechen War, the Russians appeared to be aware of the operational environment in which they would be fighting.

One of the primary reasons that the Russian forces were not successful in conducting COIN operations during the First Chechen War was that they lacked the manpower to effectively secure pacified areas and continue forward operations. The 45,000 troops that the Russians had in Chechnya at the height of the First Chechen War were simply not enough to fight the insurgency and secure Chechnya. To make matters worse, these troops were prepared to fight a conventional operation, not a COIN operation, and there were no contingency plans for fighting a prolonged COIN operation. The Russians were not able to defeat the insurgency on a tactical or strategic level as they had insufficient troops and had not expected to face an insurgency. They could not effectively blockade

Chechnya's borders or prevent beaten insurgents from frequently escaping into inaccessible areas, as occurred following the first and second battles of Grozny.

This problem was further exacerbated by the majority of Russian units being too large to be effective in COIN operations. The Russians ability to conduct COIN operations was also limited by the continued use of a rigid command and control system which proved wholly unsuitable for COIN operations because it did not allow Russian personnel the time or authority to exercise initiative. As a result of the centralized command system the Chechens consistently outfought Russian soldiers at close quarters. The conscript force which Russia used to invade Chechnya had very little acquired knowledge and poor training, and was no match for the Chechens. In order to compensate for all of these deficiencies the Russians used massive firepower to engage the insurgents, which only served to alienate the population and turn them to the insurgency.

Not many of the mistakes that had been made by the Russians during the First Chechen War were made during the second. At their peak strength the Russians had 100,000 troops in Chechnya, which proved to be enough to effectively blockade most of Chechnya's borders as well as to surround areas of suspected insurgent concentration and systematically reduce them thereafter. Although these troops were not necessarily well trained for COIN operations, they had been prepared this time and were organised to fight COIN operations which made them far more effective at doing so.

During the Second Chechen War traditional units were replaced by combined operational groupings. These units were far more flexible than traditional units and also allowed Russian commanders more latitude to conduct small unit operations with adequate fire support. This, coupled with the use of the zonal territorial method, effectively decentralized the command chain and allowed lower level commanders to exercise initiative. Additionally, in order to increase the proficiency of the units, more *kontrakti* were utilized, for the most part green recruits were no-longer sent into Chechnya, and MVD command positions were filled with career MOD officers. Despite having superior units, the Russians continued to use overwhelming firepower to overcome the insurgents, a

measure that had only served to alienate the population and drive it into the arms of the insurgency during the First Chechen War. The use of overwhelming firepower during the Second Chechen War served to successfully protect Russian soldiers as well as reduce the Chechens' resolve to continue the fight.

The ultimate success of the Second Chechen War was achieved through the Russians' ability to attain a relative measure of security early in the campaign. This allowed the Russians to successfully establish a local Chechen provisional government, which has played a key role in combating the insurgency and in the rebuilding of Chechnya's infrastructure and economy. It was these events, as well as the successful destruction of insurgent bands and killing of key insurgent commanders, that enabled Chechnya to be reintegrated as part of the Russian federation.

At the time of the First Chechen War, the Russians had planned to conduct a quick invasion of Chechnya, and had not planned to conduct hearts and minds or reconstruction operations until security operations had ceased. Although the war did not end up being the short war that was planned, the Russians continued to neglect hearts and minds and reconstruction operations. During the Second Chechen War the Russians essentially employed a similar tactic, whereby the emphasis was not on reconstruction of the republic or hearts and minds operations, but on driving out the insurgents and restoring federal rule through an iron-fisted approach using overwhelming firepower and consistently brutalizing the population. Although reconstruction and hearts and minds operations were employed in the very Northern regions of Chechnya, when the campaign neared Grozny and subsequently crossed the Terek, it took on a more brutal tone, and the majority of Central and Southern Chechnya's urban centres were reduced to rubble.

