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# War In Chechnya: Implications for Russian Security Policy

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Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

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War In Chechnya:  
Implications for Russian Security Policy

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# War In Chechnya: Implications for Russian Security Policy

## Introduction and Acknowledgements

*Mikhail Tsypkin*

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Over a century ago, in 1891, the great Russian historian Vassily Kliuchevsky described Russia:

“...like a heavily armed medieval knight. We shall be beaten not by those who would attack us, in a proper knightly fashion, from the front, but by him who would grab our leg from under the horse and turn us upside down: like a cockroach lying on its back, we would, without losing any of our inherent strength, powerlessly move our feet in search of firm ground. Power is action, not a potential; when not connected with discipline, it kills itself. We are the lower organisms in the international zoology: we keep on moving even after losing our head.”<sup>1</sup>

The war in Chechnya, a tiny (in comparison to the Russian Federation’s population and human and material resources) ethnic homeland in the North Caucasus, has put into question Russia’s military power and the cohesion of Russia’s political system itself, and dramatically slowed Russia’s momentum towards reform. The five chapters of this collection are based on papers by prominent Russian specialists on the implications of the Chechen war on Russia’s security policy, presented at a conference held at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California on November 7 and 8, 1995.

The Russian participants (in alphabetical order) were:

- Dr. Vladimir Averchev, a member of the State Duma (lower house of parliament) from the YABLOKO party;
- Dr. Sergei Arutyunov, Senior Fellow, Institute of Ethnic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences;

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<sup>1</sup> V. O. Kliuchevskiy, “Aforizmy i mysli ob istorii,” in *Sochineniya v devyati tomakh*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Mysl’, 1990) pp. 363, 364.



- Major Aleksandr Belkin (Ret.), Deputy Executive Secretary of the Council for Defense and Foreign Policy, a leading non-governmental organization;
- Dr. Pavel Felgenhauer, Defense and Security Editor, *Segodnya* daily newspaper (Moscow);
- Dr. Col. Vitaly Shlykov (Ret.), formerly with the General Staff, currently a private consultant.

Russia's military involvement in Chechnya has lasted since the fall of 1994, and the public, both in Russia and the West, is still ignorant of the policy-making process that resulted in the decision to use military force in December 1994, ostensibly to bring the rebellious Chechen Republic back under the sovereignty of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Averchev argues in his paper that the war in Chechnya has resulted from a virtual breakdown of the national security decision-making mechanisms of the Russian Federation. While the public and the elites are in general agreement over the Kremlin's ultimate goal in Chechnya – to preserve the territorial integrity of the Russian federation – Yeltsin's administration made no effort, prior to the initiation of hostilities, to ensure a broad public or even elite support for use of force.

The war in Chechnya has also demonstrated that the legislative branch has very little practical control over the actions of the executive branch in the area of national security. The parliament, although generally opposed to the war, has failed to find a legal foundation for stopping the hostilities. According to Averchev, “[T]he Council of Federation [the upper chamber of the parliament] was unable to exercise its authority to approve or disapprove the introduction of the emergency rule in Chechnya and hence the use of force inside the country because the President simply did not ask for it.” The lower chamber, the State Duma, has failed to exercise the only practical power it has over the executive – the budgetary one in the case of Chechnya – because of various loopholes in Russia's laws on financing government operations.

The executive branch has concentrated immense national security decision-making power in its hands, in a manner reminiscent of its predecessor, the communist regime. The crucial difference, however, is that the Russian presidency, unlike the Soviet Politburo, largely lacks the political “transmission belts” essential for mobilizing societal resources for national security needs. Yeltsin's administration failed to mobilize not only the public to support the war in Chechnya, but even the military. As Alexander Belkin notes in his chapter, the war in Chechnya has aggravated the crisis in civil-military relations that has been brewing throughout Boris Yeltsin's term in office. This crisis involved:

“...[the] latent struggle for the right to control the military and law-enforcement policies between the president himself (counseled and directed by his security entourage) and other branches of power — the prime minister, Security Council, and parliament.... On the level of the military itself, the crisis of civil-military relations was manifested in the

desperate desire of the military to establish their own lobby in the parliament in an attempt to affect the national government.”

This attempt resulted in a nearly complete failure during the parliamentary elections in December 1995. And finally, the war in Chechnya aggravated the relationship between the mass media and the military, because of the latter’s attempts to deceive and censor the former.

Initiated to cover up, as suggested by Pavel Felgenhauer, the blunder of the security forces’ highly visible “covert” operations to overthrow Dudaev, the military attack on Chechnya stumbled into a blunder itself, reminiscent of Russian and Soviet defeats in 1914 and 1941, albeit on a much smaller scale. Poorly trained and hastily organized troops, led by incompetent commanders, walked into the trap in Grozny: according to Felgenhauer, by New Year’s Day of 1996, the General Staff practically lost control of its forces in the Chechen capital. The “perfect” plan in the style of the General Staff Academy – four armored columns meeting simultaneously in downtown Grozny – reminds one of Leo Tolstoy’s sarcastic analysis in *War and Peace* of the Russians’ “perfect” plans for the battle of Austerlitz: both ended in disaster because the enemy refused to act in accordance with the plan!

The experience of combat in Chechnya reveals three salient points. First, the new Russian state has not developed a mechanism for learning from its past mistakes: just like the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Russian forces marched into a guerrilla war hoping that the mere sight of the mass of modern weapons would suffice to intimidate the “natives.” Second, the tenacity of Russian soldiers has not disappeared altogether: if properly led (e.g. the troops of Lt. Gen. Rokhlin, nearly encircled in Grozny), they can put up a good fight even for a dubious cause. Third, military reform is desperately needed, but the war in Chechnya has cast a doubt on its direction: in their reconquest of Chechnya, the Russian military had to rely on the massive application of heavy weapons, not on highly mobile, and relatively lightly armed, forces, which are viewed as the wave of the future by many reformers and observers of reform in Russia.

Many in the military establishment, including those not directly responsible for the failures in Chechnya, refuse to see any linkage between that war and military reform, writes Vitaly Shlykov. Further, he writes:

“The Russian military leadership rejects the experiences of the Chechen war to the extent that it prohibited their inclusion in the study programs of the Russian military academies and schools. In the MoD’s opinion, this conflict is atypical because it’s being waged on Russian territory. Instead, the studies of the war in Afghanistan are being strengthened.”

Anti-reform political forces ascendant from 1995 to early 1996 in President Yeltsin’s entourage were also skeptical of military reform, so the term itself disappeared for a time from Yeltsin’s speeches. In democratic Russia, however, the issue of military reform could not be buried just because those in power were not inclined to discuss it. In

October 1995, a movement for military reform, Honor and Motherland, was established under the leadership of Lt. Gen. Aleksandr Lebed, who had just retired. His main idea regarding military reform is that military strength is essential for political and economic reform in Russia: in his view, Russia can peacefully conduct reforms only if it is strong enough to deter aggression.

But what about Chechnya itself, and the powder keg of the Caucasus? Before the end of the Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet empire, which had put a lid on ethnic friction, American analysts tended to ignore the ethnic dimension of international conflict. Now, with ethnic conflicts seeming to roar out of control throughout Eurasia, American observers frequently view them as inevitable. Sergei Arutyunov argues against such fatalism: "The real causes of the war lay in the desires of the powers in conflict to dominate larger territories, markets, natural resources and so on." Thus, it is the policies pursued by Russian and Caucasian elites that have resulted in the war. A different set of policies can result in cessation of hostilities and economic development of the region.

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The Editor would like to express his appreciation to Ms. Diana Peternell for her flawless work in organizing the conference, and for her editorial assistance.

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- Dr. Roy Allison, Director, Russian and Eurasian Program, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Dr. Rob Arnett, Office of the US Army Chief of Staff.
- Dr. Sergei Arutyunov, Senior Fellow, Institute of Ethnic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.
- Dr. Vladimir Averchev, Member of the Committee on International Affairs, State Duma of the Russian Federation.
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- Mr. Alexander Belkin, Council for Defense and Foreign Policies
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# Chapter One

## Possible Consequences of the Chechnya War for the General Situation in the Caucasus

*Sergei A. Arutiunov*

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Today the Caucasus is one of the hottest, most potentially explosive and dangerous areas of the world. It consists of nine or ten distinct territorial formations: the seven republics (formerly autonomous and now “sovereign” within the Russian Federation) of Adygea, Karachai-Cherkessia, Kabardin-Balkaria, Ossetia-Alania, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan; two *kray* or territories, Stavropol and Krasnodar; and often the territory or *oblast* of Rostov-Don is also included in the notion of the Caucasus or, more precisely, Northern Caucasus. There is also the Southern Caucasus, or Transcaucasia, which became a part of the Russian Empire, paradoxically, much earlier than most territories of the Northern Caucasus, but was never seriously regarded as an integral part of Russia and always maintained a separate position governed by a vice-roy. In the Soviet era it did not become a part of the Russian Federation but formed a number of initially independent republics later integrated into the Soviet Union.

The historic fates and the cultural specificity of these Transcaucasian lands were always quite different from lands of the Northern Caucasus. The proper ethnic Russian element never played any important role here, contrary to the situation in the Northern Caucasus, where Russian colonization, with the exception of mountainous Dagestan, has been very significant even long before the final incorporation of these lands into the Empire.

Today, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence by all former constituent Union Republics, there are three so-called newly independent states of Transcaucasia, all nurturing tensions and claims to each other though nevertheless maintaining membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Two of these, Georgia and Azerbaijan, when in the USSR initially included territories which formally enjoyed national autonomy as either autonomous republics or autonomous oblasts.

These were Abkhazia, Adjara and Southern Ossetia in Georgia, and Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaidjan. The governments of Azerbaidjan and Georgia have abolished de jure the autonomy of Southern Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh respectively, but this is in fact just wishful thinking. With the exception of the Nakhichevan Republic, all these territories today are practically independent small states. Adjara has not proclaimed its independence but in fact successfully effectuates it.

All these territories put together are smaller than the territory of France, approximately 500,000 square kilometers, and have a considerably smaller population,

but ethnically this population is extremely heterogeneous. Apart from Russians, who constitute a majority in Rostov-Don, Krasnodar and Stavropol territories and from one to fifty percent in practically all other territories and states, there are numerous relatively large ethnic entities, numbering from approximately one hundred thousand (e.g. Abkhazes, Balkars, Nogais, Dagestanian Laks and Tabassarans), to several hundred thousands (e.g. Adygeans, Kabardins, Karachais, Ossetians, Ingushes, Chechens, Kumyks, Avars, Dargins and Lezgins), to the nations of several million people (e.g. Armenians, Georgians and Azeris). There are also about thirty smaller ethnic groups, numbering from one thousand to sixty thousand people (e.g. Abazins, Rutuls, Tsakhurs, and Andis), and more than twenty significant immigrant groups (e.g. Germans, Assirians, Turks and Greeks).

Three millennia of more or less documented ethnic history of the Caucasus have been filled with virtually incessant wars fought between tribes, kingdoms, principalities, clans, fiefs, warlords, barons, bishops, highland communities and other groups.

These wars were fought under dynastic, tribal, religious and other banners. Very rarely, if ever, were they fought under purely ethnic banners, but today it is exactly the ethnic banners which are the favorite tokens of bitterly opposed parties. However, the true motive for all these wars has never been religious faith, nor cultural difference, nor loyalty to a certain dynasty or sovereign, and today, too, it is not the ethnic difference per se. The real reason of these wars has almost invariably been a competition between congregated groups or powerful individuals alongside their retinues for the ownership of valuable property, primarily arable lands and pastures, which are rather scarce in this relatively densely populated, mountainous and predominantly arid corner of Eurasia.

In this contradiction-ridden area, the iron rule of the Tsarist government and the ensuing communist regime maintained just for a century a shaky, forced and superficial peace that was frequently interrupted by acts of spontaneous violence. But when the USSR collapsed, the struggle resumed with a new force. There was suddenly much property belonging to unidentifiable owners, the formerly state or collectively owned property, which had to be privatized or redistributed. No solid legal base existed to govern the rules of this redistribution, nor was there any recognized, authoritative and powerful will to enforce such rules, had they existed. The competition for such decision-making authority is quite naturally aligned along ethnic lines.

Therefore, ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus are not unexpected, odd or unnatural. On the contrary, they had to be expected. Some leading Russian anthropologists and ethnopolitologists well expected them, alongside with the general collapse of the Soviet Union, already in the late sixties and early seventies. But at that time no open statement on that topic was possible, and the heated disputes about possible directions of these events and their approximate timing rarely leaked outside the restricted circle of "Moscow kitchen conferences." A massive ethnic conflict between Ossetians and Ingushes broke out in 1981 in Vladikavkaz (then Ordjonikidze) that very much resembled in scope and pattern the recent ethnic clashes in Los Angeles, and was quelled by a curfew and introduced troops. But in 1981 there was no question of the mass media covering such a conflict, and it remained unknown to the broad public. The blindly over-

confident communist authorities, too, failed to draw any lessons from this and several other experiences, and hence the events of 1986 in Almaaty and of 1988 in Karabakh and Sumgait appeared to them as puzzling and unexpected.

Karabakh was the first territory in the Caucasus and generally in the Soviet Union where, for the first time after the Second World War, an intention to separate from a larger ethno-national body and to create a self-governing or independent state was explicitly announced. With the escalation of the Karabakh conflict, soon the same pattern was followed by Southern Ossetia, where separatist aspirations were similarly combined with and strengthened by irredentist ones. That is, Karabakh wanted not only to separate from Azerbaidjan, but to unite with Armenia. Similarly, Southern Ossetia wanted to separate from Georgia and to unite with Northern Ossetia.

It is interesting to note that while the determination to separate from initial "mother-states" (the term "stepmother states" is more metaphorically justified in these cases) not only does not diminish over time in both cases but, on the contrary, becomes more pronouncedly adamant with every subsequent stage of the conflict, the irredentist aspirations tend to become less frequently articulated and are in fact substituted by a desire to maintain and strengthen the already achieved de facto independence, autarky and self-reliance.

In 1992 the ethnic tension in the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia seemed to achieve its peak. The Soviet Union had collapsed. The Russian federation, under the well-intentioned but completely inexperienced management (mismanagement would be a much more suitable expression) of quasi-democrats Egor Gaidar *et al.*, was faced with rocketing hyperinflation and the rapid impoverishment of the overwhelming majority of its population, as well as the tremendously increased rate of crime, pollution, catastrophes and other disasters. It seemed to everybody that to split away from this monstrous bog of moral and physical infection would be, if not a panacea, then at least a reasonable sanitary measure.

In this atmosphere, on August 14, Georgia began its aggression against Abkhazia, followed in November by the Ossetian-Ingush conflict in the Prigorodnii Raion of North Ossetia.

The secessionist strife of South Ossetians in Georgia and of Karabakhtsi Armenians in Azerbaidjan found complete understanding and support only in North Ossetia and Armenia, respectively, and to some extent among the liberal Russian intelligentsia and the Orthodox Church-oriented Russian conservative patriots. These forces and strata were unhappy with the rather pronounced anti-Russian stance of the majority of Georgian political leaders. Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze then had to be more or less silent on these matters. Besides, South Ossetians and Karabakhtsi Armenians were decidedly Christian nations, the latter case also struggling to liberate themselves from Moslem domination. Both Ossetians and Karabakhtsis were demonstrating quite explicitly their pro-Russian standpoints, if not in favor of the then-existing Russian government, then at least in favor of the Russian nation. Both nations linguistically are clearly Indo-European, and their intelligentsia is very fond of emphasizing this Indo-European and subsequent Scythian-Alanian and Byzantine legacy.

This contrasts sharply with the historiographical ideology of North Caucasian Mountaineers, including Abkhazians, who are predominantly and in most parts exclusively Muslim, are very proud of their non-Indo-European, but rather Pan-Asiatic, Caucasian or Turkic linguistic alignment, historically tended to be oriented toward the Ottoman rather than Byzantine empire, and at least since the 100-year long Caucasian War (1763-1864) used to cherish hidden or overt anti-Russian sentiments.

Russian attitudes toward events in Abkhazia and the Prigorodnii Raion were different. The attitude of officials and quasi-democrats towards Abkhazian separatists had oscillated between feeble condemnation and very inconsistent, lukewarm support. The Russian military stationed in Abkhazia decided to support the Abkhazian side for several reasons: Abkhazians not only behaved correctly to them but had declared themselves in favor of a revival of the Soviet Union, where Abkhazia could be one of Union republics. Interestingly and significantly, the same position was adopted by Dudaev in Chechnya still earlier, and this may explain to some extent initially a rather tolerant attitude toward him by many Russian military, ex-military and pro-military, including such personalities as ex-KGB general and extreme nationalist Sterligov and Zhirinovskiy.

Besides, the Russian military quite predictably were consumed with their hatred for Shevardnadze, whom they blamed for "capitulationist" pro-western policies, and for Georgians, who were attacking Russian military bases stationed in Georgia to seize the badly needed weapons.

But in the Prigorodnii Raion, Russian sympathies were unequivocally on the Ossetian side. Ossetian national guards, local Cossacks and regular federal troops of all banners were touchingly unanimous in their determination, if not to extinguish completely, then at least to oust completely and forever all Ingushes from all villages and cities not only of Prigorodnii raion but also from Vladikavkaz, where Ingushes constituted about six percent of total population, and where an Ingush settlement existed long before the foundation of the fortress by the Russians. Only a small fraction of truly liberal and democratic Russian intelligentsia dared to raise their voices in defense of Ingushes as of objects of open genocide, and Yegor Yakovlev was very promptly dismissed by Yeltsin from the position of Chairman of Russian TV exactly for supporting this liberal stand.

Unlike the situation in Chechnya of 1994-1995, the most outrageous atrocities and violations of the human rights in Prigorodnii Raion were committed not by regular federal troops (though they too have demonstrated far from innocent behaviour) but by Cossacks and especially by Ossetian national guards, who were mostly recruited from among the badly embittered refugees from South Ossetia and other Ossetian-populated towns and villages of central and northern Georgia.

In spite of this obvious difference in positions (albeit very widely ranging) of Russians in the crises of Abkhazia and Prigorodnii Raion, all the so-called Caucasian Mountaineers<sup>2</sup> were unanimous in their support of Abkhazians and in their sympathies

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<sup>2</sup> These included Adygeans, Cherkessians, Kabardins, Karachais, Balkars, Chechnyans, Dagestanis, and not only the then quite influential and mighty KNK (Confederation of the Nations of Caucasus), but all aboriginal population in general



to Ingushes. In Abkhazia there were many thousands of volunteers and mercenaries who were fighting against Georgians on the Abkhazian side. This helped Abkhazians to win over Georgians, in spite of the latter's prevailing number. True, morale was rather low among the Georgian troops, who consisted largely of ex-jail-birds summoned with the consent of Russian authorities from various Russian prisons and conscripted into the army. The volunteers penetrated Abkhazia by mountain trails, which the Russian troops, summoned temporarily to this area, were unable and probably unwilling to control. There were no volunteers fighting to defend Ingushes in Prigorodnii Raion, only because the president of Ingushetia, Major General Ruslan Aushev, who enjoys enormous prestige not only among Ingushes but also among other mountaineers, took a firm position not to allow the conflict to escalate and to use only peaceful, legal methods for its solution. In a couple of subsequent years his negotiations with Ossetia's president Akhsarbek Galazov resulted in a number of agreements providing for a partial return of Ingush refugees to the Prigorodnii raion, but the Ossetian authorities have sabotaged the realization of these agreements.

The firm peaceful stand taken by President Aushev, the inconsistency and contradictions concerning Abkhazia which existed in the Russian ruling circles, the Abkhazians' achievements in 1993 and their final victory after a year of fighting prevented an outbreak of a wholesale new Caucasian war in 1993, though there was a very serious danger of it. Had Russian troops tried by force to stop the flow of volunteers to Abkhazia from Adygea, Karachai, Kabardinia and Chechnya, or had the Russian tanks, that despite Aushev's vigorous protest had entered Ingushetia after having shelled Ingush villages in the Prigorodnii raion, engaged in a conflict with Dudaev's tanks,<sup>3</sup> then an outbreak of a new Caucasian war involving all Caucasian mountaineers in a fight against Russians, Cossacks and perhaps Ossetians, and later probably against each other, would have been inevitable.

But fortunately this did not happen. The Russian government belatedly realized that it was in its interest not to prevent Abkhazians to win over Georgians, and then to play peacemaker, to put Georgia on its knees and to incorporate it back into Russia's geopolitical order. Besides, President Yeltsin was too busy in 1993 with his confrontation with the rebellious parliament to let himself be seduced into one more adventure.

Thus an all-out Caucasian war did not begin in 1993. Though in the eyes of the progressives and liberals, the Russian troops had been somewhat marred by their participation in the genocide of Ingushes in the Prigorodnii Raion, it nonetheless was a comparatively small blot noticed by few. On the contrary, the role of Russian troops as separating and peace-making forces along South Ossetian-Georgian and Abkhazian-Georgian armistice lines was generally appreciated by everybody, including Georgians.

Though the Abkhazian war and the conflict in the Prigorodnii raion (which was not a war but a massacre of small, poorly armed bands of Ingushes by heavily armed

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<sup>3</sup> and there was a moment when two tank regiments, the Russian and the Chechenian ones, stood face to face, divided by three or four hundred meters' distance, on the undemarcated Ingushetian-Chechenian border

Ossetian national guardsmen and Russian troops) were locally restricted conflicts, their consequences were disastrous. In each conflict several thousands of people were killed, the majority civilians. The number of places deliberately destroyed, including homes, theaters, museums, animal reserves, libraries, national archives and so on in Abkhazia, by marauding Georgian national guardsmen cannot be evaluated in terms of money. Thousands of people on both sides of the conflict, as well as the neutral, were raped, tortured, mutilated, humiliated, robbed and expelled from their homes.

