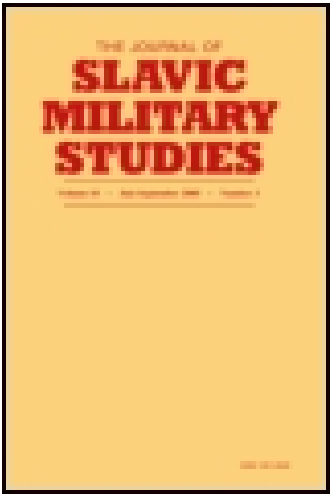

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Kabul to Grozny: A critique of Soviet (Russian) counter-insurgency doctrine

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Kabul to Grozny: A Critique of Soviet (Russian) Counter-Insurgency Doctrine

CARL VAN DYKE

Ever since the humiliation of the Crimean War (1853–56) generations of Russian military professionals have sought to create a positive 'science of victory'. General Staff theorists from Astaf'ev, Leer and Svechin to Ogarkov and Gareev have studied the history of warfare to discover patterns, conjunctions, and similarities in the hope of discovering the inner logic of warfare and using these principles for training the leadership talents of field commanders, indicating trends for military planners and providing standard operating procedures for administrators. Their goal: a unified military doctrine that would provide effective management over a vast and complex security environment.

This military doctrine responded well to the demands of industrialized warfare. In the late 1920s and 1930s the Soviet army leadership co-opted the doctrinal concepts of its Tsarist predecessor and adapted them to the ideology of dialectical materialism, the Bolshevik party's management principle of 'democratic centralism', and the creation of the command-administrative system. During World War II the Soviet military machine gained the respect of allies and opponents alike by its strategic vision, the ability to mobilize enormous resources for the war effort, and brilliant staff work at the Front and army level. However, unified military doctrine has had trouble responding to the growing intensification of warfare brought about by technological and societal changes in the post-1945 era. Direct evidence of the Soviet army's inability to make the systemic shift from quantity to quality first appeared during the counter-insurgency in Afghanistan (1979–1991). The 1994–6 debacle in Chechnya indicates that Russia's new military doctrine and reform efforts have not adequately resolved these issues, and in some cases have actively hindered effective response to regional conflicts.[1]

The purpose of this study is to conduct a preliminary analysis of Russia's doctrinal response to counter-insurgency warfare in Afghanistan and

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Chechnya. Part I will briefly define the three main principles involved in that doctrine: forward defense, lightning war, and continuous assessment of lessons learned. Parts II, III and IV will examine how these principles were manifested during the war in Afghanistan, the reform and reorganization of the Russian army after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the first battle for Grozny.

Part I: Principles of Unified Military Doctrine

Forward Defense

From the earliest days of its existence, the Soviet Union had relied on a combination of union treaties and the creation of political, economic and military buffer-zones to deter civil war and potential aggression from the capitalist world. The buffer-zone policy, otherwise known as 'forward defense', was conducted by a close co-ordination of diplomacy, propaganda and military force. In the first instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs promoted Soviet political and economic interests in neighboring countries through a combination of trade and other bilateral agreements, such as friendship, non-aggression and mutual assistance treaties. If these diplomatic efforts failed and vital interests were at stake, the Soviet government would resort to the propaganda tactic of 'demonstrative diplomacy'. In the words of George Kennan, demonstrative diplomacy was designed '... not to promote freely accepted and mutually profitable agreement as between governments, but rather to embarrass other governments and stir up opposition among their own people."[2] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies used the media to appeal directly to public opinion, thereby putting political pressure on foreign governments to accept Soviet terms. These propaganda measures could be combined with implicit and explicit threats of armed force, ranging from ominous official statements to military deployments in the adjacent border areas, and the conduct of large military maneuvers, border provocations and political violence.