Following four years of almost no reconstruction, Russia started to seek to normalize the situation and began to supply a minimal amount of aid for the reconstruction of Chechnya. However, because the money and proceeds from Chechen oil were funnelled through the Kadyrov clan before it went into reconstruction or social services, little reconstruction has occurred in the area surrounding Tsentsroy, the home region of the

Kadyrov clan, and the showpiece capital Grozny. The corruption and brutality of the Kadyrov regime, as well as the lack of reconstruction has given young Chechens a motive for decent and revenge. Although the current generation in Chechnya has known nothing but conflict, which has led to a sense of war weariness amongst the population, if wide scale reconstruction and economic revival does not occur, the next generation of Chechens, who have not experienced war and repression, may be willing recruits in a renewed insurgency.

A major failure in Russian COIN operations during the First Chechen War was the lack of cooperation that the Russians had with their Chechen allies. Before the war commenced the FSK did a very good job of cultivating and using Chechen allies to attack the Dudaev regime. However, when the Russians invaded, they began to disregard and in many cases mistreat their Chechen allies. Not having legitimate Chechen allies hurt the Russians, in that without indigenous support they were unable to get very much usable human intelligence. Further, without indigenous allies, normalisation of the security situation could not occur.

During the Second Chechen War the Russians cooperated far more efficiently with their indigenous allies, and as a result, have gradually been able to implement a form of colonial rule in Chechnya, whereby Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation, yet Chechens govern themselves and for the most part provide for their own security. This was largely achieved by installing Akhmat Kadyrov, a former Grand Mufti and insurgent, as the head of the new Chechen provisional government, which allowed the Russians to be quite successful at reaching out to more moderate insurgents and Sufi Muslims alike. Through the continued support of the Chechen forces the Russians have gradually been able to 'Chechenise' the conflict.

The unity of effort between the different Russian forces fighting in Chechnya, and between the Russian security services and the Russian political leadership was a major issue during the First Chechen War. Although there was an attempt to implement some cooperation between the various Russian security organizations in the form of a joint

headquarters, the headquarters was only created in the weeks preceding the invasion which was not enough time to manage the transition of a myriad of security organizations into a unified force. In order to avoid this state of affairs in the Second Chechen War, in the year preceding the war the Russians created the Unified Grouping of Federal Forces. This was to ensure the cooperation between the many government agencies that would be involved in a military emergency. The early creation of a joint command did result in a degree of cooperation between the various security organizations. As was the response with the American government and people following the 11 September attacks, following the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings all but the most fringe opposition groups supported a renewed 'war on terror'. This, coupled, with the support of a President who essentially owed his rise to the presidency and much of his continued popularity to the success of Russian forces in Chechnya, meant that Russian commanders in Chechnya could pursue the war as they saw fit. The Russians also began to put army officers in command of large parts of the MVD during the initial invasion. Thus, the Russian forces entering Chechnya the second time were not a completely unified force, but the different security services could generally work together.

The Russians possessed overwhelming air superiority in both wars, which should have been one of the most decisive factors. Yet, as a result of problems which can be attributed to poor funding, the Russians use of airpower achieved very mixed results in both wars. Due to underfunding, the aircraft and helicopters that the Russians utilized were typically obsolete, poorly maintained, pre-digital age Soviet relics. Underfunding also resulted in little training for pilots, who did not receive nearly enough flying time to maintain the high degree of skill needed to perform COIN air operations. During both conflicts poorly trained pilots, obsolete and poorly maintained helicopters and aircraft severely hampered the effectiveness of Russian air COIN operations. During the Second Chechen War airpower did play a more decisive role than it had during the first war. Airpower was used to soften targets before the war, it was used to attack and push the insurgents back during the war, and it was used to destroy and harass isolated insurgent groups. Airpower was the primary means by which the Russians isolated insurgents in remote mountain valleys and prevented them from establishing new strongholds. Bombing

was used to depopulate isolated areas, making it easier for Russian forces to identify, isolate and attack insurgents.

One of the worst failures of the First Chechen War was the Russians' inability to control the message portrayed by the media. The Russians should have been working to explain the motives and objectives of the Chechen invasion. This did not occur: instead the Russian military awarded control of the media to the insurgents by completely shutting out the media from its servicemen. The result was that the international and Russian news prominently featured destroyed Russian equipment, dead Russian soldiers and the atrocities committed by Russian forces on the Chechens, which broke the Russian public's waning support for the war. During the Second Chechen War the Russians worked quickly to ensure that the picture seen within Russia, and largely around the world, would be one of their choosing. Russian news agencies were explicitly barred from showing Russian atrocities or losses. Those that did not comply were barred from the combat zone, were threatened, or in some cases were bought out. Winning the media war greatly minimized the public's reaction to the duration of the war as well as to Russian casualties.