In Northern Ossetia at one time there were as many as 70 thousand refugees from Southern Ossetia and other regions of Georgia. About 40 thousand later returned to Southern Ossetia, but at least some 30 thousand from other areas of Georgia remain, too scared to return. The ethnic Ingushes of Ossetia have been squeezed out completely. The total number of these refugees was about 60 thousand. Their houses were either seized by Ossetians (mostly by the so-called Kudartsi, the Southern Refugees) or burnt and demolished. So far no more than a few hundred Ingushes were allowed to return to the ruins of their homes in the Prigorodnii Raion. Today in greatly overpopulated Ingushetia, among the present population of some 250 thousand inhabitants nearly fifty percent are refugees, including huge numbers from Chechnya, living mostly with relatives and friends. There are about 30 to 40 thousand ethnic Georgians, mostly concentrated in or around Tbilisi, who are refugees from Southern Ossetia. In Abkhazia at the beginning of the conflict there were about 90 thousand ethnic Abkhazians, more than 220 thousand ethnic Georgians, about 50 thousand Armenians, the same number of ethnic Russians, and probably some 20-30 thousand Greeks and others. The majority of Russians, Armenians and Greeks fled Abkhazia at the beginning of war, mostly to Krasnodar Territory (many Greeks fled to Greece). Some have returned, but many remain in Krasnodar or went further into Russia. As to the ethnic Georgians, there are about 200 thousand refugees, many of them living in tents in awful conditions near the Abkhazian border, eager to return but not allowed to.

All these disasters were followed in October 1994 by the outbreak of the Chechnya war, which turned to be summarily perhaps more disastrous than all previous conflicts put together.

Here is probably not a suitable place to describe all the events of this ugly war, all the stages of its gradual escalation. Suffice it to say that this war, represented by the propaganda machine of Yeltsin's administration as a police operation intended to restore law and order and to disarm illegal bands, resulted in several thousands of deaths and several times more general casualties (wounded, frozen, etc.) among federal Russian troops alone. It has brought about at least 30 thousand dead, many more wounded and injured, and ten times more homeless civilians, many of them ethnic Russians. It exceeds the losses of the horrible earthquake of 1988 in Armenia, which was considered a disaster of a first grade national scale. It is several times more than the losses in the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan.

As a rule there are no right sides in ethnic wars, and all recent wars in the Caucasus, the Chechnya war being no exception, have been ethnic. Usually the ultra-nationalist party or leader, to deliberately or spontaneously drag their compatriots into

escalating a war, manipulates such notions as a menace to the national existence of the given ethnic group, oppression of its cultural integrity and continuity, gradual disappearance of its native language and so on. These phenomena do exist to a certain extent in reality. But the biggest fear experienced by an ethnic group or a nation is the demographic fear. When a certain group realizes that its birth rate is lower than that of the neighbouring group, it fears finding itself increasingly in a minority position and concludes that the “ethnic cleansing” of the neighbouring group is the only possible escape from the menacing situation.

This was definitely the basis of the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict. For decades, both due to the natural increase and even more so to a forced or sponsored immigration, the Georgian population of Abkhazia was growing much faster than the Abkhazian. The same can be said about Azeris versus Armenians not only in Karabakh, but also in the southern region of Armenia, Zangezour, where prior to the conflict of 1988 the percentage of Azeri population was steadily growing. In the end of 1988 they all were forced to flee to Azerbaidjan. The percentage of Ingushes was similarly steadily growing in the Prigorodnii raion and in Vladikavkaz. The same demographic correlation can be observed in Lebanon, Assam and a number of other areas stricken by ethnic conflicts throughout the world.

But certainly this was not the case in Chechnya, where the growth of the indigenous population greatly outpaced that of the ethnic Russians. The indigenous population is a minority, and the preservation of the native language and culture is seriously endangered, for example, in Mordovia in the Middle Volga Basin. Some ethnic tensions can be observed in Mordovia too, but by no means are they attaining the scale where attempts at “ethnic cleansing” and internecine warfare begin.

To some extent the origins of the present conflicts in the Caucasus may be compared to the origins of the First World War. As we all know today, it was triggered by a fanatic nationalist.

But the real causes of the war lay in the desires of the powers in conflict to dominate over larger territories, markets, natural resources and so on. Only the ruling classes of these powers were interested in these objectives, but the working masses had to die for them, although they might have lived perfectly in peace, as Serbs, Croats and Muslims once did in the now war-burnt Sarajevo.

The current conflicts in the Caucasus all have been triggered by extremist statements, demands and irresponsible actions of local ethnic or minority patriots and leaders, but the basic responsibility lies with the governments, ruling establishments and money-making cliques. These sometimes include local elements, but basically represent larger powers, such as Russia, Georgia or Azerbaidjan, which have attempted to safeguard for themselves the privatization of property, the incomes from covert and illegal economic operations and so on. There is no doubt that Dudaev and his cohorts were involved in such operations. But there is also no doubt that such people as Zavgaev and his ilk, overthrown by Dudaev, similarly attempted to utilize the unstable situation of 1990s in their own interests and those of their friends. Definitely there is no doubt that behind the ethnically tinted Chechen front cover there have always stood much more

powerful, influential (possessing the broadest Army-, KGB- and CPSU-based connections), anonymous and informal groups, organizations and personalities who had absolutely nothing in common with the so-called "Caucasian" ethnic identity.

There is no proof, but nevertheless serious reasons exist to believe that an unhindered existence for more than three years of a de facto free economic zone in Chechnya, and then a sudden determination to eliminate Dudaev, can be explained by the following reasoning. Initially to have the Chechen cover and a customs- and control-free opening between certain corrupt Russian civilian and army circles and "mafiosi" businessmen, on one hand, and the rather odious Near Eastern and other foreign partners, on the other hand, was for a time quite useful and comfortable. But when Dudaev and his group became a menace, demanding a bigger share of illegal incomes or threatening to blackmail, then the necessity arose to lure the President of Russia and the whole might of the Russian Army and secret services into an attempt to eliminate Dudaev.

At the beginning of his political and nationalistic activity, Dudaev might have been motivated by purely idealistic, quixotic values and goals. Or he might not have been. This is, after all, irrelevant. What is really important is that the main undercurrents operating in the Russo-Chechnyan war are political and economic forces and interests that in their cumulative scope and scale far exceed the scope and limits of the tiny Chechnyan Republic, an infinitesimally small part of Russia's territory, constituting less than one percent of Russia's total population. Only this can explain the extreme cruelty of this war, the massiveness of the war effort, and the readiness to ignore all protests and indignation from the world community and the liberal and democratic opposition within Russia. It would be not unheard of to say that this war is indeed extremely unpopular. Sociological surveys indicate that if the question of whether Russia should grant Chechnya independence and withdraw all troops from its territory were put on a referendum today, more than 50 percent of the voters would approve this solution, provided that the northern districts, which were part of Stavropol until 1957 and remain populated largely by ethnic Russians, remain within the Russian Federation. The reason for this lies not in sympathy with the heroic struggle of Chechnyans for this independence, not in a feeling of historical justice or of guilt for the innumerable sufferings that the centuries of Russian aggression and oppression have caused the people of Chechnya. Such motivations can be found among a very thin stratum of the liberal intelligentsia, but on the whole they are alien to the masses of Russian people who for the most part still consider Chechens if not a horde of bloodthirsty bandits, then at least an uncivilized, savage tribe that constitutes a permanent threat to the peace in Russia's southern regions. The Chechen diaspora in central Russia, Moscow and other large cities is considered the main ethnic substratum for all criminal and "mafiosi" activity, an opinion which has no basis in reality.

But the Russian population as a whole is very tired of this war and its calamities. The war has already cost the lives of thousands of Russian soldiers. Its total monetary cost amounts to some 10 billion dollars. In many regions of Russia, as I witnessed myself in Siberia during the summer of 1995, not only have policemen, army officers, and other budgeted workers not received their salaries for several months, but they are also

explicitly told that the money initially designated to pay them had been pumped instead into the "restoration" of destructions caused by the war in Chechnya.

It is essential to notice that all these "post-perestroika" wars in the Caucasus so far have followed one general pattern. They begin with a decisive, but peaceful declaration by a newly elected authority, like a president or a supreme council, about their intention to separate, to be independent, to change relations with the center from autonomy to confederation, or the like. Then a campaign of slander, menaces, and defamation from Moscow follows. After an indefinite period of escalation of hostile actions, the center initiates an armed invasion under a pretext. At first the smaller nation suffers great losses and is forced to retreat considerably, but it later launches a successful counter attack, which ends in a serious defeat of federal forces. Then a stalemate follows, and an armistice or temporary peace is established. In no case so far has there been a final resolution of a conflict or a formal recognition of a new status.

This was the sequence of events in Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Prigorodnii Raion of Ossetia seems to be an exception. There was no declaring government body, just a popular movement of Ingushes to secede from Ossetia and to reunite with Ingushetia. Later they were defeated and ousted from Ossetia. But in all probability, despite all sabotage by Galazov's administration, Ingushes will in the end return to Prigorodnii raion, and in the end it will be as lost for Ossetia-Alania as South Ossetia seems lost for Georgia. This is because the tombstones in this area are mostly Ingush, not Ossetian.

The main reason why the smaller nations win and much more mighty centers are defeated is simple. The Georgian troops in Abkhazia, the Azeri troops in Karabakh and the Russian troops in Chechnya are not very eager to fight for their governments' domination over lands quite different from most soldiers' native lands, with a different landscape, different tombstones, different place names and a different indigenous population. These lands are alien to most soldiers, despite all the governments' quasi-patriotic propaganda. On the other hand, the indigenous people of Karabakh, Abkhazia, Ingushetia and Chechnya are fighting to defend their own homes, their ancestors' tombstones, their native territory and their national survival. They will fight to the last, and there is no means to vanquish them but to exterminate them completely. Unfortunately, probably many years and decades of mutual mistrust and alienation will have to elapse before Ingushetians and Ossetians, or Armenians and Azeris, or Georgians and Abkhazians live peacefully side by side as good neighbors, which in principle they were successfully doing still some ten or twenty years ago, despite, or much more plausibly because of, all the intrigues, injustices, biases and oppression by their communist rulers.

What was happening in Chechnya for more than half a year and to some extent still is happening now is unequivocally genocide. Everyone who wants to be a liberal, a democrat, a humanitarian, must realize that the killing of Chechens by Russians in Chechnya is no more Russia's internal affair than the killing of Jews in Germany was Germany's internal affair. Chechnya is not Russia. Chechnya was and is no more an integral part of Russia than Algeria was an integral part of France. Though perhaps on a

slightly smaller scale, Russian occupation troops in Chechnya are doing in principle, quality, form and content exactly the what the German Wehrmacht did in Belarus in 1941. The name of the little Chechen town, Samashki, sounds today as sinister as Khatyn in Belarus, or as Lidice in Czechoslovakia, and more sinister than My Lai in Vietnam. And the response today in Chechnya is the same as it was in the 1940s in Belarus. It is a cruel, bloody and pityless response, but it cannot possibly be anything but irreconcilable guerrilla warfare.

This response is not rooted in simple ethnic hatred. Chechens do not nurture any inherent hatred towards the average Russian. By their traditional ethics they are rather disposed towards good neighbourly relations with those peoples with whom they live side by side. In the history of their relations with their neighbours there have been conflicts, as have happened between all neighbouring communities in the Caucasus, but in general, at least in the recent decades, relations of mutual respect and benevolence prevailed.

But it must be born in mind that for a Chechen, more than for any other Caucasian, to be a man means, *inter alia*, to remember the names of seven generations of paternal ancestors: the father, the grandfather and so on. And not only their names are to be remembered and faithfully transmitted from generation to generation, but also the basic circumstances of their lives, their deaths, and the locations of their tombstones. All together, this constitutes an enormous depth of historic memory. Naturally, in so many cases the remembered deaths occurred at the hands of Russian soldiers: under Catherine the Great, Nicholas I, Stalin, and now Yeltsin. Thus, for practically every Chechen, a Russian soldier and especially a Russian general are considered to be evil incarnate, worse than the Devil himself.

Furthermore, Chechnya was and is a society of military democracy. In the development of a society, in the theoretical framework of the Russian school of Evolutionist and Marxist anthropology, the military democracy is a stage way above primitive communalism but below a completely developed class society.

This means that Chechnya never had any kings, khans, barons or princes of their own. Some parts of Chechnya were sometimes in a more or less nominal vassal dependency of Kabardin princes, but in practical terms this was hardly noticeable. There were attempts by some powerful Chechen families to proclaim themselves princes or something similar, but with very poor results: most often the families who dared to undertake such an endeavour were simply exterminated by their neighbours. Quite unlike most other Caucasian nations, there had never been any feudal system in Chechnya. Traditionally, if it was ever governed at all as a distinct entity, it was done by a council of elders on the basis of consensus. But like any other military democracy, such as the Iroquois in America or the Zulu in southern Africa, Chechens retained an institution of a supreme military chief. In peacetime, that chief had no power at all. No sovereign authority was recognized, and the nation might be fragmented in a hundred of rival clans.

However, in time of danger, when confronted with aggression, the rival clans would unite and elect a military leader. This leader might be known to everyone as a very unpleasant personality with many faults, but nevertheless would be elected just on the

basis of being an experienced military leader. While the war was going on, this leader would be obeyed. This was the kind of authority enjoyed by such leaders as Sheikh Mansur (Ushurma) at the end of the eighteenth century, and even the famous Imam Shamil in the first half of the nineteenth century was obeyed by Chechens mainly along the same lines.

It must be understood then that the institution of the presidency is generally not suited to the conditions of self-government in Chechnya. Dudaev was definitely a poor president. But even the best possible president would last in Chechnya only as long as the euphoria of long-desired independence from Russia, and this in turn would be possible only as long as this independence was menaced. Dudaev understood this well and therefore did his best to maintain among his subjects a continuously heated anti-Russian paranoia.

Djokhar Dudaev is a typical example of a temporary military leader. His presidency is, in this sense, an historical accident. Many well informed Russian observers believe that in peace time, in cooperation with the corrupt Russian civil and military bosses, his circle conducted gigantic smuggling operations of arms and drugs through Chechnya from Russia to Iran, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. Before the Russian invasion, he had lost a great deal of prestige and popularity. By September 1994 perhaps no more than 20 percent of the total Chechen population were supporting him, and any strong support was limited almost exclusively to his own clan and other groups related to him either by clan or business ties.

But despite all of Dudaev's misdeeds, due to the military leadership traditions and to his indisputable military talents, many Chechens have been willing to fight under his guidance or that of a similar authoritative and experienced leader as long as they feel threatened by Russian invaders. And in the future, Dudaev or no Dudaev, many Chechens will fight the Russian occupiers even if, as it is likely, all the other mountaineer nationalities in the Caucasus offer little more than lip support. Thus, the war and its atrocities in a guerilla form will probably continue for a very long time. Today the hatred and determination for vengeance by many who lost their families due to bombings and shellings by the Russian army are so great, that even when a field commander is willing to conclude an armistice with the Russian forces and cease fire, his soldiers simply desert him and shift to another commander determined to continue the fight. But the general situation in the Caucasus has changed considerably in the two years since Russia's last parliamentary elections, and it continues to change in an unfavourable direction for Chechen fighters.

As I mentioned earlier, two years ago, in 1993, there was a real danger that a minor provocation might lead to a great new Caucasian War. That war would have been launched first of all by the KNK against the central government in Moscow, against its ex-communist puppets in local governments, against much feared Cossack organizations, and against all Russians in general. The mountaineer populations had their nerves on their edge and, besides, the central government looked slow and inefficient and probably was so in fact. But this is not the case now. The October 1993 shelling of the Russian Supreme Soviet by the military loyal to Yeltsin has obviously strengthened the central

government's confidence that it can do whatever it wants, uncontrolled and unpunished. There are certain limits to this overconfidence, of course, but it is still very high. On the other hand, in most former areas of fighting, a ceasefire, no matter how shaky, is more or less observed. Only in Chechnya, and to some degree in the ethnically closely related areas of Ingushetia and Northern Dagestan, is the resistance to the Russian occupation really widespread and strong. In these areas, and probably in these areas only, a situation like the conflict in the Northern Ireland may be expected to continue for many years to come.

However, all other mountaineer nationalities in the Northern Caucasus will probably continue to render only lip service to the Chechens and their struggle. There may be some fanatic nationalists and even some small organized groups that will side with the Chechens in their guerilla warfare, just as the IRA used to recruit its members not only from among the ethnic Irish, or as the PLO terrorists were represented not only by Palestinian Arabs. But a massive anti-Russian movement, which could be expected only a couple of years ago, is now impossible.

For this there are many reasons. First of all, people in Russia in general and in the Caucasus in particular are increasingly sick and tired of politics. The phrases that a few years earlier would ignite a mob with "rightful indignation" now are perceived by a mass of critically minded individuals as cheap nationalist propaganda. The nationalist leaders have had enough time to largely politically discredit themselves through their inefficiency, inconsistency, lack of responsibility, and often dishonesty in money matters. Meanwhile the the former communist puppet presidents in many republics have proved that they are no longer puppets. They have succeeded in many areas to consolidate up to 70 or 80 percent of popular support. This is largely because these presidents, namely [FIRST NAMES] Djarimov in Adygea, Khubiev in Karachai-Cherkessia, Kokov in Kabardin-Balkaria, Galazov in Ossetia-Alania, in maintaining good relations with the federal government have proven very adept at soliciting considerable financial donations and other benefits for their republics. The mechanism at work is simple but efficient: some grudging criticism of government and some nationalist phrases by popular organizations to help convince the government in Moscow that carrots rather than obviously discredited sticks are much preferred by generally loyal republics. The heads of local governments, demonstrating both their loyalty and the difficulties they ostensibly experience in preserving the social peace on their territories, successfully collect the carrots.

Also, the tragic example of Abkhazia and of the Ingushes in the Prigorodnii Raion of North Ossetia has convinced the majority of the working population, especially small owners, farmers, small businessmen and the like, that any attempt to change by force the status quo to favor one ethnic group may result only in thousands of lost lives, total destruction of villages and property, and hundreds of thousands of homeless refugees. Today most people vote for the status quo. The peoples of the Caucasus do not fear the "might" of the Russian army attempted in Chechnya and if attacked will fight to the last, but they do fear the damage they may inflict upon themselves if they start a conflict.



The recent development of the situation in Kabardin-Balkaria is a striking example of this change in attitudes. The Balkarian nationalist leader, General [FIRST NAME] Beppaev, became famous by organizing a huge number of protests, like seizing public buildings, hunger strikes, meetings, demonstrations and so on, to demand a separation of Balkaria from Kabardinia.

Naturally, Kabardins felt very offended by these actions and, in a less violent way, were preparing some countermeasures. At times it seemed that conflict and bloodshed between Balkars and Kabardins were inevitable. But then the government of this two-nationed republic<sup>4</sup> wisely proposed, in the very end of 1994, a referendum in which only ethnic Balkars were to participate. About 75 percent of the potential voters participated, and more than 90 percent of them voted to maintain the status quo, against a separation.<sup>5</sup> This is a fine example of the ratio between silent majorities and noisy minorities in most areas of the Caucasus.

In principle, the same prevalence of peacefully minded people soon might be characteristic for Chechnya, as well. Here, too, people are growing increasingly fed up with nationalist rhetoric. Chechens have suffered from the Tsarist colonialist and Stalinist neo-imperialist policies more than any other nation in the Caucasus, and probably second only to the Crimean Tatars on the all-Russian scale, so the determination to maintain independence was nearly universal among them, but they would probably agree to some kind of associate status with Russia. In 1993-1994 the number of Dudaev's supporters in Chechnya was falling rapidly and would have very soon dropped to a very low level, had not the stupid (or criminally irresponsible) policy of Yeltsin's generals turned 90 percent of Dudaev's bitter enemies into his adamant supporters. Without this ill-fated intervention, Dudaev soon would have become, like his colleague Beppaev, a general without an army.

The future of Chechnya, the whole Caucasus, and finally Russia in general is determined by many factors, some of which are stable and permanent, and others of which are unstable and subject to rapid change.

So what is stable and what is unstable in the Caucasus? The configurations of relations between ethnic groups, their mutual claims, and their basic historical aspirations are stable. They are so stable that archive materials of 1918 often seem to have been written in 1992. But at every given moment the readiness to fight or to compromise, to conform temporarily with the status quo or to strive to change it may be different and change easily, according to the prevalent conditions. The sympathies towards certain leaders are, too, extremely unstable and may change rapidly from admiration and adoration to hatred and contempt. The absolute prevalence of the role of shame over that of guilt has been stable throughout the millennia.<sup>6</sup> The inability of all Russian

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, Kabardins form nearly 50 percent of the total population, Russians about 30 percent, and Balkars only 10 percent.

<sup>5</sup> Two other proposals by nationalists, the creation of two separate parliaments, the Balkar and the Kabardinian ones, and a gerrymandering of *raions* (districts) as to make them ethnically homogeneous, were also rejected.

<sup>6</sup> Shame is understood basically as an irretrievable or difficultly retrievable loss of honor, decency, dignity, mutual respect and self-respect, which is to be avoided at any price.

governments (and of most rank and file ethnic Russians, as well) to understand this fact of paramount importance is also very stable. Hence the constant failures to find mutual understanding. Cossacks are, perhaps, to some extent an exception, because living for centuries side by side with the highlanders, they not only borrowed from them their traditional costume and many customs, but have acquired also some traditional values, including the overemphasis on shame and honour.