Lightning War

The Soviet government could turn to the armed forces in the event that diplomacy and intimidation failed. The experience of the Civil War (1918–20) had taught the Soviet high command to avoid attritional wars against coalitions and to conduct rapid offensives against isolated enemies. Over the next 70 years the Soviet army elaborated this experience into a formal military doctrine that emphasized offensive warfare using large-scale combined arms forces suitable to the terrain of the Central European plateau. The principle role was played by infantry, tanks and artillery. They

were responsible for conducting offensive operations against linear defenses, then encircling and destroying the enemy forces in detail. Aviation, long-range artillery and airborne assaults played an important, but secondary role. Decision-makers in the Kremlin face a dilemma maintaining strategic control over such an enormous military theater as Russia, Europe and Central Asia. Offensive forms of warfare, referred to as 'lightning war' by Soviet military theorists, allow military planners more initiative in responding to threats. On the other hand, offense is the most complex and precarious form of warfare. The Soviet response was to develop a science of troop control which consisted of two principles. The first is 'unity of command' (otherwise known as *edinonachale*), which is the continuous flow of information between the supreme commander and his subordinates. The second principle is 'interaction' (*vzaimodeistvii*) signifying continuous horizontal communication between commanders and their counterparts in other field formations and services.[3]

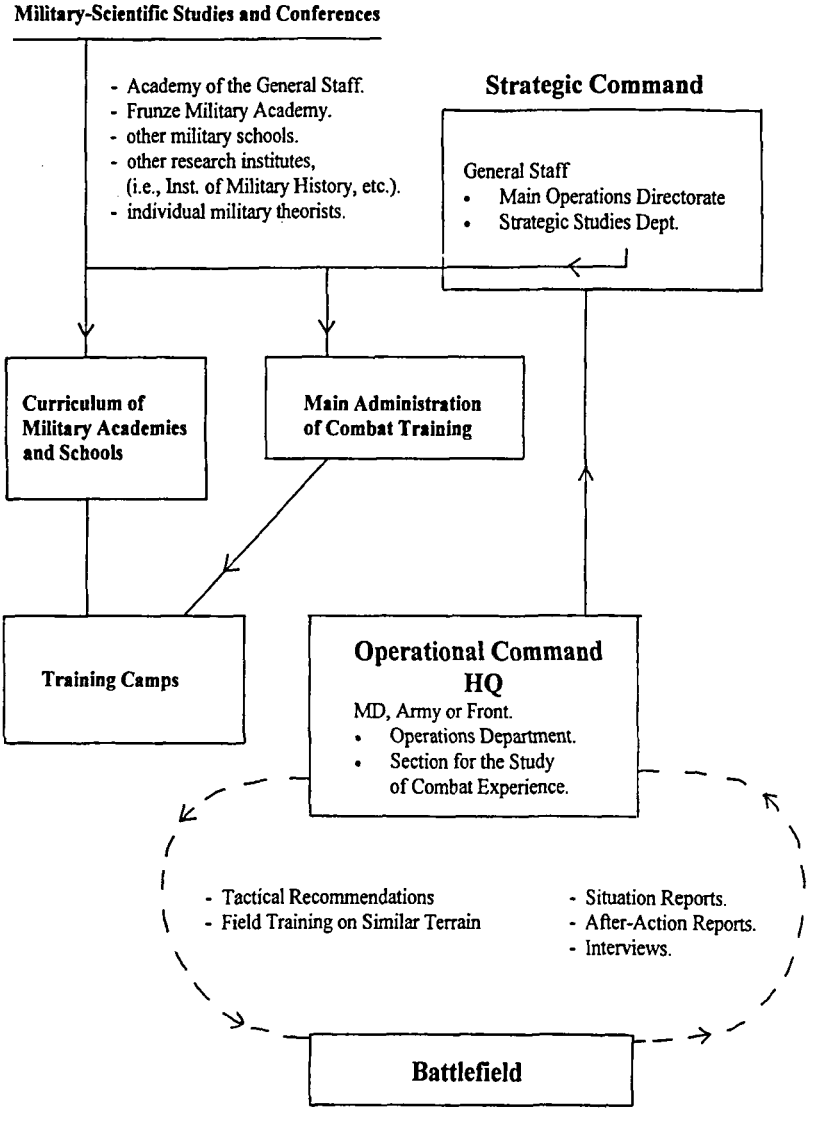
Lessons Learned

Troop control is regulated by the doctrinal process: historical study of past combat experience combined with mathematical modelling and formal administrative procedures. (Figure 1, The Doctrinal Process.) In the Soviet era responsibility for formulating doctrine fell to the instructors at the General Staff Academy and other military schools, as well as officers working in the Operations Administration of the General Staff. During a war these officers were posted to field headquarters to study the combat situation and recommend changes in tactics, force structure and weaponry.[4] In peacetime these same officers institutionalized the changes in new field regulations and training regimes. Formal doctrine and mathematical models permit the theater HQ to maintain control over forces in the field. However, the problem with centralized control over the doctrinal process is that it stifles initiative and promotes rigid operations. Placed in inexperienced hands or used against a more flexible and determined enemy it could lead to organizational disintegration and mob tactics (what Russians call 'shapkozakidatel'stvo'). The implications for overall security policy can be enormous. A lightning war against an isolated opponent can stall and become a prolonged war involving a coalition of opponents.

Part II: Afghanistan and the Birth of Soviet Counter-Insurgency Warfare

There are many examples of 'lightning war' in the history of the Soviet army. The most successful lightning wars were the occupation of Poland, the Baltic States and Moldavia in 1939–40, as well as the military interventions in East Germany, Hungary and Czeckoslovakia in the 1950s and late 1960s. Less