Before the First Chechen War, virtually no regular professional military training was conducted in the majority of the military units in Russia. Deficient training was a long standing factor within the post-Soviet Russian military as a result of a small military training budget, and the breakup of the Soviet Union which left many of Russia's key training bases outside its borders. Although meager amounts were added to the training budget between the two Chechen wars, most units within the Russian Federation continued to lack regular military training. As a result, during both wars the majority of Russian forces were far too unprofessional and undertrained to conduct effective COIN operations. The Russian command was left with no choice but to employ overwhelming firepower in order to neutralize the insurgents. This tactic backfired in the first war and set Chechen people against them, however, eventually it wore down the resolve of the insurgency and the people to keep resisting in the second war.

Throughout the First and Second Chechen Wars the fighting potential, morale and

health of the Russian forces was negatively affected by the inability of Russian logistics to deliver the support necessary for effective COIN operations. Basic equipment and supplies that a soldier should be provided with in order to carry out effective COIN operations were not provided. One of the primary reasons that supplies had difficulty reaching forward units was that the majority of Russian transport vehicles were unarmoured, which meant that even when supplies and equipment were available at forward collection depots, it could not effectively be brought forward. The inability of Russian logistical units to provide the basics for soldiers in the field raises serious questions as to whether Russia could successfully provide for the logistical needs of servicemen fighting a COIN war further abroad.

With the exception of the extended use of thermo baric weaponry and smart weapons in the Second Chechen War, Russian equipment was essentially the same in both of the wars. That is to say, in both conflicts Russian forces used basically obsolete, pre-digital age equipment, much of which, especially the helicopter fleet, was in bad need of maintenance or replacement. Unless massive budget increases occur a good proportion of the equipment utilized by Russian forces will be inferior to that which an insurgent could potentially acquire off the civilian market.

Russian morale was extremely low throughout the First and Second Chechen Wars. The major factor affecting the morale, as well as the health, of Russian forces in both wars has been *dedovshchina*. This phenomenon has always been a negative factor within the Russian security services and will likely continue unabated into the future. As long as *dedovshchina* continues to exist there will be poor morale among junior conscripts, and strained working relationships between all levels of the Russian military hierarchy.

The atrocious conditions that Russian servicemen lived and fought in during both campaigns also contributed to their poor morale. Clean water was a rarity, which resulted in widespread sickness. Sickness was compounded by bad food, ineffective medicines and unsanitary living conditions. Testament to the depths of the poor moral are the coping mechanisms Russian soldiers have used to deal with the abuse, bad living conditions and

low pay; in both conflicts servicemen frequently turned to drugs and drink.

Russian COIN operations and the future

Although some key improvements occurred during the Second Chechen War, many major deficiencies existed, and continue to exist which will definitely make any future COIN operation, especially if conducted further abroad, very difficult for Russian forces. Conclusions can be drawn from Russia's performance in the Second Chechen War and in the Russo-Georgian conflict in order to ascertain how Russia might perform in a future COIN operation.

When looking at the information available regarding the intelligence operations conducted by the Russians during the Second Chechen War there are a few long term concerns that can be identified. Although Chechnya was part of the Soviet Union, few Russian soldiers or FSB officers were able to speak Chechen and they did not understand the Chechen culture. This indicates that in a future COIN war, especially if it were conducted outside Russia's sphere of influence, cultural awareness could pose a major problem in the planning and execution of COIN operations.