But despite difference of values and centuries of confrontations, the Caucasus needs Russia. It needs Russia and its money, technology and education much more than the present Russia needs the Caucasus. Despite all the conflicts and contradictions, the centripetal tendencies in the foreseeable future will prevail over the centrifugal ones. But the way to the structural reintegration is going to be painful and slow.

Ossetia will certainly remain loyal to Moscow, and territories west of Ossetia will remain more or less peaceful. Any violation of peace here may result not from the activity of Chechen agents or their local supporters, but from the arrogance and extremism of the Russian Cossacks. But east of Ossetia, rebellious Ingushes and Chechens will continue to cause trouble for many years and may also ignite a conflict in Dagestan, where thirty ethnic groups are at each other's throat. But because the contradictions between various highland tribes are stronger than between all mountaineers put together and Russia, it will sometimes be possible for Russia to play peace maker, as it did between Abkhazia and Georgia.

The religious factor tends to be grossly exaggerated by most authors and observers. In fact, religion plays a comparatively minor part in the events in the Caucasus. People align along ethnic lines, not religious ones. Some 20 percent of north Ossetians are Muslims, but this did not prevent them from demonstrating absolute solidarity with their Christian compatriots in their determination to expel Muslim Ingushes from Ossetia. However, in other places Islam and the law of Shariat may sometimes prevent Muslims from killing other Muslims. One has to differentiate, however, between the formally educated, sophisticated and ecumenistically oriented clergy on the one hand, and ignorant and fanatic, self-proclaimed Mullahs on the other.

The paradigms of the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus are found throughout the world. Least of all do these conflicts, however, resemble the situation in Bosnia. But there are striking parallels with Ulster, Algeria, Palestine and even South Africa. And though the Caucasus is relatively small, its unrest may be extremely disruptive to Russia in general. Considerable groups of Chechens have fled the calamities of war, even to the easternmost towns with ethnic Russian and indigenous populations, in northeastern Siberia, as far east as the Chukotka peninsula.

But regardless of Russia's political fate in the immediate future, there are only two alternatives to every trouble-stricken area in the Caucasus. One is a total extermination or expulsion (forced emigration) of the indigenous rebel populations: Abkhazians, South Ossetians, Karabakh Armenians, Ingushes. Georgians and Azeris would not hesitate to implement this alternative, as the North Ossetians did not hesitate to do in Prigorodnii raion with the Ingushes. But Russia cannot afford this, because the image of a democracy

and international public opinion is much more important for Russia than it is for Georgia and Azerbaidjan.

The other alternative means that the indigenous people will become the unequivocally dominant or even the practically sole population of their respective territories. Even Ingushes may in the end return to Prigorodnii raion and gradually squeeze out Ossetians. It must be noticed that just as in the New World the black population usually succeeds in squeezing out whites and not vice versa, in the same way the less advanced minority may be successful in squeezing out the more cultured majority. This is the main fear of the Karabakh Armenians, who are unwilling to allow even a small group of Azeris back into Karabakh. They know that such a thing has already happened in Nakhichevan, where no Armenians were left by the 1980s, while they constituted 50 percent of the population in 1920s.

Therefore there is a very small probability for Georgians to return to Abkhazia or to South Ossetia, and for a large number of Russians to Chechnya. Russians return to the ruined basements of their homes in Grozny because they have no other shelter elsewhere, but they will try to leave at the tiniest possibility. Thus, more and more territories in the Caucasus are and will be turning into ethnically homogeneous areas.

This is achieved at the expense of Krasnodar, Stavropol, and even Rostov-Don territories, which accept, albeit unwillingly and grudgingly, a huge number of refugees and immigrants, who are not only Russians, but much more (as percentage to already existing communities) Armenians, Jews, Meskhetian Turks, Tatars, Koreans, and, in the Republic of Kalmykia,<sup>7</sup> also Chechens and Dagestanis. In these areas, ethnic heterogeneity is rapidly increasing, with all its accompanying problems of tension, attempts at pogroms of refugees, and so on.

There are reasons to believe that the already shrunken territory of Russia is not going to shrink any more. Chechnya will be finally forced into some kind of association, and nobody else will now try to secede. But the consequences of the Chechnya war will be felt in Russia for many years and decades (as were the consequences of Vietnam in the United States, or of Afghanistan in Russia), and they will be very grave. Even when the war is nominally terminated, the terrorists acts of small groups and vendettas carried out by individuals will continue. No pilot known to have ever participated in bombing the civilian population in Chechnya, no officer with a Chechnya war record will ever feel safe from revenge, whether he would live in Moscow or Vladivostok. And any puppet bureaucrat of the Russian-installed civil government in Chechnya will never feel safe, either.

But this is not all. The United States prosecuted Lieutenant Calley for his role in the massacre at My Lai. He was just a scape goat, no doubt, and there were hundreds much worse than Calley who never were prosecuted. But in Russia the situation will be different. Dozens and hundreds of lieutenants, corporals and colonels should be prosecuted for Samashki and scores of similar events. Certainly, very few of them, if

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<sup>7</sup> The Republic of Kalmykia (Khalmgh Tanghch) is a nation within the Russian Federation, with a total population of approximately 350,000, just north of Dagestan and Stavropol.

any, ever will be. But there is enough evidence already to prosecute Pavel Grachev, Minister of Internal Affairs Victor Yerin, and a huge number of other generals, just for the irresponsible inefficiency and shameless lies at all stages of this war that resulted in the unnecessary deaths of many Russian soldiers, let alone for the brutal violations of human rights and international conventions. And if and when Yeltsin is succeeded as president by someone willing to create an image of a democrat and an advocate of the state of law, this person may order to start a prosecution. It will be done, of course, not for the sake of democratic principles or human rights, but to gather political capital, to redistribute spheres of interests among one's own supporters, and for many similar practical, selfish reasons. But such prosecutions most certainly will be attempted.

This is well understood by everyone constituting the present de facto military junta surrounding today the president of Russia and influencing his decisions. Therefore these people will do their best either to defraud or not to allow a new presidential election, to organize a provocation to introduce an all-Russia state of emergency, and – if anything happens to Yeltsin and his *pouvoir personnel* – to carry out a coup d'état, to place in power a Bonapartist figure able to defend their interests and their immunity.

And this is not yet all. The Caucasus possesses all necessary resources to be one of the prosperous areas of the world, like Spain or Greece. But for this it needs to develop its tourist industry, to create a stable, numerous and influential stratum of small and medium owners of private property, of farmers, shopkeepers, restaurateurs and other entrepreneurs. The main obstacle for this is instability, absence of firm peace, and the rule of post-communist bureaucrats who are the least interested to allow a middle class to appear. The consequences of the Chechnya war will provide favourable conditions for an indeterminately prolonged rule of these bureaucrats, for more authoritarianism and voluntarism in economic matters, and thus create the prerequisites for a painfully long economic stagnation in the Caucasus and, perhaps, in Russia in general.

## Chapter Two

# War in Chechnya: The Impact On Civil-Military Relations In Russia

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“Chechnya is the deepest disappointment of my presidency.”  
-- Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation<sup>8</sup>

At our last meeting here in Monterey in November 1994, some of the Russian participants, myself included, expressed their concern that in the case of Moscow's direct military intervention in Chechnya, Russia might face a challenge of terrorism — brutal armed violence could backfire into its cities. At the same time other voices aired serious doubts of any long-lasting and well-organized resistance in Chechnya, as well as skepticism about the potentiality of organized Chechen terrorist activities inside Russia.

I am glad to admit that I have underestimated the restraint and sensibility of the people of Chechnya (qualities having nothing to do with Dudayev's regime), though the hostage crisis in Budyonnovsk not only exposed the potential of terrorism, on the one hand, but also made it clear that terrorism was not the Chechens' primary intention, on the other. Certain analysts characterized Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's approach to resolving the Budyonnovsk crisis as a disastrous one. They predicted that the bargain with the terrorists over human lives established a dangerous precedent which would trigger a series of nation-wide bloody terrorist acts, not limited just to Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus. Fortunately, time has not proved the accuracy of their warnings. But the Budyonnovsk tragedy was a turning point of the war in Chechnya. The name of Budyonnovsk, a small North Caucasian town in the Stavropol district, has become a polysemantic political symbol: an indication of the incompetence and incapability of Yeltsin's administration, evidence of the Russian armed forces' weakness and their inability to win a local conflict, a symptom of a split within the government, a manifestation of the Russian parliament's impotence.

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<sup>8</sup> M. Eismont, “Chechnya — samoye silnoye razocharovaniye prezidenta Yeltsina” (Chechnya Is “The Deepest Disappointment” Of President Yeltsin). *Segodnya*, October 20, 1995, p. 2.

“...The war in the Caucasus continued for sixty years. Little by little Russia got used to the idea that such a state of affairs was natural and should last almost forever, particularly since the Caucasus for nearly half a century remained in a dark shadow, and the public judged it based on a few novels and stories told by people who visited the Pyatigorsk mineral spas. ...Our society on the whole was not even cognizant for what purpose the state had been striving for subjugation of the mountainous country so persistently and with such sacrifices. ...Russia rejoiced in patriotism at the conquest of the eastern mountains as a victory over a stubborn enemy, irrespective of the great importance of that development which is still much more distinctly realized abroad than in this country.”<sup>9</sup>

These observations on Russia's first war in the Caucasus were published more than a century ago in a book by Major General Rostislav A. Fadeev, one of the best Russian military historians of the last century. Unlike Russia of the early nineteenth century, modern Russian society is seriously concerned about the situation in Chechnya, where an undeclared local-war-scale constabulary operation was launched by the “power structures” — the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and the Federal Security Service — by the secret decrees of the president.

The Chechen war has effected the climax of the crisis of civil-military relations in post-Soviet Russia. This crisis is rooted in the last years of the former Soviet Union, and ripened during President Yeltsin's term of office.

The paramount causes of this crisis include:

- The elimination of the former totalitarian Soviet system of subjective civilian control of the military through the Communist Party and state security (KGB) structures and the institution of political instructors;<sup>10</sup>
- The failure to establish efficient executive control and legislative oversight over the military;
- The formal concentration of the oversight authority by the president (though it turns out that Yeltsin applied his famous formula of the powers of the subjects of the Russian Federation — “Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow” — to the military leadership as well, although in this case swallowing means not endangering presidential positions);

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<sup>9</sup> R. A. Fadeev, “Shestdesyat let Kavkazskoi voiny. Pisma s Kavkaza” (Sixty Years of the Caucasian War. Letters From The Caucasus), *Sobraniye sochinenii* (St Petersburg, 1889. Vol. 1. Part 1. pp. 1-2).

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957) pp. 80-81.

- The underdevelopment of civil society, which would hold liberal and democratic social values, in Russia;
- The loose social control of the ruling regime in general;
- The persisting non-democratic, authoritarian traditions and Byzantine methods of the post-Soviet political culture.

The rise and evolution of the Chechen republic closely correlates with the unsettled civil-military relations in Russia. It is extremely significant that traditionally warlike mountainous people of Chechnya and Ingushetiya, who never admit any supreme authority, elected former Air Force and Army generals (Dzhokhar Dudaev and Ruslan Aushev respectively) as their national leaders. On the other hand it was very meaningful that, while campaigning to be the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin favored another uniformed military — a Hero of the Soviet Union, Aleksandr Rutskoi — to run with him for the vice-presidency in 1991. Politicians were actively seeking the military's support, while the military were actively entering the policy-making process on every level in the Soviet Union, in Russia, in Chechnya, and so forth.

It is characteristic that representatives of both civilian authorities<sup>11</sup> and military leadership<sup>12</sup> of Russia were involved already in the very first attempts at settlement in Chechnya. Likewise, when their brief, unskilled attempts to peacefully solve the problem through political dialogue with the new Chechen leadership (though not quite legitimate, but the only really potent one) failed, both civilian and military administration demonstrated a rare concord and hastily resorted to armed violence to regain control over Chechnya.

To further understand the inevitability of the armed involvement in Chechnya, it is essential to comprehend why President Yeltsin declined any possibility of a personal meeting with Dudayev as a last hope to peacefully end the crisis. Certain individual features of Yeltsin's character made it psychologically difficult, if not impossible (though not excusable), to meet his political twin from Chechnya. Like Yeltsin himself, Dudayev strove for political power. And just Yeltsin was prepared to facilitate the disintegration of the Soviet Union in order to win power from Gorbachev, Dudayev was ready to sacrifice the unity of the Russian Federation for his own independent rule in Chechnya — that was one reason why Yeltsin did not, or could not, act decisively in the fall of 1991 to stop Dudayev's secessionism. Yeltsin in Moscow readily accepted forcible solutions to political disputes between different branches of state authority, just as Dudayev did in Grozny, . It was characteristic that Dudayev suggested, in a private letter to Yeltsin in April 1993, that the best solution for Yeltsin's conflict with the parliament was to disband the Supreme Soviet and hold simultaneous elections to a new legislature and a

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<sup>11</sup> i.e. Speaker of the former Supreme Soviet of Russia Ruslan Khasbulatov, Yeltsin's close aide Gennady Burbulis, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai

<sup>12</sup> i.e. Rutskoi, Minister of Defense General Pavel Grachev

referendum on a new constitution!<sup>13</sup> When in September 1993 Yeltsin “followed” that advice, Dudayev stated in the Chechen press that “Yeltsin's resolution directed the development of events in Russia into a logical channel” which should lead to complete democracy.<sup>14</sup>

If the decision-makers in the Kremlin and the Ministry of Defense had been better overseen by other social institutions, and if they had been better educated in the history of Russian policy and military history in the Caucasus, they might not have made all those ridiculous mistakes which led to the national crisis over Chechnya.

Firstly, they lost and misused time to prevent the development of Chechen secessionism in 1991. They have shown their political impotence and military inability by declaring a state of emergency in Chechnya and even airlifting paratroopers there, but failing to decisively engage them. More than that, they practically armed the forces of the quasi-independent Chechnya by leaving huge arsenals to Dudayev,<sup>15</sup> and for more than three years they let him train and prepare those forces for future combat.

Secondly, they ignored experience of Russia's annexation of the Caucasus, neglected historical, cultural and religious peculiarities characteristic to Chechens (as well as to other Moslem Mountaineers): their traditional belligerency, hostility to any supreme authority, defiance of death in combat, tight bonds of blood relationship, strong tradition of vendetta, and so forth.

They neglected the experience of Russian Generals Aleksey Ermolov, Alexander Baryatinskii, Nikolay Evdokimov and others who acted not only skillfully, decisively, and cruelly, but who could treat their enemies respectfully. Alexander II met with captured Imam Shamil in St. Petersburg and treated him generously, providing him with a pension and a private mansion in the city of Kaluga. Later Shamil was even permitted to leave for Mecca.

Two colonels from the Russian General Staff visited the State Military Historic Archive in Lefortovo at the end of November 1994 (!) with an official request from the Ministry of Defense to learn more about the historical context of the armed conflict in the North Caucasus. The archive officials were very enthusiastic that their assistance and expertise might help to sooner resolve the conflict in Chechnya and prevent future armed violence there. But the military limited their knowledge to mere general information which they could have found in any pre-Soviet encyclopedia.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the combat experience of the Imperial Russian army in the Caucasus, Robert Baumann, an American researcher of the Caucasian war, observed, “From an

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<sup>13</sup> E. Pain, A. Popov, "Rossiiskaya politika v Chechne: Diplomatiya pod kovrom" (Russia's Policy In Chechnya: The Under-Rug Diplomacy). *Izvestiya*, February 9, 1995, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> L. Krutakov, "Two Presidents Follow One Path To War". *Moskovskiy Novosti* (Moscow News), February 3-9, 1995, No. 5, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Dudayev “inherited” with the help of General Grachev 42 MBTs (with 9,770 shells), 38 IFVs (12,000), 28 APCs, 31,738 AKMs, 12,813 hand guns, 1,011 submachine guns, 1,021 rocket grenade launchers, 8,654 artillery and mortar shells, 13,847 hand grenades, etc. See: A. Borovkov, "ChR: Komu i dlya chego ostavleno oruzhiye?" (Ch[echen]R[epublic]: For Whom And For What Purposes They Left The Arms?). *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star), July 1, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> V. Gromov, "Dom, gde razbivayutsya pamyatniki" (House Where Monuments Are Decrowned). *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* (Russian Gazette), November 3, 1995, p. 27.



institutional perspective, no systematic effort was made to preserve and disseminate the lessons of the Caucasian theater, which had little relevance to European warfare...<sup>17</sup>

If that assertion correctly applies to activities of such an outstanding personality as the nineteenth century Russian war minister (1861-1881) General Dmitriy Milyutin, it unfortunately corresponds even more accurately with the deeds of “the best Russian Minister of Defense of the last decade,” as President Yeltsin characterized General Grachev. The cost of neglecting the Russian Caucasian army’s experience in the last century turned out too high for the modern Russian troops engaged in Chechnya.

(Though even the fact that the armed forces’ units presented as a part of the elite Mobile Forces suffered a crushing defeat in Grozny did not discourage Minister Grachev, who demonstrated steadfast confidence that his dreams will come true. Grachev asserted that the total strength of the Mobile Forces would be 200,000 men.<sup>18</sup> While inspecting troops in the Far Eastern Military district in September 1995, he declared that the local component of the mobile forces would be based on one of the assault battalions of the naval infantry division, Pacific Fleet, and that the formation of the Far Eastern arm of the mobile forces would be accomplished by the year 2000.<sup>19</sup>)

Thirdly, the decision-makers in the Kremlin and the Ministry of Defense failed to convince the Russian public of the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus in general and Chechnya in particular for Russian national security interests and of the necessity to preserve Chechnya as an integral part of Russia. They never tried to initiate wide public discussion of ways and methods to peacefully solve the problem to mutual satisfaction. Instead they launched a series of secret coercive moves and finally secretly decided on a full-scale invasion.

General R. Fadeev, a prominent Russian nineteenth century military theorist, explained the security interests of the Russian empire in the Caucasus in the following terms:

“...[Russian] domination at the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, or at least the neutrality of these seas, is a vital issue for the entire southern half of Russia, from [the river] Oka to Crimea, where the major strength of the empire, both human and material, is more and more concentrated. ...But Russia can guard its southern basins only from the Caucasian isthmus... The sequence of water basins delving into the Asian mainland from the Dardanelles to the Aral Sea with its navigable tributary Amu River, cutting through entire central Asia almost up to the Indian border — is an

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<sup>17</sup> Robert F. Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan* (Leavenworth Papers, No. 20, p. 35).

<sup>18</sup> N. Astashkin, V. Yermolin, "Mobilnyi sily na yuge Rossii sformirovany i gotovy reshat lyubyi zadachi" (Mobile Forces in Russia's South Are Formed And Ready To Solve Any Tasks). *Krasnaya Zvezda*, July 5, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> O. Kryuchek, "Pavel Grachev ob'yavil o sozdanii mobilnykh sil tikhookeanskogo flota" (Pavel Grachev Announced About Formation of the Mobile Forces of the Pacific Fleet). *Segodnya* (Today), September 5, 1995, p. 2.

extremely attractive trade route [for Europe], leading its way through roadless ridges and the highlands of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

...In case some Europeans had established trade via internal Asian basins on their own, prior to or beyond our control in the Caucasus, that trade route could have set the limit of our relations with Asia. Everything behind the line running from the mouth of the Kuban River through the northern coast of the Aral Sea and farther on would have been united in a group adversarial to us; and our only gain would have been turning our whole southern boundary from Crimea to China into an actual frontier with forts and armed forces needed to guard it.

...European trade with Persia and internal Asia conducted across the Russian-dominated Caucasian isthmus guarantees positive benefits to the state; if the same trade had been trafficked through a Caucasus which was independent of Russia, that could have created an endless chain of losses and threats for Russia.

Almost the whole Russian history is a lasting Asian question since those old days when the first communities of Slavs started moving westward, superseding or absorbing Asian tribes.

What is a matter of convenience and profit for Western Europe, for Russia is a crucial matter. It relates to Asia as naturally as the United States related to America before breaking off. Russia could not stop neither in the Caucasus, nor in the Urals. Advance was more suitable than passive defense in an unfavorable position..."<sup>20</sup>

Of course it could be hard and probably unnecessary to apply a hundred year old imperial geopolitical rationale to the modern situation in Russia in general, and in Chechnya in particular. Though one notion is topical even today: "if the same [Europe-Asia-Europe] trade had been trafficked through a Caucasus which was independent of Russia, that could have created an endless chain of losses and threats for Russia." The problem of the Caspian oil deposits (with a supposed output of 200-400 million tons per year) and especially of the possible pipe-line route (with the forecasted near- and long-term dividends of correspondingly 1 and 5 to 10 billion dollars a year)<sup>21</sup> is just one example of geostrategic importance of the North Caucasus and Chechnya.

Such an explanation of the Caucasian focus of the Russian government's security concerns could sound even more persuasive if coupled, for example, with a foreign policy statement of one of the major candidates for the next president of the United States, Republican Senator Robert Dole, who declared that:

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<sup>20</sup> R. A. Fadeev, "Shestdesyat let Kavkazskoi voiny. Pisma s Kavkaza" (Sixty Years of the Caucasian War. Letters From The Caucasus), *Sobraniye sochinenii* (StPetersburg, 1889. Vol. 1. Part 1. Pp. 5-7, 241, 249).

<sup>21</sup> I. Sidorov, "Chechenskaya zadvizhka dlya milliarda dollarov" (Chechen Slide-Valve For A Billion Dollars) *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, November 3, 1995, p. 4.