FIGURE 1
THE DOCTRINAL PROCESS



spectacular and more drawn-out was the suppression of the Basmachi rebellion in Central Asia during the 1920s and early 1930s.[5] The most dramatic example of lightning war 'turned sour' was the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan during the 1980s.[6] Not only did this war precipitate the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union, it also compelled the General Staff to develop new concepts of non-linear combat, many of which have been adopted and modified in recent years by the Russian armed forces.

Soviet-Afghan relations existed on a stable basis from the 1920s until 1978, when the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of Afghanistan violently seized power in Kabul with Soviet military assistance. Moscow welcomed this change in government, and diplomatic relations were normalized in December 1978. However, popular resistance against the PDP and factional disputes within the party convinced the Soviet high command that military intervention was needed to preserve the status quo. On Christmas Eve 1979 the Soviet army launched an offensive into Afghanistan with special operations forces (SOFs) and ground troops from 40th Army. The lightning war was over within two weeks, but the counter-insurgency which followed lasted for ten years.

Large mechanized forces were poorly suited to the narrow valleys and mountain roads of Afghanistan. Within a few months of the invasion entire Soviet motorized rifle battalions fell prey to *mujahideen* ambushes. Three years passed before 40th Army decentralized its command and developed non-linear tactics more responsive to the enemy and the terrain. The result was a new counter-insurgency force made up of airborne, air assault and Spetsnaz units. The mission of these counter-insurgency forces was to conduct raids and ambushes in addition to providing convoy security and tactical support for the ground forces.

The key to non-linear combat was independent operations conducted at the brigade and battalion level.[7] The brigade's force structure needed to be carefully tailored and its officers needed to be better trained and given more initiative. Responsibility for this reform fell to 40th Army HQ where representatives from the General Staff studied recent combat experience and made doctrinal recommendations. These doctrinal analysts developed three tactical innovations which became the core of the Soviet army's counter-insurgency doctrine. The first of these innovations was the 'enveloping detachment'.[8] Composed of airborne, air assault or Spetsnaz sub-units, these enveloping detachments were transported to the combat zone by helicopter or APVs and were most effective when supporting a conventional ground operation. Their mission was to attack enemy strongholds in the flanks and rear, cut LOCs and block the enemy's withdrawal, but they rarely had enough transport helicopters or assault forces to do the job effectively. Another tactical innovation was the '*bronegruppa*', a small armored reserve

consisting of four or five APVs or tanks used to reinforce infantry squads in contact and to provide transport to and from the combat zone. The third tactical innovation was the technique of 'bounding overwatch', where a combat vehicle or sub-unit would occupy dominant terrain to provide cover for other forces as they advanced.