The Russians proclivity for conducting ineffective hearts and minds operations in previous COIN campaigns could point to a future disposition to do so, which could lead to future difficulties in gathering human intelligence. Human intelligence drives the intelligence picture, and without conducting effective hearts and minds it is unlikely that the population would be willing to provide them with invaluable information. One of the primary factors in the future success of any COIN operation is whether or not Russian intelligence will be able to predict an insurgency before Russian forces begin fighting. During the First Chechen War Russian intelligence did not predict an insurgency, while during the Second Chechen War they did expect that the Chechens would resort to insurgency. This prediction was essentially a foregone conclusion, because the Chechens had resorted to insurgency in the first war it was clear that they would be forced to resort to

the same strategy in the second.

Therefore, questions must be raised as to whether in future COIN operations, in countries which Russian forces haven't had previous experience, they might adopt conventional operations against an opponent who is fighting unconventionally, as was the case in the First Chechen War as well as the Soviet Afghan War. Clearly the indications are that in a future COIN war Russian intelligence may not be able to provide reliable enough information for Russian forces to pursue effective COIN operations.

One of the most important factors determining the success of the Russian forces in future COIN operations will be their ability to provide security. The Second Chechen War offers some indication that Russia can provide for security in a localized COIN conflict. During the Second Chechen War the Russians brought in sufficient numbers of troops to provide for security, and during the Russo-Georgian War they had enough troops to overcome the Georgians in South Ossetia.

Another key improvement made during the Second Chechen War was the reorganization of Russian units into smaller units with greater firepower. Furthermore, the introduction of the zonal territorial method has given the commanders of these smaller units more room to exercise initiative as well as better access to timely fire support.

The use of *kontrakti* during the Second Chechen War and the small annual increases in the numbers of *kontrakti* within the Russian forces since 1999 has improved Russia's ability to provide security in a future COIN operation. Although *kontrakti* make up only a small fraction of Russia's total servicemen, they have become more professional than they were in the second conflict, most elite units have become *kontrakti* units, and *kontrakti* were the main force conducting Russia's drive into Georgia and Abkhazia during the recent Russo-Georgian conflict.

Despite some changes being made to the security tactics utilised by Russia before the Second Chechen War, their reliance on overwhelming firepower to achieve security

was just as evident in the Second Chechen War as it had been in the first. Overwhelming firepower was eventually successful in delivering security in the Second Chechen War; however, the use of overwhelming firepower against an opponent larger than the Chechens, in an area of operations larger than Chechnya, would most likely create more insurgents than it would kill. Russia's proclivity to use overwhelming firepower as a substitute for well prepared forces will hinder the effectiveness of Russian COIN operations in the future.

Questions remain as to Russia's ability to conduct timely reconstruction or efficient hearts and minds operations during future COIN operations. In both Chechen wars Russia essentially neglected conducting hearts and minds operations or reconstruction, and instead pursued tactics designed to destroy the insurgency through the use of overwhelming firepower and wholesale brutalization of the population. Although this tactic may have worked in Chechnya, a republic the size of Wales with a population of fewer than two million, this tactic would most likely fail in a larger country with a larger population. Unless Russian forces begin learning how to engage in efficient hearts and minds operations they will be unable to efficiently conduct future COIN operations.

One of the most promising indications for effective Russian COIN operations in the future is the success they have had in working with their indigenous allies in both the Second Chechen War and the recent Russo/Georgian conflict. Today, Chechnya is firmly under the rule of Ramzan Kadyrov, and although monthly violence continues it is confined to the peripheries of Chechnya, usually Dagestan and Ingushetia. During the recent Russo-Georgian War, Russian troops cooperated with both Abkhaz and Osset militias and irregulars. Ultimately, Russian troops have remained in both Countries, yet Abkhaz and Ossets essentially run their own day to day affairs and security. The Chechens, Abkhaz and Ossets are all people that the Russians are familiar with, and despite the Russians willingness to work closely with them and then hand over security and political power to their auspices, it could potentially be more difficult for the Russians to work with people they are not as familiar with. Russia's close cooperation with the three peoples does indicate that they understand the importance of close ties with indigenous allies when fighting COIN operations.