“[T]he security of the world’s oil and gas supplies remain a vital interest of the United States and its major allies. But its borders now move north, to include the Caucasus, Siberia, and Kazakhstan. Our forward military presence and diplomacy need adjusting.”<sup>22</sup>

But the Kremlin did not put forward this argument to convince the Russian public of the urgent necessity to stop the criminal evolution of the secessionist republic. Almost no other arguments were used except the condemnation of the criminal nature of Dudayev's regime. The primary reason for officialdom to avoid open public discussion was an apprehension that society might demand a peaceful solution and break the rules of the power game of the Kremlin and “power ministries.”

The fourth blunder is closely related to the previous one. Russian political-military leadership did not use all the peaceful means to resolve the problem. Instead its civilian part, represented by “intellectuals” (presidential assistants, analysts, and members of the whimsical — innocuous and unavailing — presidential council), unskillfully exercised the policy of “carrot and stick.” They failed to propose to Dudayev a “carrot” big enough, so that he could not reject it (like they did in the case of Tatarstan).

As to possible “carrots,” the imperial Russian past provides instructive examples. One was prompted by the Chechen émigré-writer Abdourahman Avtorkhanov. In his memoirs Avtorkhanov quoted the proclamation to the peoples of Chechnya, signed on behalf of emperor Alexander II by a viceroy of the Caucasus General Field Marshal Prince Alexander Baryatinskii in 1859:

“On behalf of His Majesty the Emperor, I proclaim:

- 1) that the Russian government allows you forever to adhere absolutely freely to the faith of your forefathers;
- 2) that you never will be recruited or turned to Cossackship;
- 3) that for three years after the adoption of this act you are granted [tax] exemptions, while after this term you must pay for maintenance of your public administration 3 rubles per house. Aul [mountain village] communities will apportion the dues independently;
- 4) that appointed authorities will rule by *Sharia*..., while justice and prosecution will be executed in public courts, composed of the best people elected by you and appointed by the authorities;

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Walker, “Caspian Oil and Pipeline Diplomacy.” *The Moscow Times*, September 29, 1995, p. 8.

5) that your rights of property will be kept inviolable. Your land estates, both hereditary or apportioned by the Russian authorities, will be allotted to your inherent possession by laws and plans..."

"If the modern 'autonomous' Checheno-Ingush Republic had such a constitution," summarized Avtorkhanov, "I would consider it as a super-happy state."<sup>23</sup>

While this "party of peace" continued its feeble attempts, the "party of war" represented by strong supporters of the forceful solution — "power ministers," members of the Security Council, assisted by "uniformed civilians" (like deputy ministers for nationalities' affairs and regional politics Generals Alexander Kotenkov and Kim Tsagolov, et. al.) and civilian "hawks" (like Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Shakhrai, former minister and now presidential adviser for nationalities' affairs and regional politics Nikolay Yegorov) — secretly supported and armed Dudayev's local opponents and refused to deal with Dudayev himself. More than that, every time it seemed that Grozny might agree to Moscow's terms, the "power ministries" have repeatedly taken measures to undermine any possibility of a negotiated settlement.

The fifth misdeed of Yeltsin's political-military establishment displays its "blood relationship" with the last Soviet administration of Gorbachev. Almost in the same way as the Soviets did after Afghanistan, Tbilisi, Vilnius, etc., the "democratic" Russian government shifted the blame for its own political faults to the armed forces.

At first, the Chechen opposition and deceived Russian mercenaries, backed up and instigated by Deputy Premier Sergei Shakhrai and by Chief of the Federal Counterintelligence Service Sergei Stepashin, carried out a series of abortive armed attempts to overthrow Dudayev. But when the mercenaries were captured as prisoners of war and the news was disclosed to the Russian public, the "power ministers" managed to persuade the president, who was not at all adverse to the idea of armed "elimination" of the problem called "Dzhokhar Dudayev," to intervene militarily in full scale.

Though it is obvious that the idea of involving the armed forces in the Chechen crisis resolution was long cherished by the "power structures," it very soon turned out that in fact neither Grachev's military nor Yerin's interior forces were ready for such a "police" operation. Grachev, Yerin, and Stepashin let their soldiers die in hundreds in an unprepared combat without clear objectives.

After Shamil Basayev's terrorist blackmail victory, the military discovered that all the results of their self-sacrificing fierce fighting were once again lost by politicians. Thus, many military officers became convinced of political and social malfeasance — sending the army to Chechnya (like before to Afghanistan) but withdrawing support when things went wrong, leaving the military to "hold the bag."

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<sup>23</sup> A. Avtorkhanov, "Iz biografii moyego naroda" (From The Biography Of My People). *Novoye Vremya* (The New Times), September 29, 1995, p. 8.

Besides, the unpopular, bloody and dirty Chechen war, combined with the April 1993 cancellation of practically all legal exemptions from military conscription, which affected primarily youths from middle-class families, led to a new, high wave of anti-military sentiments in Russian society.

Finally, the Chechen adventure of the decision-makers from the Kremlin, Staraya Square, Arbat Square, Lubyanka Square, and Oktyabrskaya Square<sup>24</sup> have exposed to the whole world, not just Russia's friends, that the Russian leadership and armed forces cannot resolve militarily even a limited conflict.

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A systemic crisis of civil-military relations is unfolding in Russia at three levels: in the upper echelons of state power, in the military, and in society.

At the national government level the Chechen war activated several conflicts. The most important one is a latent struggle for the right to control the military and law-enforcement policies between the president himself (counseled and directed by his security entourage) and other branches of power — the prime minister, Security Council, and parliament.

The president unilaterally deprived parliament of most of the legislative provisions for civilian oversight of the military after October 4, 1993 — first by his constitution, and then by his decree on December 21, 1993. That is why the State Duma's attempts to put the course of the military operation in Chechnya under legislative control failed.

Highly significant was a clash between the Duma's Defense Committee Chairman Sergey Yushenkov and the Duma's former human-rights representative Sergey Kovalyov (both representing Russia's Choice), opposing the war in Chechnya on the one side, and Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev on the other side. The details of their confrontation were accurately described in mass media. That collision had meaningful results: while the Duma democratic deputies won a moral victory, they did not succeed in stopping the war. At the same time Grachev not only resisted their criticism and continued a catastrophic military operation, but also survived its disastrous results.

It was once again the tragedy in Budyonnovsk that helped the parliament and intellectuals in the president's office to decisively call to account the "power ministers." However, soon after the "party of peace" started to celebrate the resignations of the "heroes" of the Chechen war they discovered that their main target, Defense Minister Grachev, had skipped out intact.

While Grachev's conflict with Russia's Choice was an open one, his behind the scenes struggle against Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's control revealed itself only occasionally. Obviously, Chernomyrdin had nothing to do with the real decision-making on the start of the police operation in Chechnya. The first time that Chernomyrdin

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<sup>24</sup> Places of residence of the president, Security Council, Ministry of Defense, Federal Counterintelligence Service (currently — Federal Security Service), and Ministry of Interior.

managed to get the power structures under temporary control was the Budyonnovsk crisis. He did what the “party of peace” in the Presidential Administration could not accomplish: he stopped the war and renewed negotiations.

Today we are facing the second time that Viktor Chernomyrdin’s authority over the power agencies is openly challenged by the defense minister. On Friday night, November 3, major Russian television companies broadcast news of the partial transfer of the president’s responsibilities to the prime minister as a result of Yeltsin’s decision while recuperating from heart trouble at the government hospital in Kuntsevo. But that very day at the meeting of the heads of the CIS governments, Grachev announced to the media that he is subordinated “directly to the president of Russia.” According to Grachev, he deals with Chernomyrdin only in “military-economic matters.”<sup>25</sup>

It was very telling that Boris Yeltsin’s escape from public view on the pretext of nasal surgery on the eve of intervention in Chechnya coincided with an unexpected, unexplainable disappearance of the president’s national security adviser Yury Baturin. When questioned about his strange behavior, Baturin rebutted charges against him of keeping silent on the war in Chechnya, saying “...[S]ince early 1994, when I became the assistant [to the president] on national security, I have been dealing with the classified data which was seldom inter-related with open information. ...I believe that it is inappropriate to hold public discussion of the particulars now. Later — yes, certainly.”<sup>26</sup> It is no secret for defense and security analysts in Moscow that Baturin’s relations with Defense Minister Grachev are strained, so most observers commented on the serious victory of the pro-military lobby in the Presidential entourage over Yeltsin’s civilian assistants in the question of the Chechen crisis resolution.

On the level of the military itself, the crisis of civil-military relations was manifested in the desperate desire of the military to establish their own lobby in the parliament in an attempt to affect the national government. Today 123 uniformed Grachev loyalists are running for public office. However, not all the military candidates are Grachev’s supporters. Some of them opposed the policies of the minister of defense and resigned in protest. Now they figure prominently on the lists of several major electoral blocs (Aleksandr Lebed of the Congress of Russian Communities, Eduard Vorobyov of the Russia’s Choice, etc.). Others in uniform are either Grachev’s open opponents (like Boris Gromov of the “My Fatherland” bloc) or his moderate critics (like one of the most prominent Russian commanders of the Chechen war, General Lev Rokhlin of Chernomyrdin’s Our Home Is Russia, who has declined to be awarded the Hero of Russia military decoration on the grounds that a military officer cannot be decorated for taking part in a civil conflict, or Yevgeny Podkolzin, Commander in Chief of the airborne troops, of the “For the Motherland” bloc).

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<sup>25</sup> I. Korotchenko, “Pavel Grachev: Moi nachalnik — tolko Yeltsin” (Pavel Grachev: My Chief Is Yeltsin Only). *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 4, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Yu. Zainashev, “Predstaviteli Yeltsina hoteli schitat tsyplyat po oseni” (Yeltsin’s representatives wanted to count their chickens when they were hatched [literally — in autumn]). *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, July 27, 1995, p. 2.

It would be a mistake to see this as a military coup by stealth. The army is a deeply divided organization, as the war in Chechnya has proved. The generals confirm this by running for political office with parties representing different parts of political spectrum. The Duma is not a good launching pad for seizing power other than by democratic electoral means. General Lebed put it best with his customary brevity when he said: "Fear the generals who are not running for the Duma."

As Thomas de Waal, a columnist of the *Moscow Times* newspaper, accurately observed:

"Sergey Yushenkov, the excellent reformist chairman of the [Duma] Defense Committee, is unlikely to hang on to his job after December. Who replaces him will be very important. If it is Lebed, the results could be interesting. If it is ...[General Valentin] Varennikov [one of the leaders of the unsuccessful hard-line coup in August 1991], Western strategists should start taking a few Cold War treatises from their shelves."

The evolution of the relationship between the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Russian mass media mirrors the crisis of civil-military relations at the societal level in general.

The introduction and support of freedom of speech was an indisputable credit of *perestroika* and Gorbachev's greatest achievement, the importance and long-term effect of which had never been exceeded by any of Boris Yeltsin's undertakings. It was due to *glasnost* that an active public discussion of the problems of defense policies, military reforms, and civil-military relations started. That debate involved not only party and military officials, but a great number of civilian defense analysts as well. For the first time in Soviet history, such a public dialogue was becoming free of ideological dogmas and attracting the lively interest of a broad audience. At the same time, during the Gorbachev era for the first time in the Soviet history, the military complained about being insulted and criticized, both as a social institution and as individuals, by society and particularly the free mass media.

During Yeltsin's term of office the new Russian military leadership tried to learn how to deal with the free mass media. However, several events of the last two years ruined Minister Grachev's and his ministry's relations with the mass media.

Firstly, journalists criticized the military for their role in the fighting between the President and the Supreme Soviet in October 1993. Then, the mass media accused Grachev's military of voting for Zhirinovskii in the December 1993 State Duma elections. Next came the scandalous campaign of sharp criticism in the media against Grachev himself and his closest aids at the Ministry of Defense in connection with the assassination of a Moscow newspaper correspondent who investigated the "generals' case" of large-scale corruption in the armed forces. In response, Grachev attacked media treatment of the issue of corruption within the military as a "political provocation" aimed at undermining the armed forces and the authority of the Russian state. He even compared that criticism of the top military to the past persecution of Jews by Stalin:

“Once we had the doctors’ plot, now it’s the generals’ plot.” He added, “Beat the generals, save Russia,” an obvious paraphrase of the old Russian anti-Semitic slogan “Beat the Yids, save Russia.”

Public criticism of the Chechen campaign arose before the first civilian and military casualties came. The media criticized the political-military leadership for its chosen option of conflict resolution. The main reason for sharp criticism was not just the character of that option — a full-scale armed intervention in Chechnya — but the ways and methods of making the final decision. It was done in the worst Soviet-style tradition of total secrecy and mass deception. Pavel Grachev, together with his colleagues from the other power ministries, Stepashin and Yerin, deliberately lied about the Russian military officers’ involvement in Chechnya on the side of anti-Dudayev opposition. Even later, when those mercenaries were captured by Dudayev’s forces and their semi-interviews or semi-interrogations were televised by the Chechens, Grachev refused to recognize their affiliation with his ministry.

Further events proved that total secrecy was chosen as the main method of handling the Chechen crisis. Grachev (definitely on Yeltsin’s authorization) kept in the dark not only Russia’s lawmakers, the public and the mass media, but his ministerial staff as well. As former Deputy Defense Minister Colonel General Boris Gromov disclosed, “[T]he operation [in Chechnya] was prepared in great secrecy and I did not know anything about it.”<sup>27</sup> Gromov characterized such secretiveness as the general trend within the Russian defense establishment.

“Over the past two and a half years [of the existence of the Russian Ministry of Defense, May 1992 - January 1995] the work of the Collegium [of the Ministry of Defense] has become a formality,” said Gromov. “The crucial decisions affecting the future of the nation are increasingly being made by a limited number of officials. In fact, the Collegium was barred from the discussion of problems connected with the START II treaty, the Partnership for Peace program, and other documents of great importance to the Defense Ministry. The decision on using the armed forces in Chechnya was also made secretly and was not discussed by the board.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Pavel Grachev’s Chechen campaign totally ruined the Ministry of Defense’s relations with the democratic mass media. But the top military officers stood up staunchly to defend their minister. For instance, Commander of the Moscow military district Colonel General Leontiy Kuznetsov was quoted as saying that he “would shoot ...those rascals who are slandering our minister of defense.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> A. Zhilin, “Chechnya Plans Kept From Deputy Defense Minister.” *The Moscow News*, No. 2, January 13-19, 1995, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> K. Lyubarskii, “Sovershenno sekretno” (Top Secret). *Novoye Vremya* (New Times), No. 19-20, May 1995, p. 19.



So, today the Russian Ministry of Defense has a mostly confrontational relationship with the mass media. The Ministry of Defense-controlled newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* and several military journals accused journalists of an anti-military and anti-army stance, of corruption, and of pro-Dudaev sympathies.

In reality, Russian journalists again feel the public interest and concern regarding the problems of the Russian military and of their democratic reforms. In the nearest future we may face a revived debate of these questions reminiscent of the high point of the democratic wave of the Gorbachev era. It may be even more interesting and important not only for Russia, because in the following several months Russia will hold two electoral campaigns, which will significantly change anyway the situation within the Russian military and society.

## Chapter Three

### The Chechen Campaign

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When in mid December 1994 the Russian army suddenly marched on Grozny, not only the general public in Russia, but many politicians and analysts in Moscow and world wide were caught unawares. This sudden and ill-prepared winter march seemed totally irrational. But politicians, journalists, analysts and other "Gurus in Residence" must deliver explanations even if they are as baffled by events as the general public is, an occupational hazard of a profession that most of the time provides an easy and reasonable income with lots of personal ego satisfaction on the side.

The most intelligent way to react publicly to an unpredictable situation and to avoid tarnishing one's "Guru in Residence" credentials is to use the method of historical similarity. There was a long and bitter war between Russians and Chechens last century, so the new encounter may be described as the Second Caucasian War.

### The Long History Of Russian-Chechen Warfare

There really are striking similarities between the wars then and now: battles on the Argun, for Vedeno and near Dargo; the severity of the fighting; the heavy losses, including very many civilians; the rules of engagement used by both sides that are obviously not in accord with civilized customs of warfare. As a result, many an analyst believed that the conflict would indeed turn out to be a second edition of the Great Caucasian War. When the Russian army got bogged down battling the Chechens in the winter of 1995 and took four whole months of heavy fighting in Grozny and on the plains just to reach the mountains, it was universally predicted that there, on the cliffs and in the ravines, the gallant guerrillas could make a stand, and that the ungainly Russian armored columns would be even less effective than on the streets of Grozny. The anti-Russian guerrilla war would go on and on, spreading from tribe to tribe throughout the Caucasus, as it did last century. Many even predicted that Russia had already lost the war and was on the verge of plunging into a long period of destructive internal turmoil like some Third World country.

But historical analogies are often misleading. After almost a year of conflict the Caucasian nations seem even more calm and unwilling to revolt against Moscow than at the beginning of the war. Also, in the old mountain strongholds of Vedeno and Shatoi the Chechens fared much worse in May and June 1995 than in Grozny in January. The

strategic situation in the Caucasus is totally different today than in the last century. The mountainous people of the Caucasus no longer live in self-sufficient communities. They cannot produce their own arms and munitions in high mountain hideouts to fight the Russians face to face. They cannot even feed themselves. Without massive trade with Russian-inhabited lands and massive help and subsidies from the government in Moscow, not a single Caucasian nation can physically survive.

Nonetheless, the call of history is still important. In the Soviet times the authorities in Moscow did their best to keep the general public ignorant of the long and bloody war in the mountains in the last century. The official motive was to perpetuate the myth that all the tribes and nations of the Soviet Union joined Russia voluntarily and with glee. That was all a good Soviet officer needed to know. Serious military, political and ethno-social research of that war and its aftermath was virtually forbidden. As a result, the Russians have virtually forgotten the Caucasian war of the last century. And so they made many of the same mistakes as they made 150 years ago. The Russian forces often assumed a reactive posture, failing to consistently and aggressively engage the Chechens. The decision-making and command structure of the Russian forces was confused. The Russian military, intelligence and political leaders grossly underestimated the Chechens' resolve to fight and the degree of hostility that a Russian military move into Chechnya would create. The Russian army marched into a conflict as unprepared and ignorant of the task ahead of it as their nineteenth century predecessors -- those bayonet and saber brandishing, post-Napoleonic, dandied infantry and cavalry men.

But the Chechens forgot nothing. Not the war itself, not the gallantry of Imam Shamil's men, not the savagery of the fighting and the scorched land tactics of General Aleksei Ermolov and other Caucasian viceroys. And, of course, the Chechens did not forget the 1944 brutal deportation of all their nation by Soviet (Russian) troops. But the Chechen recollections of the last century Caucasian war were very romantic. They, apparently, actually believed that the irresolute Russians would simply flee when confronted with real Chechen valor, and thus invested very little effort into long-term planning and organization.

During virtually all of the 1995 campaign<sup>30</sup> the Chechens lacked the concentration and coordination of force needed to inflict any but minor defeats on the Russians. Just as in the pre-Shamil times of their anti-Russian resistance last century, the "mountaineers were so deficient in conducting offensive operations more complex than an ordinary raid that the Russians considered a detachment of several companies sufficient to constitute an independent force. The mountaineers repeatedly proved unable to defeat a disciplined formation and showed no capacity whatsoever to cope effectively with artillery."<sup>31</sup> Whereas the great Imam Shamil created a stringent political-economic system that enabled him to conduct a prolonged and effective campaign, Dudayev's Chechnya-Ichkeriya

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<sup>30</sup>with the exception of fighting in Grozny on January 1-3, 1995

<sup>31</sup>*Leavenworth Papers*, N 20, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan by R.F. Baumann", p.11.

collapsed militarily after several months of fighting. Even such a span of effective resistance in the field was mostly the result of Russian strategic, operational and tactical blunders.

The mountaineers of the Northern Caucasus may think of themselves as direct descendants of Imam Shamil's Murids who followed their leader unquestioningly. But in reality the social and economic structure of the Caucasian tribes has changed dramatically and the independent Chechnya-Ichkeriya of Dzhokar Dudayev was definitely no Imam. Thus the method of historical parallelism is rather misleading when analyzing the present Chechen conflict.

## **The Independent Chechnya-Ichkeriya Of Dzhokar Dudayev (1991-1994)**

The self-proclaimed republic of Chechnya-Ichkeriya unilaterally declared its independence in 1991, after the Congress of the Chechen Nation overthrew the government of the Chechen-Ingush republic and forcibly disbanded its Supreme Soviet headed by former Communist Party Chief and Chechen strong-man Doku Zavgayev.<sup>32</sup> In October 1991, after dislodging Zavgayev, taking over local KGB and Interior Ministry headquarters and freeing criminals from local prisons, the armed pro-independence supporters of the Chechen Nation's Congress organized unconstitutional parliamentary and presidential elections that made their declared leader, former Soviet Air Force General Dzhokar Dudayev, the president of a sovereign and independent Chechnya-Ichkeriya republic.

The authorities in Moscow never recognized Dudayev and his self-proclaimed independent Ichkeriya. In November 1991, several weeks after the unilateral declaration of Chechen independence, Russian President Boris Yeltsin proclaimed martial law in Chechnya in an attempt to quell General Dzhokar Dudayev's secessionist revolt before it became really dangerous.

But Mikhail Gorbachev, then still formally president of a collapsing Soviet Union and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the army to remain strictly neutral and to take no part whatsoever in enforcing the martial law. This order to keep out of mischief was willingly passed to the troops in and around Grozny by then-Chief of Staff General Vladimir Lobov.<sup>33</sup> A regiment of lightly armed Interior Ministry troops that had been airlifted into Grozny surrendered its arms to the Chechen rebels without a fight when it became clear that the army would not support them.