Restructured forces and new tactics required changes in troop control. At the beginning of the war the 40th Army's Operations Department was responsible for drawing up battle plans with the help of centralized information and mathematical modelling, and then issuing these detailed orders to subordinate commands for further elaboration. As the war progressed, planning was gradually decentralized. Eventually, the battalion commander was using nomograms and programmable calculators to plan his own combat operations.[9] These tools allowed the battalion commander to visualize various combat solutions in a timely manner and nurtured his self-confidence.

How well did the SOFs and motorized rifle forces learn from their experience and adjust their tactics and training? The doctrinal process produced mixed results. Combat experience was well analyzed at 40th Army HQ and published in the theoretical journal *Voennyi Vestnik*, but there was no systematic distribution of these lessons to the army. Individual units developed their own techniques from experience and rarely shared these techniques with other units. Motorized rifle troops assigned to Afghanistan underwent specialized training at Ushgorod and Ashkhabad in the Turkestan Military District but they remained unresponsive to non-linear tactics. The situation was different in the airborne, air assault and Spetsnaz SOFs. They were formed, trained and deployed as units, which contributed to higher unit cohesion. They trained often, using two-sided exercises and terrain mock-ups to adopt new techniques and rehearse for a specific operation.[10] Ultimately, 40th Army was unable to suppress the *mujahideen*. Tactical innovations such as bounding overwatch, *bronegruppy* and enveloping detachments were compromised by other factors, such as inadequate unit field strengths, an ineffective hearts and minds campaign, and poor co-ordination between military and civilian authorities.

Part III: Russian Military Reform and the Mobile Forces

The 40th Army retreated from Afghanistan in 1989. Three years later the Soviet Union collapsed more or less peacefully, its legitimacy shaken and its ideology discredited. In the rush to consolidate their new freedom, the former republics quickly nationalized property on their territories, including the assets of the defunct Soviet army. The Russian Federation managed to inherit a sizable portion of these assets, but for the most part

they were second-echelon forces and their combat readiness was low.[11] Moreover, the Russian Ministry of Defense, established in the spring of 1992, had to confront a series of new challenges to its authority: obligations to international arms agreements, political oversight by the Duma, the lack of a new ideology to legitimize the use of armed force, and technological advances that made much of Russia's existing arsenal obsolete.

Defining the new threat was the first priority. In 1992 the Ministry of Defense issued a draft military doctrine stating that NATO remained the long-term threat, but that regional conflicts and low-intensity warfare were more probable.[12] These two threat perceptions were polar opposites of each other: a high-tech war requiring large combined-arms formations, sophisticated C3I and extensive air power, compared with a low-tech war, requiring more flexible and easily transportable forces. Although force requirements for these two missions seemed irreconciliable, there was a common denominator. The Russian General Staff studied the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf in the context of other twentieth century regional conflicts and drew the conclusion that 'nonlinear battle' was the answer.[13] Nonlinear battle had evolved from its original conception during the Afghan war to become a war conducted by simultaneous operational and tactical maneuvers throughout the depths of the enemy's territory. This offensive ideal could be achieved by integrating rapid deployment forces with automated C3I, PGMs and electronic warfare. SOFs, made up of airborne troops, naval infantry and Spetsnaz, could be deployed to fight short, low-intensity conflicts. If the situation escalated to a larger war, these forces could be supplemented by heavier combined arms formations.

In the summer of 1991 the chief of the Airborne Forces, Colonel General V. A. Achalov, proposed the idea of a 'mobile force' to fulfill this wide range of missions.[14] The proposal was officially adopted a year later by the new Defense Minister, General P. S. Grachev (a former deputy to Achalov), as the starting point for the reorganization of the Russian Armed Forces. The new Mobile Forces Directorate is commanded by Colonel General Podkolzin with staff from the former Airborne Forces Directorate and consists of the following forces: five airborne divisions, eight independent airborne and air assault brigades, six light motorized rifle brigades, six naval infantry battalions, two amphibious assault battalions, four military transport aviation divisions and one Spetsnaz brigade.