Although many of the major issues that affected the unity of effort of Russian forces were remedied before Russian forces embarked on a second invasion of Chechnya, many issues remain which could affect future COIN operations. Many of the major coordination issues which plagued the Russian ground forces in the First Chechen War were resolved before Russian forces entered Chechnya a second time in 1999. This allowed MOD units to conduct combat operations in which they excelled, while MVD units could be reserved for stabilization and policing-style operations, and have the ability to mutually support one another. Problems still existed in the coordination and communication between ground force units and the air force however, a problem that remains to this day. During the recent Russo-Georgian War ground forces were frequently unable to call in air support, while many of the Russian aircraft downed occurred as a result of friendly fire.

In looking at the role of Russian airpower in the First and Second Chechen Wars many factors have become evident, some that will serve to hinder, and some that will enhance future COIN operations. The way in which Russian airpower was utilized during the Second Chechen War certainly illustrates that Russian commanders implemented lessons learned from Desert Storm and the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although Russian airpower has been successful at a tactical level, lack of funding has meant that despite newer models of aircraft and helicopters being available the money to purchase and introduce them into Russian air units is not available. The Russian Air Force and Army aviation must rely on older, less effective, unreliable models which often lack modern digital age equipment.

One of the greatest successes of the Second Chechen War was Russia's ability to manipulate the media. Since the creation of the Ministry of the Press the Russian State has professionally managed its media image. Testament to this has been the reactions of the western media and the Russian media to the recent Russo-Georgian War. While the western media almost universally condemned the invasion, the Russian media explained the invasion from the Kremlin's perspective, and as a result, polls conducted during and following the invasion showed that the Russian population overwhelmingly supported the

war. The ongoing political dominance of the Unity party seems assured, consequently so does the ability of the Russian government to manipulate Russian media. If this holds true the Russian media will be a powerful asset in future Russian COIN operations.

The training that Russian soldiers receive today is far better than the training received before either of the Chechen wars. Many Russian units have begun implementing regular training regimes and many units throughout the Russian Federation perform yearly joint exercises with the MVD, other security organizations, and with foreign allies such as China and the Central Asian nations. The majority of units however, only conduct training for conventional operations. Training specific to COIN operations is conducted by a few special units. Further COIN training will need to be implemented in order to enable Russian forces to conduct themselves proficiently in future COIN operations.

Good logistical support is absolutely necessary for efficient COIN operations to be conducted. It is important and valid to question Russia's ability to provide adequate supplies to Russian forces in future COIN operations. If a future COIN campaign were to be conducted within Russia or along its peripheries, based on the occurrences in the two Chechen wars, it is reasonable to expect that Russian soldiers would be inadequately supplied, to the point that they would not receive the minimum necessities required to conduct efficient COIN operations. If a COIN campaign were to be conducted further afield, serious concerns can be raised as to whether Russian personnel in the field would receive the logistical support needed to carry out effective operations.

To this day poor morale is rife throughout the various Russian security organizations. Although better living conditions were eventually provided for Russian troops serving in Chechnya, poor housing remains the norm for officers and conscripts serving throughout the Russian Federation. *Dedovshchina* is as prevalent as ever, and conscripts continue to be killed and seriously maimed every year by this brutal practice. The poor morale which all these factors have contributed to has resulted in continued problems with alcohol and drug abuse among Russian servicemen. Poor morale had led to frequent instances of desertion, and cases of suicide among desperate Russian personnel.

Continued poor morale among Russian forces does not bode well for the ability of Russian servicemen to conduct effective COIN operations in the future.

Although Russia has made some important improvements in its approach to COIN operations, serious deficiencies still exist within the core of the Russian security services that will cause major difficulties if Russia conducts COIN operations in the future. The sense of cultural superiority that seems to permeate the Russian security services, inhibits Russian intelligence from fully understanding the cultural factors key to the information process, and also makes cooperation with indigenous allies difficult. Russia has large numbers of troops that could be committed to future COIN operations yet, the majority of these troops are conscripts who have poor morale, relatively poor training and are also poorly equipped; the ability of these conscripts to conduct COIN let alone conventional operations remains suspect. Perhaps the reason most likely to cause Russia to fail in a future COIN operation is their proclivity to use firepower to make up for the deficiencies of their troops; this, coupled with their inability to conduct hearts and minds operations probably means that Russia will never be able to take on COIN operations in a large country with a moderate-to-large population effectively.

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