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<sup>32</sup>In October 1995 Zavgayev, who spent almost 4 years in exile in Moscow working as an official in the administration of President Yeltsin, was appointed prime minister of the Russian-backed, Grozny-based National Revival Government of Chechnya.

<sup>33</sup>According to what Lobov told me in December 1991.

The Russian Supreme Soviet promptly overruled Yeltsin's martial-law decree. The Chechen secessionist movement was allowed to develop until it got totally out of control and war became more or less inevitable. In 1991 Russian society and the majority of the political elite regarded the use of armed force as totally unacceptable in any situation.

Never since, in any negotiations, did the Chechens believe that the Russian government was capable and willing to use force to subdue their secession. During the war in 1995 they were reluctant to enter any meaningful negotiations, regardless of the pounding they were getting in the fighting. The Chechens were waiting for the Russian morale to crack, for the total victory and final triumph of the Chechen side. Many Chechen resistance field commanders even considered the Russian-Chechen military accord, signed in Grozny of July 30, 1995, as only a face-saving maneuver for the Russian army to withdraw its forces without officially acknowledging total defeat. The Chechens, obviously, do not believe that the Russian Armed Forces are capable of winning any armed conflict.

They had a very good reason to think so. After the disastrous November 1991 attempt to subdue the Chechen secession, the Yeltsin administration was too preoccupied fighting the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, headed by another well-known and influential Chechen, Ruslan Khasbulatov, to be able to maintain any credible forceful policy in dealings with Dudayev. Since legislative support for any military action in Chechnya was not forthcoming, the situation was more or less left to simmer in the hope that it would somehow solve itself.

In June 1992 the Russian authorities withdrew all Russian defense personnel and their families from Chechnya. Almost all the arms and military equipment of Russian army units in Chechnya were left behind. This included, according to semi-official estimates: 42 tanks (T-62M and T-72); 66 armored combat vehicles (ACVs) - BMP-1, BMP-2, BTP-70, BRDM-2; 30 122mm towed howitzers D-30; 58 120mm PM-38 mortars; 18 B-21 Grad MRLs; 523 RPG-7 anti-tank grenade launchers and 77 ATGW (Concurs, Fagot and Metis); 18,832 AK-74, 9307 AK-47 (AKM), 533 sniper rifles, 1160 machine-guns; 4 ZCU-23-4 Shilka, 6 ZU-23 and an unspecified number of Igla portable SAMs; 152 Czech-made L-39 trainer-bomber jets, 94 L-29, several Mig-15, Mig-17, An-2 airplanes and 2 Mi-8 helicopters.

The arms could not have been recovered without a major military operation, since the cadre (skeleton) units based in Chechnya could not defend themselves. But a major invasion of Chechnya, to free the besieged Russian garrisons and to organize a withdrawal of the armaments and the men, would have certainly led to armed clashes and loss of life. Such action would have been extremely unpopular in Russia, would have almost certainly been condemned by the Supreme Soviet and maybe even used to initiate a successful impeachment procedure to oust President Boris Yeltsin. So no one in the administration dared to provoke an armed clash in Chechnya with uncertain results. Therefore a tacit agreement was reached that allowed the Russian servicemen and their families to withdraw peacefully and Dudayev to get the arms.

This tacit agreement clearly followed the pattern of other Russian Armed Forces withdrawals from the former Soviet republics. In 1992 the Russian army was used to

cutting its losses and retreating. But this time it happened on sovereign, internationally recognized Russian territory. However, in 1992, only several months after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the difference between former Soviet and Russian territory was in no way clear. Emotionally a great number of Russian officers did not see any difference. But the politicians, who should have known better, just shoved the problem onto the military to blunder through on their own.

While the legislature and administration in Moscow were locked in battle, the heavily armed and semi-independent Chechnya-Ichkeriya of Dzhokar Dudayev developed into a strange buccaneer republic, a source of illicit arms and drug trafficking into Russia and a safe haven for any common criminal. In 1993 General Dudayev used armed force to disband the Chechen parliament and since then ruled in Grozny as an authoritarian Lebanese-style warlord, his control over the majority of small Chechen towns and the countryside being nominal or nonexistent.

The civil airstrip north of Grozny developed into a unofficial international airport with up to 150 foreign-bound charter flights a month, mostly to Turkey. There were, obviously, no Russian government customs or passport controls, which made it a safe haven for smuggling. Official authorities still considered Chechnya an integral part of Russia, so the traffic through the secessionist republic was virtually unhampered, especially through Ingushetia.

It is often alleged that certain influential people in Moscow actively participated in large scale bank fraud and illegal oil export operations conducted through Grozny. It is also alleged that the Chechens actively bribed high-ranking Moscow officials and that this explains the obvious leniency of the Kremlin in dealings with Dudayev's illegal and corrupt regime.

But in the end basic Russian strategic and national security interests prevailed. The only railroad linking Russia with the Transcaucasus, which is of great strategic and economic importance was virtually blocked because it passes right through Chechnya. In addition, several important oil and natural gas pipelines that go through the secessionist republic also became unreliable. Because many influential Russian businessmen and bankers are extremely interested in developing economic ties with Azerbaijan, and in view of the Russian effort to channel Azeri Caspian oil through Russian territory, the pressure to restore order in Chechnya was steadily increasing.

Since the failed November 1991 attempt to stop the Chechen mutiny, there have been many attempts to solve the problem through negotiation. Several times an agreement seemed almost inevitable. But time and again Dudayev blocked negotiations or denounced agreements. At the same time, Chechnya-Ichkeriya was obviously disintegrating, with warlords big and small taking over districts, towns and villages. As the anarchy increased, clans and large families formed armed groups to defend themselves and to harass the neighborhood, if need be. As a result there was a growing number of low-scale inter-Chechen armed clashes since late 1993.

The situation was becoming increasingly intolerable. Chechnya seemed to be in total disorder and fragmentation. General Dudayev was too weak and out of control to negotiate with and, for that same reason, ripe for an easy overthrow.

## **The Covert Operation To Overthrow Dudayev, 1994**

After the Yeltsin administration and its supporters successfully used armed force to subdue the Russian legislature in October 1993, several high-ranking officials decided that the time to solve "the Chechen problem" had come. By mid-1994 it was decided to begin a covert operation to overthrow Dudayev, using the same tactics that were so successful in Abkhazia in 1993, where the Russian army unofficially supported the Abkhaz rebels by providing them with some arms and also firepower, air power and logistical support.

Originally, the idea to use the Chechen opposition to overthrow Chechen President Dzhokar Dudayev came from Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai. General Aleksandr Kotenkov, Deputy Nationalities Minister and a senior member of Shakhrai's political faction, took on the practical task of supplying money and weapons to the opposition.

Obviously, Shakhrai and Kotenkov had been given approval by President Boris Yeltsin. They supplied the "united Chechen opposition" with considerable quantities of arms and cash. Later, Russian Mi-24 "unidentified" attack helicopters began flying close support combat sorties to help the opposition. But even this failed to bring results. Two attempts to blockade and storm the Chechen capital Grozny, at the end of August and again in mid-October, ended in failure. The rag-tag Chechen opposition gladly took the money and the arms, but never had any serious intention of risking their lives for the sake of Moscow's interests.

In October, Shakhrai lost control of the secret operation in Chechnya. A new attack on Grozny was planned and organized by the Federal Counterintelligence Service, and overall control was passed on to Nationalities Minister Nikolai Yegorov. Allegedly, the powerful chief of President Yeltsin's security service, Aleksandr Korzhakov, was also involved. The Chechen opposition was provided not only with Russian tanks but with active duty Russian officers as well.

However, during the November 26, 1994 attack on Grozny, opposition fighters again fled. The tanks with Russian officer crews were left exposed without infantry support on the streets of the capital and forced to surrender. After that, Yeltsin was left with no choice but to send the regular army into Chechnya.

Only a full-scale operation in Chechnya could prevent an investigation of the previous covert missions. Apparently, the administration has already achieved this goal. A year later, after all the fighting and carnage in and around Chechnya, even the harshest critics of President Yeltsin and his administration have virtually forgotten the blundered covert operations in August-November 1994. Besides, on December 13, 1994, the Duma passed a resolution granting amnesty to all participants in the events in the Caucasus, apparently including even the highest levels of the administration and Yeltsin himself. In this respect the war has fully achieved its aim.

## The Russian Army Moves On December 11, 1994

Russian Defense Minister Army General Pavel Grachev has publicly acknowledged that the planning of the Chechen operation started only one month before "D" day. And these could have been only very tentative plans, since all in Moscow were awaiting the successful outcome of the last attempt to take Grozny using covert means on November 26, 1994. The political decision to go into Chechnya was finally made on November 29, 1994, after the extent of the November 26 disaster had become apparent. After that, the staff of the North-Caucasian Military District (NCMD) was given orders to plan and prepare the operation. First orders to begin force concentration were actually issued only in early December 1994, a week before "D" day.<sup>34</sup>

By December 11, 1994 a task force of NCMD, Interior Ministry (MVD) and mobile force airborne units was loosely assembled at bases in Mozdok, Beslan and Vladikavkaz. It consisted of 23,700 men (19,000 Army, 4,700 MVD), 80 tanks, 208 ACVs, and 182 guns and mortars. The enemy armaments at the beginning of the Chechen campaign were later officially estimated by the Russian defense ministry at 98 tanks, over 150 ACVs and up to 300 guns and mortars.<sup>35</sup>

This enemy heavy armament assessment at the beginning of the campaign is approximately two times bigger than the estimates of arms left by the Russian army in Chechnya. This can be in part explained by the Chechen resistance taking over a large part of the equipment the Russians gave to the Chechen "united opposition". But mostly it is apparently the result of the Russian military's deliberate overestimation of enemy capabilities to explain its own blunders. Privately, high-ranking Russian generals agree that the bulk of the heavy armaments that the Chechen fighters used in battle was precisely the equipment the Russian army had left them.

In any case, the Russian military command failed to concentrate an "overwhelming" force that could have melted away organized Chechen resistance.

The Chechen campaign should have been a showcase of rapid deployment and success by Grachev's mobile forces, but it turned into a disaster. Low manpower in the Russian army has reduced all tank and motorized-rifle divisions to near cadre state so they can not be used in combat operations as whole units. The Russian armored columns that moved on Grozny on December 11, 1994, were in essence salami-style combined task forces hurriedly put together from small bits and pieces of different army and airborne units. Many of the soldiers had never fought or trained together because the Russian army, for lack of funds, has held no large maneuvers in the last three years. The Chechen fighters were much better motivated and knew the country they were fighting in.

Understaffed and undertrained tank and mechanized units often suffered heavy losses. At the same time mobile paratroopers often refused to attack enemy strongholds in their

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<sup>34</sup>Pavel Grachev, in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 28 July, 1995, p.4.

<sup>35</sup>Grachev's official statement at February 28, 1995 Chechen operation assessment meeting in the Defense Ministry in Moscow. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 1, p.1.



airborne, aluminum-armored light tanks. In December 1994 and January 1995, Grachev's mobile force dream of a single airborne regiment capturing Grozny in two hours went sour.

There was no pressing military necessity for the Russian army to march into Chechnya in December 1994 so unprepared and at the wrong time of year, when fog and low clouds hampered effective air support. There was time to prepare an offensive, since the Chechens possessed no capabilities to march to Moscow and to win a battle for the Kremlin while the Russian army was preparing to go into Grozny. But General Grachev, under attack in the press for alleged corruption, would not stop the operation and risk his position when many in the Kremlin believed that the Dudayev regime would collapse when the first Russian tank hits the streets of Grozny. Maybe Grachev himself believed in such an outcome.

## **Marching On Grozny In December, 1994**

Elements of the 76th airborne division, the 21st airborne brigade and the 19th Vladikavkaz-based motorized-rifle division moved into Chechnya from the Beslan and Vladikavkaz bases through Ingushetia. The march was hampered by local anti-Russian Ingush demonstrations. The morale of the troops was low; they were unprepared for action and did not understand why they were being sent into battle. When the columns reached Chechen territory their progress was also impeded by the Chechen armed resistance, mostly various types of irregular units.<sup>36</sup>

Chechen fighters attempted to organize night-time partisan raids to stop the advance of the Russian columns, but these attacks were poorly planned and the Russian soldiers were able to fend them off. However, the advance of the western columns was slow.

The most effective Chechen action in December was a surprise Grad MRL attack on an advance column of ACVs of the 106th airborne division and 56th airborne brigade near Dolinskoe that killed 6 officers (including 2 colonels) and 13 enlisted men.<sup>37</sup>

The advance of troops in the north was much more efficient than through Ingushetia. Elements of the 8th Guards Corps from Volgograd, under General Lev Rokhlin's command, and the ill-fated 131st Maykop-based motorized-rifle brigade sped through territory controlled by anti-Dudayev forces from Isherskaya up to Chervlenaia, taking control of the railroad and important bridges on the Terek river, the only significant water-way obstacle for troop movement in this region.

Unhampered by hostile civilian demonstrators and meeting very little armed opposition, the Russian troops crossed the Terek at several points, forged their way through the low ridge of hills known as the "Terski" mountains and began to descend on

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<sup>36</sup>In Chechnya, every clan and village has its own armed formation with no other loyalties.

<sup>37</sup>Grachev's official statement at February 28, 1995, Chechen operation assessment meeting in the Defense Ministry in Moscow. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 1, p.2.

Grozny, semi-encircling the enemy stronghold from north-west to north-east. There they encountered growing resistance from Chechen formations.

The first objective of the operation -- to block Grozny in preparation of a final assault on Dudayev -- was not accomplished. The Northern army group was still struggling to reach the outskirts of the city, while the Western task force was bogged down ten miles away. Only the Russian Air Force took advantage of several days of clear weather in early December and, according to Air Force Commander-in-Chief General Petr Deynekin, totally destroyed all Chechen airplanes on the airstrips near Grozny -- not only the hundreds of trainer jets that belonged to a former military flying school, but also six Tu-134s and other civilian aircraft (in sum, over 250 planes).

Russian officers and generals were reluctant to go into serious combat, being unsure of the possible political ramifications of massive losses of servicemen and civilians. They obviously feared that public protest could forever destroy their military careers. So on December 21, 1994, days after the start of campaign, General Grachev stormed into Mozdok to chew out the Russian officers and to get things going again.

The commander of the NCMD, three-star general Colonel General Aleksei Mitukhin who had been in charge of the operation was pronounced "ill" with back problems on December 18, flown to Moscow to a hospital for treatment and later dismissed from service. The deputy commander of the NCMD Lieutenant General Todorov (in charge of the slow-advancing Western army group), the NCMD chief of staff and other NCMD high-ranking officers also was dismissed.

Colonel General Eduard Vorobyov, first deputy commander of the Russian Ground Forces, on December 17 arrived in Mozdok, where the operational staff was based, and took over command of the operation on December 18 "on a temporary basis," as he said later. Talking to reporters on January 26, 1995, he said that "after studying the situation" he reported to the Chief of General Staff, General Mikhail Kolesnikov, that "the operation is unprepared and can not be executed because of deficiencies in means and forces." He said that "according to army intelligence reports, Dudayev's units outnumber the Russian forces, the improvised "combined" regiments and brigades arriving for battle from different military districts are totally not battle worthy, and bad weather reports mean that constant and effective air support for the troops was virtually impossible." So further offensive action should be postponed.

On December 20, General Grachev phoned Vorobyov and officially asked him to take over command of the Chechen operation and to continue the advance, Vorobyov refused. On December 21, at a meeting of staff in Mozdok General Grachev publicly demanded that Vorobyov resign from service, and he promptly handed in his letter of resignation. General Grachev also introduced the new commander of Russian forces in Chechnya -- Lieutenant General Anatoly Kvashin from the General staff.<sup>38</sup> A new chief of staff of the Russian forces in Chechnya was appointed, Lieutenant General Leonty Shevtsov.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> General Kvashin was promoted to Colonel General for taking Grozny and became commander of the NCMD in the spring of 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Shevtsov also got his third general's star after the Russian army overpowered the Chechen fighters and finally captured Grozny. In October 1995 he was tentatively appointed commander of Russian troops in the

I spoke with Vorobyov the day after he submitted his resignation. He told me that he received a number of phone calls of support from leading Russian generals, although many also called "to express their regret" that he had taken such a foolish step. However, in both cases he said that his personal fate is not as important as the fate of the country and of the army, which is being decided in Chechnya. In the fall of 1995 retired General Vorobyov decided to run for parliament, sharing the party ticket with Egor Gaydar and Sergei Kovalev, who played the most prominent roles in opposing the war.

Vorobyov's resignation was a sign of the growing dissent among Russia's military chiefs. In December 1995 Grachev decided to dismiss three deputy defense ministers, Boris Gromov, Valery Mironov and Georgy Kondratyev, who were accused of dissension over the Chechen campaign. Several months later one more open military critic of the Chechen war, General Aleksandr Lebed, was also dismissed from service.

Meanwhile on the battlefields of Chechnya, Grachev's wrath and verbal assault on the Russian officers, of which he's a first class expert, did make a difference. The Russian troop commanders acted more energetically and began to close in on Grozny. In the north the Russians took Pervomayskoe, Tolstoy-Urt and then Grozny's civilian airport, Groznoe-Severnoe. The Chechen fighters resisted but were outgunned and outmaneuvered by the better armed and better disciplined regular troops. The Chechens had some tanks but no self-propelled heavy howitzers. Their better motivated fighters answered to orders coming only from their immediate field commander (often a tribal warlord), which made regular staff work for the Chechen general staff chief Aslan Maskhadov a nightmare.

When fighting in the open, the Chechens were basically no match for the Russians. In a surprise south-east dash from Tolstoy-Urt, a column of Russian troops, led by elements of the 104th airborne division, captured the former Soviet military base and airstrip at Hankala at the eastern outskirts of Grozny, also overtaking the main Rostov-Baku highway and cutting direct access into Grozny from Argun. This loss was so important that the Chechens even counterattacked from Grozny and Argun, using tanks, but were beaten back.

Meanwhile the Western army group used the fighting to the north of Grozny and near Hankala to finally press its advance up to the city's outskirts. As a result, Grozny was surrounded on three fronts, leaving the south as the only clear outlet for the Chechens. A Russian General Staff officer said that this free corridor is to let the Chechens flee Grozny, but basically the Russian army simply did not have sufficient manpower to close it.

For the last days of 1994 the fighting died down. Both sides were preparing for the decisive Battle of Grozny.

## **The Battle of Grozny, January and February, 1995**

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Bosnia peacekeeping force and sent to NATO headquarters to plan the Bosnia peacekeeping operation with NATO Supreme Commander in Europe, U.S. General George Joulwan.

General Grachev was in overall charge of planning the attack on Grozny that began on December 31, 1994, and led to heavy Russian army losses and a nearly complete breakdown of morale.<sup>40</sup> Many officers in Chechnya confessed to me in mid-January 1995 that at the beginning of that month the Russian army was on the verge of refusing to obey the ridiculous orders of its commanders and the government.

On paper, the plan for taking Grozny seemed ideal and corresponded perfectly with the Prussian traditions of the Academy of the General Staff, Russia's premier military school. Four columns were to move in a sudden and coordinated attack on Grozny on New Year's eve and, having smashed the enemy, they were to meet at the Presidential Palace in center of town. The key to the plan, though, was that all four columns -- Army groups West, East, North and the Main Assault Force -- had to act and reach the center of the city simultaneously.

The Russian forces assembled near Grozny numbered 38,000 men, armed with 230 tanks, 454 ACVs, and 388 guns and mortars. The enemy forces were estimated by military intelligence at up to 15,000 men, 50 tanks, 100 ACVs, 60 guns and mortars, and 30 B-21 Grad MRLs.<sup>41</sup> The overall balance of forces obviously seemed to favor the Russians.

However, today's Russian Army bears little resemblance to the old Prussian Army. The Main Assault Force managed to break into the center of Grozny, but the eastern and western groups barely moved at all. As a result, the enemy was able to concentrate almost all its forces against the Main Assault Force and smash it. General Lev Rokhlin's 8th Corps reached the city center from the north but was unable to save the units that had fallen into the trap because of stiff resistance. The weather was bad and air support was inaccurate and ineffective.

The Chechens did not mount a perimeter defense of the city. Instead, they cut off the ungainly Russian armored columns and attacked them from the rear as they moved through the streets of Grozny. "On January 2," a high-ranking Russian General Staff officer later admitted, "we lost contact with our forward units." These were the 131st motorized-rifle brigade that took the city's railroad terminal and the 81st motorized-rifle regiment that reached the Presidential Palace, both from the Main Assault Force.

On January 21, 1995 at the Sunzha front in central Grozny near the Presidential Palace, General Lev Rokhlin, commander of the North group, told me that General Anatoly Kvashin, commander of Russian forces in Chechnya, was in charge of the Main Assault Force.

General Kvashin in January 1995 in Grozny told me that he had been deceived by the commanders of groups East and West. He said that they told him they were advancing when in reality they were holding their positions.

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<sup>40</sup>The official toll, as reported to the General Staff, was over a hundred servicemen dead a day in the beginning of January 1995.

<sup>41</sup>Grachev's official statement at February 28, 1995, Chechen operation assessment meeting in the Defense Ministry in Moscow. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 1, p.1.