The primary mission of the Immediate Response Force (the IRF) is to provide peacekeeping forces for resolving regional conflicts adjacent to Russia, or UN mandated operations around the world.[15] For instance, the reinforced airborne battalion currently serving in Bosnia is a part of the IRF. In the event of a large-scale conventional war the IRF reinforces the border troops and provides the first echelon defense/counter-offense

forces. Following the parliamentary crisis in October 1993 the responsibilities of the IRF have been expanded to include internal peacekeeping operations in conjunction with OMON and MVD troops against terrorism, organized crime and paramilitary nationalist groups as well as special police functions such as crowd control, hostage rescue, civilian evacuation from disaster areas and maintaining road-blocks.

If a mission takes longer than expected or a crisis escalates out of the IRF's control, then the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) is responsible for providing heavier ground support. The RDF consists of three army corps organized on the corps/brigade/battalion structure. The advantage of this configuration over the old front/army/corps/division structure is a more responsive C2 network and greater operational flexibility. For instance, motorized rifle brigades and combined arms battalions can be easily reconfigured, trained, and equiped for a variety of different missions. They can provide second-echelon ground support during a large-scale conventional war or can be used as peacekeeping forces. An example of the RDF as peacekeeper is the 27th and 47th Guards Motorized Rifle Divisions which are involved in peacekeeping operations in South Ossetia. The 27th Guards took part in a joint US-Russian peacekeeping exercise at Ft Riley in 1995.[16]

Training for the newly-organized IRF and RDF was scheduled to begin in the summer of 1994. The training centers at Riazan and the 'Vystrel' military college north of Moscow were responsible for training officers and troops the techniques of low-intensity warfare and developing teamwork at battalion and company level.[17] This training was reinforced at the first full-scale exercises in the North Caucasus Military District that autumn. In November 1994 President Yeltsin announced that the creation of the Mobile Forces was complete.

Not everyone supported Grachev's reorganization of the Russian army on the basis of the Mobile Forces. One of the most vocal opponents was General Vladimir Semenov, the commander-in-chief of the Ground Forces, who complained that the new directorate was too powerful and would divert too many scarce resources away from the other services. He referred to the Mobile Forces as a 'monster' and warned that it was too lightly armed to have any combat effectiveness.[18] The war in Chechnya, which broke out a few weeks after the end of the Mobile Forces' first field exercise, would prove him right.

Part IV: The Battle for Grozny

Until 1988 the North Caucasus Military District (NCMD) played a secondary role in the Soviet Union's defensive system. Now it is one of Russia's most important military districts.[19] There are several reasons for

this change in geostrategy: the existance of several on-going ethno-religious and nationalist conflicts including the Azeri–Armenian conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the civil war in Georgia, the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict and armed clashes between the Ingush and the North Ossetians. In the spring of 1992 the North Caucasus Military District gained geostrategic importance when Ukraine seized control over the Black Sea Fleet stationed in the Crimea. Taken together, these events transformed the Caucasus into a very complex threat environment where domestic instability and potential intervention from Turkey and Iran required the establishment of an effective buffer-zone.

The Russian Defense Ministry's first priority was to regain forward bases and ports. Traditional Armenian–Turkish animosities worked in the MoD's favor. Russian troops were soon stationed in Armenia under the auspices of joint CIS military cooperation. Regaining military bases and ports in Georgia was more problematic and required indirect methods. In the summer of 1992 Russian General Staff and representatives from the Federal Counter-Intelligence Service (the FSK) supported the Abkhazian separatist movement against Georgia.[20] This was a dangerous policy and it almost backfired, but the Georgian government eventually caved in and allowed the Russian MoD to station troops at Tbilisi, Batumi and Poti.