Consequently, three high-ranking generals were removed from command in the western group. Major General Petruk – commander of the 19th motorized-rifle, also in overall command of group West – was accused of failing to support the 131st motorized-rifle brigade at the city's railroad terminal. The brigade was smashed, its commander killed. Petruk was replaced by Major General Ivan Babichev, commander of the 76th airborne division.

Major General Nikolai Staskov, deputy Airborne Forces Commander-in-Chief and commander of group East, and Major General Vadim Orlov, commander of the 104th airborne division, were accused of cowardice. The 104th did not move when the 129th motorized-rifle regiment from the Leningrad military district moved in to Grozny from the Hankala base on December 31, 1994. Subsequently, the 129th was beaten and retreated on January 1, 1995, without accomplishing its mission. However, officers and men from the 104th told me in mid January in Chechnya that their commander saved them by not ordering them to advance into Grozny, where they in their light tanks, protected by aluminum armor, would have been massacred.

One obviously does not need airborne units with their specially designed light equipment and special paratroops training when storming a big modern city with concrete buildings that can be turned into fortresses by a determined and highly motivated enemy. Well-trained and heavily armed infantry led by professionally trained officers are necessary, since in street fighting infantry platoon and company commanders, in close coordination with heavy howitzer and mortar units, determine the outcome of the fray. The last thing needed are lightly armored airborne tanks.

The paratroopers were used in Grozny as crack infantry, but their fighting units had to be supplemented with Ground Forces artillery and tanks, as well as special flame-thrower crews from the Chemical Forces. The same is true for the Interior Ministry troops and the Naval Infantry units. In the Interior Troops (*Vnutrennie Voiska*) many officers and men were more experienced in riot-control rather than in actual warfare. Some of the naval infantry officers were volunteers, who were taken off ships and sent into pitched street battles. The result of all these feverish improvisations was heavy losses of men and combat equipment after the initial plans for a parade-ground expedition went sour.

However, the Russian Army overcame the shock of initial losses and defeats and won the battle of Grozny. The Russian Army has never had a tradition of unquestioning discipline and strict organization. Our army is better characterized as tenacious in defense, stubborn and capable of improvising in the most difficult situations. It was these qualities of Russian soldiers and officers that saved the army after the plans hatched by Grachev and Kvashin fell apart.

In the first week of January, Chechen sources repeatedly reported that several small groups of surrounded Russian soldiers remained in the center of the city and would soon have to surrender. In reality, Dudayev's main force at that time was engaged in counterattacks against General Rokhlin's army group (the 8th corps from Volgograd), trying to drive it from the city. If Rokhlin's small force, about five thousand men, had been thrown back, Dudayev would have been able to declare a complete victory.

However, Rokhlin rallied his troops, and some men who, after splintering away from units routed during the first attack on Grozny, joined his force. His men, using "Stalingrad tactics," moved to street fighting, creating several strongholds in concrete buildings from which they were able to fend off Chechen counterattacks. Talking with me in Grozny in January, Rokhlin emphasized several times the Stalingrad tradition of his regiments, partly because the home base of his corps is located in Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad.

Rokhlin is a pitiless battle-happy George Patton/Ariel Sharon type of a general. He was clearly not lost in Clausewitz's "fog of war" as many other Russian commanders were. His officers are accustomed to fulfilling any order from their commander without hesitation. Even though his wife and son were ill and he himself had severe throat problems during the battle of Grozny and could barely speak, Rokhlin refused to leave for treatment before the capture of the city. Having beaten back the Chechen counterattacks, Rokhlin's force went on the offensive, destroying the enemy and the city in their path, and took Dudayev's Presidential Palace - the main Chechen stronghold in town - a big concrete building with a nuclear bunker in its basement.

Rokhlin's offensive was enhanced by reinforcements rushed into battle by the General Staff. The most effective seemed to be the naval infantry units, the 165th naval infantry regiment from the Pacific Fleet and two battalions from the Baltic and Northern Fleets. The naval infantry entered the battle for Grozny in mid-January. During the campaign, their units were used as crack infantry at the most crucial positions along the front. On January 20, the soldiers of the 876th Northern Fleet assault battalion on their own initiative hoisted the Russian naval St. Andrew's flag above the entrance of Dudayev's presidential palace (higher than the official Russian National one!).

Group East was disbanded in early January and its troops subordinated to General Rokhlin's group North. The forces of the Main Assault Force that survived the New Year's massacre were also subordinated to Rokhlin.

As Rokhlin's group North pressed in from the north, group West under General Babichev stormed in from the south, using heavy artillery fire to smash the Chechen defenses and long-distance Shmel flame-throwers to destroy snipers. On January 21, 1995 the two groups linked up in the center of town.

The Chechens still occupied the south-east half of Grozny and established a new front line on the Sunzha river that divides the city. After several days spent regrouping and resupplying their forces, army groups North and West began a final assault on Grozny. Bridgeheads were established on the other side of the Sunzha. The Chechen fighters resisted with fierce counterattacks, mortar and sniper fire.

But simultaneously with the head-on assault, the Russian forces began an operation to encircle the south-east half of Grozny. New reinforcements allowed the Russians to form a new South-East group, including the 506th motorized-rifle regiment of the 27th division, which sent a contingent of men to joint U.S.-Russian maneuvers in Kansas in October 1995. This group moved in early February to block the last Chechen-controlled road into Grozny.

Assaulted from all sides and virtually surrounded, the Chechens fighters had to evacuate Grozny. By February 5, 1995, the bloodiest battle of the Chechen war was over. This Russian success was assisted by strategic deception. The Chechens were fed "secret" information (also using Moscow newspapers) to the effect that the main Russian strike would come at Argun, Shali and Gudermes, rather than in the south-eastern half of Grozny, and that the South-East task force had been created to carry out the attack. So the Chechens reinforced their positions in Shali, Argun and Gudermes at the very moment when Russian forces were beginning their final assault on Grozny.

Grozny, where about 40 percent of the Chechen republic's population lived before the war, has been decimated and no one can tell when it will be rebuilt. The Chechen economy -- which for three years of semi-independence has been based on bank fraud, illegal export of Russian oil, large-scale smuggling and illegal weapons trade -- also lies in ruins.

## **Fighting In The Hills And On The Plains, March and April, 1995**

Suddenly after the Battle of Grozny, heavy fighting in Chechnya came to a halt and a tentative cease-fire was signed. Moscow also replaced General Anatoly Kvashin as commander of the joint federal force in Chechnya with Colonel General Anatoly Kulikov, the commander of the Russian Interior Ministry's forces.

In mid February, 1995 General Kulikov met with a Chechen military delegation headed by Aslan Maskhadov, the chief of the Chechen general staff. These were the first serious negotiations since the beginning of the war. The lull in the fighting was politically motivated so that President Boris Yeltsin could appear with a "State of the Nation" address before a joint session of parliament in mid February, firmly stating that the military confrontation in Chechnya was over and that negotiations had begun.

Naturally, the ultimate goal of the government's Chechnya policy remained unchanged: to liquidate Dudayev's army and to return Chechnya to the Russian Federation. But the troops needed a break after two months of sustained fighting.

The Chechens established a new front on the Argun river, defending the towns of Gudermes, Argun and Shali. The Russian generals decided to wait until spring while regrouping and resupplying their forces. Spring meant more clear days and greater opportunity to exploit Russia's air power. In the meantime, the Russian Army would have time to pinpoint the Chechen positions and strongholds.

Also the army generals wanted to pass more of the responsibilities of fighting the Chechens to the Interior Ministry forces, which had participated minimally in the battle of Grozny and, as a result, lost only about 40 men in the first two months of the Chechen war, many times fewer than the army. The officers and generals of the Armed Forces resented being sent into battle with the Chechens while the forces of the Interior and Emergency Situations ministries remained in the rear counting their pay. With Kulikov the new commander of the united federal force in Chechnya, the MVD troops were obviously going to see more action.

At the end of March, 1995, the sky was bright as the regrouped Russian army (spearheaded by the 165th naval infantry regiment from the Pacific Fleet) crossed the Argun river, easily broke the Chechen front near Argun-city and moved on at Gudermes and Shali. Squadrons of armored Su-25 Frogfoot attack planes constantly and vigorously assaulted the Chechen forces, leaving them no possibility of fighting in the open in an organized manner as a regular army.

The Chechens had virtually no effective anti-aircraft defense system - no radar stations, no medium-range SAMs. When the Chechens had expelled the Russian cadre units in 1992 they took their guns but not the more sophisticated radar or anti-aircraft equipment which they did not know how to use.

At the beginning of the conflict, the Chechens had several hundred portable surface-to-air, heat-seeking Igla missiles. However, they only managed to shoot down a couple of Russian Su-25 close-support jets and over a dozen army and MVD helicopters using machine-gun and ZSU-23-4 "Shilka" fire, besides damaging a number of other aircraft. The Soviet-made Igla has a built-in "identification of friend or foe radar interrogator" designed to prevent the loss of aircraft from friendly fire. During the fighting in Grozny, these "smart" weapons recognized Russian airplanes as friendly and could not be activated. It has been reported that the Chechens were never able to reprogram their missiles.

The Chechen morale began to break. In Shali and Gudermes the local population asked the fighters to leave so the Russians would not ruin their towns as they did in Grozny. As a result, the army took these towns without a fight.

In mid-April an MVD force operating on its own in south-west Chechnya cleared the major towns and villages of the Urus-Martan district mostly without a fight. Only in Samashki did the Interior Ministry 21st motorized-rifle brigade meet some resistance and suffer casualties.

Intensified attacks from the air and from Russia's heavy weaponry forced the remainder of the Chechen independence fighters to flee to the mountains. Dzhokar Dudayev's forces were slowly turning into a small, militant extremist sect along the lines of the Kurdistan Workers' Party or the Basque separatist movement.

## **Fighting In The Mountains (May-June, 1995)**

In February, Russian forces completed the capture of Grozny and the Chechen's "temporarily" moved their command center to the town of Shali. In April, the Russians took Shali and Dudayev's headquarters were transferred to the mountain village of Vedeno which, between 1845 and 1859, was the fortified stronghold and capital of Imam Shamil.

In mid-May, after the cease-fire announced for the VE-Day summit with Bill Clinton in Moscow ended, the Russian army captured Vedeno after a pitched battle. The Chechen military commander Aslan Maskhadov attempted to regroup his command in the mountain village of Shatoi but was taken a month later in mid-June. The Chechens were running out of capitals.



The Russian Army founded the fortress town of Grozny in 1817. However, it was only in February 1859 that the Russian troops based there were able to overcome Chechen resistance, capture the fortifications they had constructed in the forests and the mountain canyons, capture Shamil's capital of Vedeno and then the imam himself, and so end the Caucasian war.

In the current conflict, the Chechens also fortified and stubbornly defended their capital and other strongholds. But they were so badly outgunned by the Russians that they could only slow the Russian advance, not check it. After the Russian army captured Shatoi, the mountainous region of Chechnya was effectively divided into several isolated pockets of resistance.

The Chechens were mistaken to think that the mountains would stop the advance of the Russian Army. Since Shamil's time, the Chechens have not fought in the mountains and are no better prepared for such fighting than the Russian forces are. It is impossible even to compare the battle readiness of the Chechens with that of the mountain Tajiks of Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley, who constantly fought with other Afghan tribes for decades before the Soviets arrived. Even then, the mujaheddin would most likely have lost the war if they had not been supplied with American Stinger missiles. The Chechens have no credible anti-aircraft defenses and Russian aircraft rule the skies with impunity.

During the successful mountain campaign in May-June 1995, the Russian Army outmanned, outmaneuvered and outgunned the enemy. When taking Shali,<sup>42</sup> the Russians sent an armored column<sup>43</sup> up the Argun river canyon that got ambushed. A company stayed behind to engage the enemy near the ambush and to simulate an attempt of head on advancing. Their heavy artillery hammered the Chechen defenses while the rest of the column used other, less defended routes to get to Shatoi.

At the same time, a paratroop battalion of the 7th airborne division was helicopter-landed behind enemy lines to the east of Shatoi and took the mountain town encountering little resistance. The Chechens tried to regroup and counterattack, but with other Russian columns converging on Shatoi from different directions,<sup>44</sup> they soon decided to break off the engagement and scatter in the hills.

So, why then did the Russians perform so poorly in the early stages of the war? Why were small, poorly prepared, combined units sent into Chechnya in December, when the region is covered with dense fog that prevented Russia's air power from providing effective cover for its ground forces?

In early December, experts in the administration advised Boris Yeltsin to impose a blockade on Chechnya and then to assemble and prepare several strong attack groups. The idea was that, if negotiations failed to produce results, Russia would attack in force in the spring, smothering the enemy from the onset with an overwhelming military superiority. However, the politicians in Moscow decided to send an unprepared army into battle to cover up the disastrous covert operation using the Chechen opposition to dislodge Dudayev. The Russian military will not forget this.

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<sup>42</sup>The same pattern of action was executed a month earlier in Vedeno.

<sup>43</sup>The 245 Guards motorized-rifle regiment of the 47th tank division.

<sup>44</sup>The 324th motorized-rifle regiment and elements of the 104th airborne.

Yeltsin also made one other serious public relations blunder: He never visited the men in Chechnya. Instead, he merely made a quick stop during his vacation in April in the North Caucasian towns of Nalchik and Kislovodsk. On April 10, I was in a Russian military field camp not far from the ravaged village of Samashki, when a report came that Yeltsin was conducting a helicopter sight-seeing tour a hundred miles to the west. The officers were openly outraged. "He should be here instead," they remarked.

Despite the war, the military parade on May 9 in Moscow was entirely traditional with freshly painted tanks from divisions in the Moscow region, and even, right-angled columns ("boxes") of cadets from Moscow's military academies, all wearing new uniforms and freshly polished boots. Parade participants did include veterans of the war in Chechnya, but they did not stand out. The traditional Russian military parade made many onlookers believe that this still is a soulless military machine fully and unquestioningly faithful to whichever Kremlin boss is on the viewing stand.

But in Grozny in April, less than a month before, I saw another kind of parade. Five companies of soldiers and officers had formed next to the Grozny-North airport terminal to welcome First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets and then Interior Minister Viktor Yerin. Soskovets and Yerin gave several dozen decorations and medals to servicemen who had distinguished themselves in battles against the Chechens, and then the companies marched past them. Their lines were not very even and none of them had the same uniform. It was camouflage of different shades and colors, from black-grey to light green. Some were in peaked hats, others in red or black berets, or simply in knitted black round ski caps bearing the inscription "Italy." They were unshaven and the armored personnel carriers they departed on after the parade were dirty, but this was a combat, not a parade-ground army.

Most of the generals, officers and soldiers whom I met in Chechnya thought that they had won this war and were proud of it. But President Boris Yeltsin, who sent them into battle unprepared in December 1994, has neither influence nor support in the army. Of course, only a fraction of the Russian Army is fighting in Chechnya. But they have been sent there from virtually every military district in the country, from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad. Eventually, they returned to their bases and told their stories to the rest of their comrades in arms. The attitudes of the army in Chechnya have now become the attitudes of all the Armed Forces.

## **Preparation For Further Action**

In mid-June, 1995, all major military operations in Chechnya ceased. The Russian forces even partially withdrew from populated areas, in preparations for a change of tactics. Small outposts in villages are vulnerable. Chechen women can cut them off by rushing at and surrounding the Russian soldiers, knowing that they will not harm them. Such action allows Chechen fighters to penetrate the village and take Russian troops hostage. It is even possible that in some Chechen towns, the military authorities will tacitly allow a

return to the lawlessness of the 1991-1994 period so that local civilians could invite Russian forces to return.

The cease-fire accord and military disengagement agreement signed on July 30 was not a capitulation or the beginning of Moscow's gradual recognition of an independent Chechnya. True, the Russians did allow the Chechen fighters who were trapped in the mountains to filter through Russian lines into the lowlands, but this by no means can be considered a unilateral concession.

In order to control the upcoming elections, and even to simply collect food and money, the Chechen warlords must control the region's major population centers. But in the lowlands, major Chechen units are exposed and there is nowhere for them to hide from Russian air power, artillery and tanks.

During the course of the June offensive, federal units advanced far into the Caucasus Mountains and, from the military point of view, there was little sense in advancing further. Neither the Russian Army nor the Interior Ministry has any special mountain troops. Advancing further would have been quite difficult, and supply lines would have become increasingly difficult to manage. Maintaining a coherent front line in mountainous conditions was also impossible and the Chechens would certainly have penetrated Russian lines anyway. Vindicated by the fighting around Shatoi and Vedeno, they might have been able to begin a guerilla campaign.

However, the mountains of Chechnya form a relatively small region, about 100 kilometers by 50 kilometers. Of course, the Chechens know these hills well, but the limited resources of the few mountain valleys make it unlikely that they would be able to long support a partisan army or even to sustain an aggressive and constant terrorist campaign without substantial help from abroad in the form of weapons, ammunition, supplies, medicine and money. Otherwise, a serious guerilla campaign will never even get started.

In addition, some of Chechnya's mountain people do not support Dzhokar Dudayev and many who do are unwilling to risk having their villages become targets for Russian air strikes. In short, the Chechens, like the Kurds, also need bases abroad where the Russian air force cannot reach them. In the final analysis, it seems that it is up to foreign countries to determine whether or not there will be a guerrilla war in the Northern Caucasus.

The West, of course, has condemned the fighting in Chechnya, but it is unlikely to begin secretly supplying weapons to the enemy as it did in Afghanistan. A strong and stable Russia is in everyone's interests.

There seems no possibility of Chechen guerilla bases operating with impunity on Georgian or Armenian territory when Russia itself has military bases in these countries.

The situation in Azerbaijan is less clear, although it seems unlikely that the cautious Geydar Aliyev would risk an open conflict with Russia or incursions by the Russian Army analogous to what we have seen recently between Turkey and Iraq.

But from Russia's point of view, the most important question is Iran. Cooperation with Teheran could help mute Iranian support for Moslem guerrillas both in Tajikistan and in Chechnya. Clearly, the controversial nuclear reactor sale to Iran is not just a lucrative export contract for Russia.

Regardless of the peace negotiations, the Russian Army remains the dominant military force in the region. Russian forces have not relaxed and are ready to engage and rout any Chechen unit, especially since they still massively outman and outgun their opponents. In April, the Chechens retreated into the mountains because they had been defeated in the lowlands and in Grozny. But they were unable to resist for long from the mountains and their main strongholds there -- Vedeno, Shatoi and Nozhai-Yurt -- were fairly quickly taken. In June, the Chechens began serious peace negotiations because they were no longer able to continue the war. Several months later, they are no match for the Russian Army.

While the talks in Grozny continued, despite flare-ups in the fighting and various mutual protests, the Russian generals replaced exhausted units, concentrated some of their forces in major garrisons, and handed many check-points over to the MVD. They are still in a position to quickly block off and capture any Chechen town or village, especially in the lowlands. The Russians' main goal in Chechnya remains as before: to split the Chechen opposition into those who can be pacified and therefore deserve encouragement, and those who are unreconcilable and will continue to bear the full brunt of the Russian Army.

While pressuring the "bad" Chechens, Moscow will simultaneously try to pursue dialogue and cooperation with the "good" Chechens, including some field commanders and maybe the Chechen Chief of Staff, Aslan Maskhadov. There are other possible "good" Chechens to promote: former Communist Party Chief and Chechen strong-man Doku Zavgayev and even the former Speaker of the former Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov. The Kremlin still has not fully decided who will run Chechnya after Dudayev, but it is actively looking for an appropriate candidate.

## **Appointing A "Czar"**

At the end of August 1995, President Yeltsin's representative in Chechnya, Oleg Lobov, was given sweeping executive powers in the region. He can issue orders to any Russian troops or security agencies there, as well as to local civilian authorities. He now has the rank of first deputy prime minister, giving him the right to affirm official government orders without first securing the approval of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. In short, Lobov has been made virtually a czar or viceroy in Chechnya. At the same time, he retains his influential position as Security Council secretary.

The appointment of a "czar" to coordinate Russian policy in Chechnya was long overdue. Since the fall of 1991, Russian policy toward Dzhokar Dudayev's regime has been extremely erratic. Negotiations alternated with forceful measures and back again without any discernible system. Everything depended upon which ambitious Moscow politician or influential Moscow agency had seized the initiative and taken up the challenge of solving the Chechen problem.

The most important result of this has been the inept and bloody intervention in Chechnya. Even during the fighting, the government agencies involved -- including the

Defense and Interior ministries -- simply could not work together, which naturally increased the campaign's casualties. Commanders of Army and Interior Ministry units constantly quarreled with one another, and soldiers even shot at one another. Operatives of the Federal Security Service in Chechnya told me in April that they were reluctant to give intelligence information on the Chechen resistance to Interior Ministry officers, because "they don't do anything with it until after the Chechens have already figured out what we know and the information becomes worthless."

This lack of coordination bolstered the Chechen resistance. Even when the situation seemed hopeless from the military point of view, the Chechens continued to fight because they did not believe that Moscow had really decided to stand up for its geostrategic interests in the Caucasus at any cost. The majority of Chechens supposed, and many still do, that they just need to hold on a little longer and conflicts among Russian officials will force Moscow to withdraw its forces and admit defeat.

If a powerful coordinator of Kremlin policy in the North Caucasus had been appointed a year ago, many people would still be alive today. But the question remains: will Lobov be able to radically change the situation after such a long period of unsystematic, failed crisis management by various Russian officials and generals?

People tell a lot of malicious stories about Lobov. For instance, former Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yevgeny Saburov told me that in the fall of 1991, when the country was on the threshold of great changes and it had to be decided what kind of economic reform to pursue, Lobov read an hour-long speech to a meeting of the Russian government on how to gather birch branches to feed starving cows on collective farms. Saburov said that that was the moment when he realized the government of then Prime Minister Ivan Silayev was doomed.

Lobov has very little experience in defense, national security and foreign policy. Having no idea what to do with the Security Council when it was thrust upon him in the fall of 1993, Lobov was apparently happy to let deputy secretary Vladimir Rubanov -- a former KGB operative and an appointee of Lobov's predecessor, Air Force Marshal Evgeny Shaposhnikov -- implement his own organizational ideas. Rubanov headed the group of Security Council representatives that Lobov sent to Chechnya a couple of weeks ago. Later, Lobov himself went there, accompanied by General Valery Manilov, another deputy appointed by Shaposhnikov.

Lobov is open to others' ideas and is capable of energetically working them out, although he is not always able to tell a good idea from a bad one. Therefore, the success or failure of his tenure in Chechnya will be largely determined by his advisers Rubanov and Manilov who, incidentally, also have no experience quelling secessionist rebellions. Still, the idea to hand over power in Grozny to Doku Zavgayev, an influential leader of Gendernoy, one of the biggest Chechen clans, may be a step in the right direction.

New elections will not help Dudayev. If there were presidential elections in Chechnya, he might well win. But the elections will be to a convention which will work out a new constitution for the republic. This national assembly will be made up of representatives of several violently opposed factions, including various field commanders

from the resistance, supporters of the pro-Moscow government and various local and tribal leaders. Dudayev will not be able to manipulate this assembly.

In 1993, he was forced to disband the Chechen parliament which had been elected under his control. Since that time, his authority has only extended to Grozny and the surrounding area. No single leader can control all the Chechen tribes without economic, political and military support from Moscow.

For the majority of Russia's ruling elite, an independent Chechnya is absolutely unacceptable because it contradicts Russia's long-term military, geopolitical and even economic interests. The Russian government wants Dudayev and his dream of an independent Chechnya dead. If Lobov and his aids fail, then a new viceroy will be appointed in Chechnya to try to keep the railroad and pipelines operational, to help the good guys, punish the bad and also to learn to distinguish between the two.

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The number of people killed in the Chechen campaign is unknown. The official Defense Ministry reports put servicemen fatalities under 3000. The majority of officers (including brigade commanders) who fought in the campaign believe that this is an underestimation.

However, overall military losses may be higher, but not grossly so. The main problem is to figure out the Chechen losses. No one even has an approximate estimation. Several tens of thousands is all one can hear. Who of them was a fighter and who a civilian is still less possible to assess. One thing is definite, while the conflict continues the toll will rise.

## Chapter Four

### The War in Chechnya: Implications for Military Reform and Creation of Mobile Forces

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Mikhail Gorbachev spoke out about the necessity for immediate military reform as early as 1987 and even created a working group of experts to outline a reform program.

From 1988 through August 1991 the issue of military reform appeared with ever-increasing frequency on the Soviet national security agenda. Reform advocacy was undertaken by a coalition that included rank-and-file military officers, civilian defense analysts and representatives of the civilian population at large.

The core issue of the reform that polarized the military institution was the system of personnel recruitment. Should the Soviet Army abandon the existing arrangement — a regular army staffed by career officers and soldiers recruited through mandatory conscription — and become a volunteer/professional army? The question overshadowed all other aspects of military reform to the extent that the very words “military reform” became synonymous with the introduction of a volunteer/professional army.

One of the first proposals for restructuring the armed forces appeared in November 1988 in the weekly *Moscow News*.<sup>45</sup> Its author was Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Savinkin, a previously unknown former paratrooper who became instructor at the Philosophy Department of the Lenin Military-Political Academy.<sup>46</sup>

Savinkin maintained that the process of change in the military sector had fallen behind the rapid reforms that were under way in Soviet society as a whole and that only an urgent military reform program could correct this deplorable situation. The Soviet army, Savinkin wrote, had to be organized into a “professional-militia” force, with a small core group of highly trained professionals and a network of local militia. This structure would be fully adequate to meet any security contingency and would be consistent with the new, strictly defensive Soviet military doctrine enunciated by Gorbachev in 1987.

The debate about military reform progressed against the general background of political change in the Soviet Union, and in particular the 1989 electoral campaign to the new Soviet parliament, the Congress of People’s Deputies. Both advocates and opponents of military reform ran in these elections, and the campaign provided a

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<sup>45</sup>A.Savinkin, “What kind of armed forces do we need?” *Moscow News*, November 6, 1988, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Now the Military University of the Russian Armed Forces

convenient setting for bringing the debate before a wider audience. The reform-related proposals featured in candidates' platforms included plans for establishing territorial and ethnic units, reducing the term of compulsory military service, and rejecting extraterritorial principles of military conscription.

The parliamentary elections gave the reform movement a much needed independent institutional base. A group of maverick junior and mid-level officers elected into parliament and now invulnerable to retribution from the Ministry of Defense because of their status as deputies started to advance the military reform agenda in the new legislature.

In late winter 1990 a group of seventeen military deputies ranking from senior lieutenant to colonel made public its program for military reform, which became known as the "Project of the Seventeen." According to this program the main goal of reform was a gradual transition to a volunteer "professional army supported by a mobilization reserve on the territorial principle."<sup>47</sup> The transition was to take four to five years to complete.

The submission of this program for consideration by the Supreme Soviet's Committee on Defense and State Security launched the legislative process in the area of military reform. This event marked the end of the Soviet High Command's previously unchallenged monopoly on representation of the entire military institution. Senior officials of the Ministry of Defense were left with no choice but to begin formulating a competing program for military reform.

In June 1990 the Ministry of Defense presented its first plan for military reform. According to this, the reform would take ten years to implement and would consist of the following three stages:

1. Withdrawal of troops from Eastern Europe, their re-deployment and resettlement, reductions in military training institutions, and restructuring of the military-administrative system, all in the span of two years.
2. More troop reductions and cuts in strategic forces, which would take another three to four years.
3. Completion of troop cuts and resolution of social problems in the armed forces.<sup>48</sup>

It is quite obvious that the proposed measures had little to do with military reform. The re-deployment and resettlement of troops from Eastern Europe, troop reductions and cuts in strategic forces prompted by external political developments, were simply being presented to the public as examples of real reform accomplishment.

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<sup>47</sup> "Proekt semnadtsati," *Komsomolskaya pravda*, February 2, 1990.

<sup>48</sup> D.Yazov, "Voyennaya reforma," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, June 3, 1990; *Na sluzhbe Otechestvu (In service to Fatherland)* TV broadcast on June 24, 1990.



After August 19-21, 1991 the Soviet Union disappeared, the Soviet Army was torn to pieces and economic reforms got underway. But officially the Soviet Army continued to exist for several more months, and with it the task of reforming.

At the end of August 1991 a special Committee for Military Reform assigned to the State Council of the USSR<sup>49</sup> was established. Its chairman was Army General Konstantin Kobets, who from August 21 to August 24, 1991 was the first Russian Federation's Defense Minister. It soon became clear that the only reason for establishing the Committee for Military Reform was to find a sinecure for General Kobets after his job was abolished on August 24, 1991 and he didn't receive a senior position in the Soviet Ministry of Defense.<sup>50</sup> Under General Kobets the Committee for Military Reform didn't produce any documents concerning military reform and was abolished in July 1992 due to the extinction of the object of reform, the Soviet Army.

On May 7, 1992 a new Russian Army was officially proclaimed and on May 18, 1992 General Pavel Grachev was appointed the new Defense Minister of Russia. For a short time it looked as if a real reform of the old Soviet Army taken over by a new Russia drew closer.

But then in July 1992 General Grachev made known his plan for military reform. Grachev suggested that the Russian Armed Forces be reformed in three stages over a period of six to eight years.

During the first stage (to be completed in 1992/93) it was planned "to set up a Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation; finalize the target numerical strength and structure of the Russian Armed Forces; determine a system to control them and establish the sequence and time-frame for their reform process; create a legal basis for their functioning, with due regard for the norms of international law and existing international agreements; and design a system of social guarantees for servicemen, members of their families and people discharged from military service.

During the second stage (two to three years), it was planned to complete the withdrawal of Russian troops from other states; to proceed with the reduction in personnel, bringing the total strength of the armed forces down to 2.1 million by 1995; and to introduce a mixed manning system (conscripts plus professional soldiers).

During the third stage (three to four years), withdrawal of all troops of the North-Western Group, located in the Baltic states, will be completed, and the reductions in deployed materiel levels called for by existing international agreements will be fully implemented. Structural and organizational reforms will be introduced, and total numerical strength may be brought down to 1.5 million.<sup>51</sup>

According to General Grachev, "the implementation of this complex and diverse package of measures, which constitute a true military reform program, should ensure the

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<sup>49</sup>governed at the time by Mikhail Gorbachev, who remained the President of the USSR until December 1991

<sup>50</sup>since Marshal of the Air Force Yevgeny Shaposhnikov was appointed as the new Minister of Defense of the USSR

<sup>51</sup> *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1993, p. 22.

creation of Russian Armed Forces of a fundamentally new quality.”<sup>52</sup> I quote General Grachev verbatim to show that his reform plan was essentially a replica of the old Yazov’s plan of 1990 described above. The only significant difference from Yazov’s plan was the emphasis put by Grachev on the need for more mobile forces.

General Grachev put it like this:

“The building up of the armed forces must be carried out, in my view, with a particular regard for the requirements of the mobile defense concept. This presupposes the existence of small but powerful groups of forces, ready to immediate action wherever a real threat arises. In this context, it will be advisable to organize the armed forces along the following lines:

- Constant readiness forces, capable of effectively influencing local conflicts;
- Rapid deployment forces, to include airborne troops, marine infantry units, light motorized rifle troops, army aviation assets and all other necessary supporting and reinforcing means. These forces shall be backed by military transport assets for transfer to any region as quickly as possible to reinforce constant-readiness forces stationed there;
- Strategic reserves, formed in peace-time and to be deployed only during a major crisis or in wartime (large-scale wars).”<sup>53</sup>

After General Grachev’s appointment as Minister of Defense, any serious and organized discussion of military reform stopped for more than two years.

The military reformers of 1988-1991 (the “Group of Seventeen” et al.), disillusioned by the appointment of a uniformed military officer to head the new Russian Ministry of Defense instead of a civilian (an idea they had been advocating all along), resigned in the majority from the ranks of the armed forces and gave up their drive for military reform as hopeless in the new situation. Their views were aptly expressed by Colonel (Ret.) Yury Deryugin, a former consultant at the Russian State Committee for Defense: “By appointing General Grachev as the new defense minister, the president for all practical purposes has buried military reform.”<sup>54</sup>

As for the official establishment, its representatives from time to time made optimistic statements to the effect that military reform was progressing according to plan.

The speaker of the Federation Council (the upper chamber of the Russian parliament) Vladimir Shumeiko wrote in an appeal to the Duma for more money for the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

<sup>54</sup> The newspaper 24, July 3, 1992.

Ministry of Defense in December 1994, that "military reform has been going on for two years."<sup>55</sup>

As proof that military reform was progressing successfully, the officials in the executive and legislative branches were pointing to troop reductions and reallocations and even to a new uniform introduced into the armed forces. President Yeltsin's decree No. 1833, issued November 2, 1993, "On The Main Guidelines Of The Military Doctrine Of The Russian Federation," a vague and misleading document, was officially presented as a great step forward in military reform, despite the fact that privately even high-ranking generals referred to it as "toilet paper."

"The Main Guidelines Of The Military Doctrine" was not the only useless but officially approved document designed to prove that military reform was moving on. Another was the so-called "Law on Defense," adopted in late 1992 and which still remains in force despite the fact that the new Constitution passed in the referendum of December 1993 contradicts it in many points.<sup>56</sup>

President Yeltsin himself was a picture of optimism. Speaking before the highest commanding generals in Moscow on November 14, 1994, he stated that the creation of the mobile forces is being completed, a new concept of the building up of the Armed Forces and other Russian troops is drawing to a close and that Pavel Grachev is the best defense minister of the past decade.<sup>57</sup>

The war in Chechnya, which exposed the many shortcomings of the Russian armed forces, shattered this optimism.

This war, which began December 11, 1994, got off to a rocky start from the beginning. On the ground, inexperienced Russian troops were badly battered at the hands of the lightly armed Chechen guerrillas, especially in the failed New Year's Eve assault on the Chechen capital. Casualties were high and many young soldiers surrendered rather than fight.

Officers and men balked, saying they did not understand why they were being sent to fight on Russian territory. Several high-ranking generals publicly denounced the war, including the first deputy commander-in-chief of the Ground Forces Colonel General E. Vorobyev, who resigned in protest. By early April 1995 the Russian Army had cashiered 557 officers who refused to fight in the war in Chechnya, and started criminal proceedings against 11 of them.<sup>58</sup>

All this brought the problem of military reform into focus again.

In his annual address to the Russian parliament on February 16, 1995. President Yeltsin indicated that he considered the situation in the Armed Forces unsatisfactory and

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<sup>55</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, December 10, 1994.

<sup>56</sup>The final draft of the new "Law on Defense" was approved by the Duma on October 25, 1995 and has yet to be passed by the Federal Council and signed by the President.

<sup>57</sup>*Segodnya*, November 15, 1994.

<sup>58</sup> *The Moscow Times*, April 8, 1995.

said that urgent measures for reforming the Armed Forces and other troops will be a priority in 1995.<sup>59</sup>

Speaking during an official ceremony on February 23, 1995, the “Day of the Defender of the Fatherland” (a new title for the annual Armed Forces holiday, the “Day of the Soviet Army and Navy”), President Yeltsin said that “the army is slowly beginning to get out of hand — the conflict in Chechnya convinced us once more that we are late with reform of the army.”<sup>60</sup>

In his February annual address to lawmakers, Yeltsin promised to make a statement before parliament on military reform and assigned Security Council Secretary Oleg Lobov and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin the task of devising a plan for military reform. He also promised that a permanent presidential commission on military reform would be established this year. He pointed out that “military construction” (*voyennoe stroitelstvo*, a term broadly used in the Soviet and now Russian military language to encompass all activities of the state with regard to the armed forces — their manning, equipping, financing etc.) is not only the job of ministries and other institutions of the Russian Federation which possess armed formations,” but that “military construction should be organized in the first place by the state.”<sup>61</sup>

The reaction of the Russian military towards Yeltsin’s urging to speed up reform was lukewarm, if not completely rejecting.

At the wreath-laying ceremony by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, President Yeltsin expressed his dissatisfaction with the slow pace of military reform. Questioned by the journalists on his reaction immediately after, General Grachev answered nonchalantly, “If there is money, there will be reform.”

The Chief of the General Staff Colonel General Mikhail Kolesnikov<sup>62</sup> expressed a similar attitude in a more careful way:

“As far as the reform of the Armed Forces is concerned, I’d like to point out that we are actually late with it. There is only one cause for the slow pace of reform — the weakening of the country’s economy. ...Regrettably, we can speak about reforming and re-equipping the Armed Forces with the existing methods and volumes of their financing only very conditionally.”<sup>63</sup>

The most direct reaction came from the Commander-in-Chief of the Airborne Forces Colonel General Yevgeny Podkolzin, who said in an interview to the weekly *Moskovskiy Novosti*: “If we don’t have the money to normally feed the soldiers and

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<sup>59</sup>*Segodnya*, August 18, 1995.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Supplement No. 2, April, 1995.

<sup>62</sup> promoted to the rank of Army General on May 7, 1995

<sup>63</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 6, 1995.

house the officers, all this talk about military reform is worthless. ...If we had the same material basis as the Americans, we would not be talking today about any reform.”<sup>64</sup>

The military also refused to accept accusations of poor performance in Chechnya. General Grachev stated that actually the casualties of the Russian forces in Chechnya had been less than planned. The only lesson he agreed to draw from the war in Chechnya was the following one, which he gave in the popular TV broadcast *Itogi*: “Everybody keeps saying — reform, reform. The (tank) T-72 has proved itself wonderfully in Chechnya. So we will be making reform on the basis of T-72.”<sup>65</sup>

Colonel General Igor Rodionov, Chief of the General Staff Academy, firmly refuses to see the connection between the need for military reform and the war in Chechnya. He writes:

“Recently there has been a lot of talk that the military conflict, or as it is often called in the press, the war in Chechnya is almost the main reason why military reform is called for. The combat readiness of the armed forces, the skills of their commanders are being measured on the basis of military operations, failures and mishaps in the Chechen conflict. There are attempts to adjust even the organizational and personnel structures of the armed forces of the future in such a way as to make them suitable to solving tasks analogous to those in Chechnya-type armed conflicts. Here we have an old illness: only that is frightening which frightens us now. From here comes the exaggeration of the dangers which are by far not the main ones. The Chechen tragedy no doubt has had its influence on the military construction processes. It sped up the understanding by both the political leadership and society of the need for reforming in the military realm of the country’s activities. But the events in Chechnya are not the cause for military reform. It ought to be well understood by all those on whom the future defense of the country and its armed forces of the twenty-first century depend.”<sup>66</sup>

The Russian military leadership rejects the experiences of the Chechen war to the extent that it prohibited their inclusion in the study programs of the military academies and schools. According to the Ministry of Defense, this conflict is atypical because it is being waged on Russian territory. Instead, studies of the war in Afghanistan are being strengthened.

In the absence of real military reform, Russian generals are naturally trying to solve the military’s most pressing problems through whatever means available. The decision to increase the military draft is just one such means.

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<sup>64</sup> *Moskovskiy Novosti*, No. 51, July 30 - August 6, 1995.

<sup>65</sup> TV broadcast *Itogi*, February 12, 1995.

<sup>66</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Supplement No. 2, April, 1995.

On April 7, 1995 the Duma passed a bill which alters the existing Law on Military Service in Russia. Deputies approved changes which extend the length of required military service from 18 months to 2 years from October 1, 1995 and act retroactively for those drafted in 1993- 1994. The bill also introduces universal conscription of young men graduating from institutes of higher learning.

According to the new law, college graduates will have to spend a year in the armed forces after graduation regardless of whether or not they received reserve officer training in college, as many Russian students do. Before that, a college graduate with reserve training automatically became a reserve lieutenant. Now such a student will only receive the rank after serving for one year as a sergeant.

The "operation" to change the existing law was conducted in the best Soviet military tradition — secretly and quickly. The Chief of the General Staff Colonel General Mikhail Kolesnikov had requested that the hearing be closed to the press because he said he would reveal top secret information to the Duma. Actually no such information was disclosed,<sup>67</sup> but safe from prying TV cameras, all factions (including the liberal *Yabloko*, led by Grigory Yavlinsky) except one supported the bill after an impassioned speech by General Kolesnikov, who assured the deputies that the army was so understaffed that it was not ready for combat.

The only faction which opposed the bill was the reformist Russia's Choice, led by Yegor Gaidar. It pointed out that in recent years there had been a general trend toward shorter terms of conscript service in the militaries of the most developed nations around the world, as well as the development of professional, contract-based armies. These trends are the result of the reduced threat of a global military confrontation and the increasingly high qualifications that young people bring with them into service. Gaidar's faction insisted that Russia should be following these trends as well.

After the vote on the new conscription law, the influential newspaper *Izvestia*, which usually supports Russia's Choice, published an article titled "The Duma Buried Military Reform."<sup>68</sup> Colonel General (Ret.) Eduard Vorobyev, who runs as number four on Russia's Choice's electoral ticket, said in an interview to the newspaper *Segodnya*:

"The increase in the duration of compulsory service, the conscription of the college students to serve as privates is abnormal, dictated by a sense of hopelessness. This is a step away from military reform."<sup>69</sup>

President Yeltsin's acknowledgment in his February annual message to the parliament that military reform "was the business of the state, and military construction ought to be organized primarily by the state institutions"<sup>70</sup> freed Russia's military

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<sup>67</sup>The transcript of the session was later published in the newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets*.

<sup>68</sup> *Izvestia*, April 11, 1995.

<sup>69</sup> *Segodnya*, October 27, 1995.

<sup>70</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Supplement No. 2, April, 1995.

leadership from the need to justify its passivity in advancing military reform. On the contrary, the military made an about face and started demanding from the country's leadership to be reformed from above, by the president, the legislature, and the government.<sup>71</sup>

The State Duma, in its turn, decided to cede to the president the responsibility of tackling military reform. The Duma Committee on Defense voted not to introduce for plenary discussion of the Duma seventeen new draft laws concerning defense and prepared by the Committee until President Yeltsin presents his proposals on military reform to the parliament, as promised in his annual message in February 1995.

In Russia the Administration sees to it that the president's orders are executed and promises kept. So, the Administration (on Yeltsin's direct orders, as far as I know) decided to stage a super-conference on military reform. The conference, titled *Military Reform in Russia*, was scheduled to take place at the end of April and was to last three days.

The list of speakers included all the top personalities in Russian politics. The conference was to be chaired by the Chief of the Presidential Administration Sergei Filatov. Here are some names and the titles of the reports, taken from the agenda sent to the participants:

- Oleg Soskovets (First Deputy Prime Minister). *Military Reform In Russia And The Management Of The Defense Sphere.*
- Anatoly Chubais (First Deputy Prime Minister). *The Market, Property And Power Institutions Of The State.*
- Pavel Grachev (Minister of Defense). *The Reform Of The Armed Forces — The Present And The Perspective.*
- Andrei Kokoshin (First Deputy Minister of Defense). *Military-Technical Policy And The Mobilization Preparedness Of The State.*
- Yuri Yarov (Deputy Prime Minister). *Military Reform And Its Social Aspects.*
- Andrei Nikolayev (Director of the Federal Border Service). *The State And The Development Of The Federal Border Service.*

Besides plenary discussions the conference agenda included four panels on such different aspects of military reform as "The Military Doctrine Of The Russian Federation — Problems of Improvement," led by Deputy Secretary of the Security Council Colonel General V. Manilov; "The Economy In The Transitional Period And Military Reform," led by Economics Minister Y. Yasin; "Finances And Military Reform," led by Finance Minister V. Panskov; and others, altogether more than 40 reports.

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<sup>71</sup> Colonel General Igor Rodionov, "In Russia and for Russia," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Supplement No. 2, April, 1995; Colonel General Viktor Samsonov, "Military Reform is inevitable. Problems of the military security of the Russian Federation," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 27, 1995.

All in all it looked as if the problems of military reform were becoming a priority for Russia's political leadership, as promised by President Yeltsin in his February message to parliament .

Overall responsibility for the preparation and organization of the conference was given to Major-General (Ret.) Alexander Vladimirov, a well-known reformer in the early 1990s who for the last three years had headed the group analyzing the problems of the Armed Forces and the military-industrial complex in the Analytical Center of the Presidential Administration.

Then, several days before the conference was to take place, Vladimirov was summoned into the office of Dmitry Rumyantsev, the Chief of Personnel in Yeltsin's Administration, and told without any explanation that he was fired and the conference canceled.

Sergei Filatov, Chief of the Administration, when approached by Vladimirov, told him that he had nothing against Vladimirov and the orders to fire him came from "high above him."

To me it is obvious that Vladimirov (and to a certain extent Filatov, who is known as Gaidar's supporter) simply fell victim to the general resistance of the officials invited to speak at the conference to discuss such an abstruse subject as military reform, and to make fools of themselves before their colleagues. So it was probably not difficult for them to convince Yeltsin or, more likely, somebody close to him, like Yeltsin's security chief Korzhakov, to get rid of such an eager beaver as Vladimirov.

Yeltsin apparently decided to take notice of the military's demand for more money as a precondition of any reform. Speaking at a cadets' graduation ceremony in Moscow on June 28, 1995, Yeltsin acknowledged that "a lack of resources was partly to blame for the slow pace of military reform, but it should now get moving." Yeltsin also pledged to stop cutting back on military spending. "In the 1996 budget we have laid down the principle that the allocation of resources for national defense must be preserved at the level of 1995," he said.<sup>72</sup>

This was, to my knowledge, the last time President Yeltsin mentioned military reform. Since July 1995 the phrase "military reform" has disappeared from the statements and speeches of Russian high officials. My guess is that the country's leadership decided not to openly discuss the subject of military reform, which drew such a hostile reaction from the military, which is plagued by poor financing and other problems. The Soviet policy of covering all major decisions concerning the military with a veil of secrecy seemed, apparently, a better proposition.

According to some, in August 1995 President Yeltsin signed an executive order "On Military Construction" and made Prime Minister Chernomyrdin chairman of a special "State Commission on Military Construction," with the task of preparing a plan for development of the Russian Armed Forces and other troops until 2005. That was certainly not a very happy choice because the "power ministers" (defense, interior, security services, border guards, etc.) are not responsible to the Prime Minister, but

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<sup>72</sup> *The Moscow Times*, June 29, 1995.



instead are under direct control of the President. Besides, Viktor Chernomyrdin has very few chances to survive as Prime Minister after the parliamentary elections on December 17, 1995, if, of course, they actually take place.

## The War In Chechnya And The Mobile Forces

The war in Chechnya made obvious the fact that Russia had failed to build up efficient mobile forces despite President Yeltsin's optimistic statement in November 1994 that the creation of mobile forces was drawing to a close.

Although the official Russian military doctrine adopted by Yeltsin's decree of November 2, 1993 authorized the creation of special mobile forces, the structure of such a rapid deployment force was never officially approved. Nevertheless, the Russian military establishment has long been debating how to form mobile forces.

The creation of special mobile forces that could be rapidly deployed in any part of Russia's extensive land borders has always been a favorite idea of Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, a paratroops commander in the Afghan war. He has been insisting on the creation of an autonomous operational command based on an airborne force with its own airlift.

His opponents say that the creation of a new command is inefficient, and that the military simply cannot afford the expenses involved in securing the necessary aircraft. They suggest that a system of local mobile defense forces be created that would be fully staffed and equipped with all the equipment of a modern motorized rifle division. These units would cover military activity in their own theaters of operation, monitoring and preparing for intervention in local conflicts.

There also exists a certain ideological, anti-Western undercurrent in these disputes. Colonel General Igor Rodionov writes, for example: "We should view more critically certain proposals on the part of proponents of pro-Western, pro-American orientation — reduction of the number of armed services to three, *exaggeration of the role of mobile forces* [emphasis mine — V. Sh.], separation of the Ministry of Defense from the General Staff, etc."<sup>73</sup>

The war in Chechnya brought some of these differences into the open.

Strangely enough, the greatest criticism of Grachev's concept of the mobile forces came from the Airborne Troops (VDV) themselves, who were supposed to be the core of the mobile forces. In an interview with the weekly *Moskovskiy Novosti*, the Commander-in-Chief of the VDV Colonel-General Yevgeny Podkolzin said, when questioned about the rumors that the paratroopers had performed poorly in Chechnya, that these rumors were being disseminated with one purpose only — to prepare the ground for an attempt to dissolve the paratroopers in other formations and create a mobile force on the basis of the VDV.

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<sup>73</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Supplement No. 2 April, 1995.

He made several strong statements which deserve to be quoted verbatim. Asked whether or not he was opposed to the mobile forces he answered:

“The mobile forces are necessary. I am all for it. But this project needs detailed calculations. We need a clear answer to the question: what are we going to gain and what to lose as a result of reform. Until I get a clear answer to this question I won’t tolerate a disintegration of the VDV. Otherwise the defensive capability of the country will suffer an irreparable loss.

“...I don’t understand the need for these experiments with the VDV. Our troops, who possess the best professional training comprise only 2 percent of the strength of the Armed Forces and have been carrying the main combat burden since 1988. The five divisions of the VDV are still a real fighting force. If we continue to torture them with experiments the country might remain without combat ready units.”<sup>74</sup>

Podkolzin complained that the airborne troops in Chechnya were subordinated to local commanders from other branches of the armed forces who didn’t use them efficiently and who tried to blame the paratroopers for their own mistakes. He added that with one full-strength airborne division he would have disarmed Chechnya long ago without heavy bloodshed.<sup>75</sup>

On October 6, 1995 the newspaper *Segodnya* published a big article by Maria Dementyeva “From the Skies to the Ground. Russia’s Airborne Troops Will Probably Cease to Exist.” The author, quoting “competent sources,” wrote that the Russian General Staff had prepared a document, already signed by Defense Minister General Grachev, which contains a new concept for the development of the airborne troops. According to the document, the VDV are to be reduced from the present five to two or three divisions (the USSR had seven airborne divisions). The existing airborne brigades are to be transferred to the military district commanders.<sup>76</sup>

Asked about the existence of such a document, Colonel Igor Kashin, spokesman for the VDV Commander-in-Chief Colonel General Y. Podkolzin, admitted that “there is a plan ... that stipulates reduction of VDV units” and that the plan to scrap the VDV is “one of several different conceptions of overall reforms in the national armed forces” currently being considered by top-brass analysts within the General Staff. So far, Kashin stressed, none of these conceptions has gathered the crucial support necessary among General Staff planners to be submitted for Defense Minister General Grachev’s endorsement.

As to the anonymous source at headquarters, quoted by *Segodnya*, Kashin called him into doubt. “We would have known if such a document had been signed,” he said.

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<sup>74</sup> *Moskovskiye Novosti*, No. 51, July 30 - August 6, 1995.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Segodnya*, October 6, 1995.

Yet Kashin supported *Segodnya's* criticism of the plan to cut back the Airborne Troops, which, in his opinion, remain the most capable branch of Russia's undermanned military. "We don't deserve such cutbacks; what we need is well-thought reform," said Kashin.<sup>77</sup>

In his turn, when contacted by the press, Grachev's press service dismissed *Segodnya's* report, reiterating the Defense Ministry's intention to base mobile forces on airborne divisions. "I see no reason why VDV should be cut," said Colonel Ivan Skrylnik, spokesman for the Defense Ministry.<sup>78</sup>

But still the argument goes on. For example, one of the senior experts at the Military Research Center of the United States and Canada Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Konstantin Oznobishev, stated in an interview that such a drastic reduction is "quite possible." Oznobishev linked the plans to scrap airborne divisions to Grachev's reported dissatisfaction with VDV Commander-in-Chief Podkolzin, who had criticized the Defense Ministry's methods of campaigning in Chechnya. The Defense Ministry's strategists, according to Oznobishev, chose to push rebels out gradually while Podkolzin favored a *blitzkrieg* by airborne troops. "It could well happen that in the course of all these in-house intrigues a situation arises whereby personal likes and dislikes influence strategic decisions," said Oznobishev.<sup>79</sup>

So far Grachev himself didn't openly express his opinion about the dispute. His last public statement about the mobile forces was made in September 1995 in Vladivostok, where he announced the beginning of the creation of mobile forces in the Russian Pacific Fleet. According to Grachev, the naval infantry division stationed in Vladivostok by the end of 1995 will include an assault battalion, representing the core of the Pacific Fleet mobile forces. The completion of the build-up of such forces, according to Grachev, is scheduled by year 2000.

## **A Revival of Interest in Military Reform in Russia**

Despite an obvious unwillingness of the present Russian leadership to openly discuss military reform, it will hardly succeed in avoiding public debate on the subject. The reason is that military reform (or rather, its absence) is turning into one of the powerful weapons of the political opposition in its struggle for power.

There is a veritable resurgence of public interest in military reform.

On September 24, 1995 a new social-political movement "For Military Reform" has been launched. It is based on Russia's Choice and its affiliates. Among the founders of the new movement are Yegor Gaidar, Alexander N. Yakovlev (head of the state radio and television and former CPSU Politburo member), Colonel General (Ret.) Eduard

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<sup>77</sup> *The Moscow Tribune*, October 7, 1995.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

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

Vorobyov and “The Military For Democracy” movement, uniting mostly military reformers (all now retired) of the first “democratic” wave of 1988 - 1991.

Less than a month later, on October 15, 1995, another movement, called “Honor and Motherland” (*Chest' i Rodina*) was established with a proclaimed aim of advancing military reform. Its founders had all along wanted to call the movement “The Public Committee for Military Reform” but had to change the name to Honor and Motherland at the last moment to prevent confusion with Gaidar’s movement.

Honor and Motherland has been created under the aegis of Lieutenant General (Ret.) Aleksander Lebed’s electoral bloc, the Congress of Russian Communities (CRC). The Congress of Russian Communities has gone from obscurity to prominence since General Lebed lent it his considerable charisma. Lebed himself is looked upon as one of the most serious contenders for the presidential seat next June and is now hard on the parliamentary campaign trail.

The two new movements, For Military Reform and Honor and Motherland, attack the present government’s policies on military reform from two opposite directions, aiming for different voting blocs.

According to Gaidar, he rejects joining Chernomyrdin’s electoral bloc, Our Home is Russia, for two reasons: first, the war in Chechnya, for which Gaidar blames the government, and second, military reform, which, Gaidar claims, the “government wants to replace by a re-militarization of society.”<sup>80</sup>

Russia’s Choice and the movement For Military Reform aim at that part of the electorate which is unhappy with heavy military expenditures and the lengthening of the conscription service. According to its electoral program, Russia’s Choice understands the following to fall under military reform:

- establishing civilian control over the Armed Forces;
- introducing alternative military service, which would allow the conscripts to reject service in “hot spots” (areas of armed conflicts) or far from home in favor of the alternative service;
- changing the structure and reducing the personnel strength of the Armed Forces;
- giving up conscription in stages and introducing a voluntary military service.<sup>81</sup>

Honor and Motherland is radically different in its approach both to military reform and to the voters.

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<sup>80</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 11, 1995.

<sup>81</sup> “Razymny vybor. Predvybornaya platforma DVR,” pp. 4- 5.

Lebed's movement is geared at his most natural electoral constituency, the military, and he is not shy about exploiting the discontent in the army to bolster his own political ends. It is a shrewd move considering that servicemen constitute one of the most disciplined voting blocs in the country. Estimates of the military's strength in the electorate run as high as 20 million voters, if one counts active duty and retired servicemen, their spouses and workers in the military-industrial complex.

In his one-hour long speech at the conference of Honor and Motherland, Lebed said that the present Russian army is "in a state of coma" and found the present situation "criminal," when soldiers live in "second-rate chicken coops" and are fed only once a day.<sup>82</sup> He pledged to remedy the situation and added that the army would hardly forgive the politicians responsible for the self-destroying reforms which caused the present state of affairs when Russia lost its military and international significance.

According to Lebed, Russia as a state had survived in the past only because it "always began its reforms with the army" and "strengthened and prospered thanks to the presence of a soundly organized military might." He said he was sure that Russia's economic and political survival should begin with a "military revival." With "a good army," which, said Lebed, doesn't fight but through its sheer existence not only deters, but kills the whole idea of an aggression, Russia would be able "to complete reforms which were not completed from the time of Peter the Great, Alexander II and Stolypin."<sup>83</sup>

In Lebed's words, Honor and Motherland will develop its own program of military reform and will see to it that it is carried out.

The main expert on military reform in Honor and Motherland is Colonel General Igor Rodionov, Chief of the General Staff Academy, who made the main report on military reform at the conference.

As a conclusion I'd like to stress, that one of the most significant results of the war in Chechnya is the serious change in the role of the military factor in the current balance of political forces in Russia. While earlier the army did everything possible to avoid being drawn into the political struggle, now we are seeing a markedly increased readiness of the army to enter the political fray. The military is actively seeking out political figures with whom they can cooperate.

Lebed's Congress of Russian Communities is not the only group that has tried to bring the powerful military bloc under its wing. It is difficult to find a major party that does not boast a general in its top lineup. Colonel General Boris Gromov, popular hero of the war in Afghanistan, heads his own party, My Fatherland; Lieutenant General Lev Rokhlin, who rose to prominence during the Chechnya conflict, is number three on the Our Home is Russia list; and so on.

All this means that we'll hear a lot more about military reform in the months and years ahead, especially if Russia ends up with a general as its next leader.

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<sup>82</sup> *The Moscow Times*, October 19, 1995.

<sup>83</sup> *Segodnya*, October 17, 1995.

# Chapter Five

## The War In Chechnya And A Crisis Of Russian Statehood

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### Introduction

The war in Chechnya, a dramatic and even tragic event in recent Russian history, is by no means an isolated or unique outcome of the functioning of Russia's society and government. The most striking characteristic of the present state of affairs in Russia is a high degree of disintegration and mutual isolation of various components at societal, institutional, and organizational levels.

The destroyed integrative mechanisms of the totalitarian state have not yet been replaced by the democratic feedback and coordinating systems in Russia. Instead, this gap is increasingly filled by substitutes like political myths and phantoms of different kinds. They are the myths in political and bureaucratic elites about value orientations and motivations of ordinary people and vice versa, widespread phantoms of a great empire that no longer exists but nonetheless exercises powerful influence on the attitudes and decisions of important elite groups.

This inevitably produces widespread misperceptions, communication breakdowns, unintended outcomes, social and political anomies and crises of various kinds and magnitude. The war in Chechnya is a special case of such breakdowns in the sphere of national security policy making.

### National Security Policy

National security policy making and implementation is a complex process that is focused on the President of Russia and involves numerous institutions branches of executive and legislative branches of government at the national and local levels.

The rationality of this process depends on the degree of consensus reached among society in general, political elites, and branches of government regarding the national security interests and goals in a particular situation or in particular region of the country or the world.

Its effectiveness (in terms of accuracy of assessments of a situation, adequacy of means chosen to reach the objectives, implementation control, etc.) depends on the state

of the government machinery – efficiency of decision making and implementation structures and procedures, coordinating mechanisms and the like.

In the case of the war in Chechnya we are dealing with a breakdown of virtually all of these components.

## **The Issue Of Consensus**

The Chechnya crisis has lasted for several years and to the fall of 1994 there had been a broad consensus in Russia regarding the goals of the governmental policy toward Chechnya. With the exception of a small minority, the Russian public and political elites agreed that the goals of preserving territorial integrity of Russia and securing its geopolitical interests in Transcaucasian region are of such importance that they justify use a wide spectrum of political and economic pressures to reintegrate Chechnya into constitutional, political, and economic structures of Russia.

But Russia turned out to become deeply divided regarding the means chosen by the President to reach these objectives. Public opinion, major political parties, legislature and even part of government have been against the use of armed forces or at least against the particular way they were being used in Chechnya. This division embraces the whole range of issues beginning from more technical ones that divided Russian military establishment and to the fundamental constitutional and ideological issues like limits of legitimate use of force, parliamentary control over the executive, precedence of individual human rights over interests of state, the right of an ethnic group to a territory of its own, etc.

These divisions in themselves were not the outcome of one particular decision by the President but in fact preceded his decision to use military force in Chechnya. They existed implicitly or explicitly as a side effect of the breakdowns in the subsystems of Russian society and government mentioned above and made this fatal decision possible and even inevitable.

## **The President and Civil Society**

The constitution that granted the President vast, practically authoritarian powers led during 1994 to a growing isolation of his office from the rest of society. All attempts of Yeltsin's entourage to create feedback loops and communication mechanisms and eventually to secure popular support for him without the help of political parties were inconsistent and eventually failed (the Treaty on National Accord, the Presidential Council, the President's Public Chamber, etc.). The general public felt an increasing sense of alienation and helplessness in the face of government bureaucracy, to even a greater degree than under communist regime.

On the Presidential side we witnessed the formation of myths about the mood and expectations of society. In particular, the idea that a decisive use of force in Chechnya would appeal to the Russian public and would help to restore the President's popularity was widely cited as one of the main motives of his decision. Even more, after the initial failure of a military "quick solution" to the Chechnya problem, the President could proceed along the same road despite active protests and widespread passive rejection of his policy.

## **The President And The Parliament**

The Constitution had the same institutional effect on the relationship between the President and the parliament in the case of the war in Chechnya. From the very beginning both the State Duma and Council of Federation opposed the brutal use of force in Chechnya. However, the absence of an effective balance of power in the Constitution did not allow the parliament to check presidential decisions and ensuing governmental actions.

The Council of Federation was unable to exercise its authority to approve or disapprove the introduction of the emergency rule in Chechnya and hence the use of force inside the country because the President simply did not ask for the council to have a role. Later it even lost its case against the President in the Constitutional Court, which ruled that the President did not violate the Constitution by issuing an executive decree to disarm "illegal" armed "gangs" without specifying the methods to be used to fulfill this goal. This case highlighted the existence of the vast "gray zones" in Russian laws that regulate the use of armed force and which were skillfully used by the government to avoid parliamentary control.

The majority of factions and groups in the State Duma also condemned the President for the launching the war in Chechnya, but the Duma failed to exercise its limited powers of control over the government.

First, there were several attempts to pass a law that forbade the use of armed forces in Chechnya or, more generally, to stipulate the use of force by a requirement to pass a special law in each particular case. The Duma failed to create a legal basis for its control over the government due to various political reasons. But the main obstacles are the above-mentioned constitutional provisions granting vast powers to the President.

Second, budgetary control – the only potentially effective instrument of Duma's influence over the executive branch – has also proved to be useless in this particular case. The beginning of the Chechen operation coincided with the final stage of the budget consideration in the parliament. Several factions tried to stop the war by banning any additional appropriations for the military operations. But the government argued that the limited operation in Chechnya, both in terms of scale and duration, could be implemented without any additional funding above the already agreed upon appropriations for the "power" ministries. Later on, when the grave miscalculations by the government of the costs of the war in Chechnya became obvious, the situation of the government was saved by inflation, which turned out to be much higher than the projection used for the



budgetary calculations. As a result, the government accumulated large non-allocated funds which it could use at its own discretion, since the law also does not contain provisions for such a situation.

Third, the State Duma created a special investigative commission to look into the roots, causes, and consequences of the Chechnya crisis. But since the Constitution does not provide control powers to the Duma outside the budget control, the activities of this commission from the very beginning were little more than an exercise in public relations. Nonetheless, it served its role as a standing public forum for discussion and clarifications of positions of various groups toward the war in Chechnya.

On the positive side, the lessons from the Chechnya crisis have given strong impetus to the legislative process to close loopholes in the laws that regulate national security matters.

## **The President And The Government**

The war in Chechnya has dramatically highlighted serious flaws and breakdowns in the architecture and functioning of the administrative machinery of the Russian government in the matters of national security policy making and implementation.

Formally, the President is the focal point of an elaborate network of units and positions intended to provide information support and coordination for making and implementing major security decisions. It includes the Security Council, the National Security Assistant, the President's Administration, various intelligence agencies, etc.

In practice, this network lacks clarity in terms of authority, subordination, and procedural coordination. Thus, the Security Council, a constitutional body, still does not have a law that would define its status and authority. The accounts of the Council's meeting where the decision to launch the Chechnya operation was made show its inability as a collegial body to seriously discuss all alternatives available and to monitor the implementation process.

## **Conclusion**

A brief analysis presented here shows that the most pressing problems in the national security policy sphere in Russia lie not so much in the substantial as in the institutional, organizational, and procedural aspects of functioning of the Russian state. Without fundamental changes in these areas, crises will be inevitably repeated in domestic as well as international security matters by institutional and organizational failures.

It is not a coincidence that the re-establishment of internal cohesiveness and the integration mechanisms of Russian society and state have become core issues of political debates and the election campaign for parliament in 1995.