The second priority was to resolve internal conflicts in the region. MVD peacekeeping troops were used to separate the warring parties in North Ossetia and control was established there by the summer of 1994. A more complex problem was Chechnya. General Dzhokhar Dudayev, the elected president of the renegade republic, firmly refused to negotiate a return to the Russian Federation. However, Dudayev's presidency faced growing opposition in the Chechen parliament and a state of anarchy existed in the countryside. In April 1994 Yeltsin's colleagues in the Security Council decided that a policy of 'demonstrative diplomacy' would yield positive results. The first step took place in mid-July when Chechen opposition leaders met with the General Staff and the FSK to discuss plans to depose Dudayev.[21] That autumn the opposition made three abortive attempts to seize power in Grozny. During the third attempt in late November Dudayev captured 27 Russian soldiers aiding the opposition and publicly denounced Moscow's interference. On 29 November the Security Council decided to use the Mobile Forces as a peace-making force to resolve the crisis.

Technically, Dudayev's supporters were no match for the Mobile Forces. Chechen forces were numerically small, approximately 12,000 men, and were a mixture of territorial militia, municipal police, volunteers and a few mercenaries from the CIS and abroad. They had at their disposal about 42 modern tanks, 66 APCs, some howitzers and mortars and 523 APG-17 launchers as well as an assortment of small arms inherited from the Soviet

army in 1992.[22] However, their numerical and organizational weaknesses were more than compensated by moral conviction and the strength of defense. Improvised fortifications, built from construction blocks, tanks and artillery, were located in three defensive belts around Grozny. The inner defensive perimeter consisted of five major fortifications across the streets leading to the Presidential Palace with approximately 50 smaller fortifications in the immediate vicinity. The middle and outer defense perimeters consisted of fortifications on the major road and rail lines leading out of town, with strongpoints on the south side of the city to protect the transport of supplies and reinforcements. This did not mean that the Chechens were committed to positional warfare. If these fortifications did not hold, the plan was to retreat south to the mountainous region and fight a guerrilla war.

During the first ten days of December the North Caucasus Military District concentrated the IRF at Mozdok, Beslan and Vladikavkaz. The IRF included an airborne and motorized rifle division, sub-units of two airborne assault divisions, several infantry brigades, two motorized rifle regiments, two battalions of naval infantry as well as MVD troops and border guards from all over Russia. These forces were organized into three groups: the Western Group under the command of Major General Petruka, the Northern Group under Lieutenant General Leonid Rokhlin, and the Eastern Group under Major General Stas'kov (a deputy commander of the Airborne Forces). All told, this represented 23,000 men, a twofold advantage over Dudayev's army, but nothing close to the four or fivefold advantage normally required to dislodge a defender in urban terrain.

Any technical advantage the Russian forces held over the Chechens was compromised by systemic problems in the unity of command. No formal chain of command existed between the Security Council and the forces in the field. Normally, the General Staff was responsible for co-ordinating the war effort, but its administrative duties were transfered to the MoD and various 'power ministries' on an *ad hoc* basis. Unity of command at the North Caucasus Military District was disrupted by the forced resignation of its commander, General Alexei Mitiukhin, but eventually stabilized under General Kvashnin. Even then, Kvashnin's authority was overshadowed by the presence of the Defense Minister, General Grachev, and two members of the Security Council at the operational headquarters in Mozdok.

Preparations for the peace-making operation were seriously flawed. The North Caucasus Military District's plan was to surround Grozny, disarm Dudayev, and then withdraw, leaving the MVD internal troops to maintain order while an interregnum negotiated the details of government. However, no one at Mozdok had bothered to formulate contingency plans, and aerial reconnaissance of Grozny was lacking due to poor flying weather. No leeway

was allowed for delays or unexpected resistance. Units concentrating at the Chechen border had not been given time to strengthen unit cohesion or organize interaction. When the final order to deploy was issued on 11 December, the operational headquarters in Mozdok failed to give mission briefings or distribute supplemental instructions to the group commanders.

Staff work was also a problem, due to the presence of MVD and FSK representatives and a team from the General Staff in addition to NCMD personnel. Administrative functions were not clearly delineated, no joint staff exercises were conducted and no attempts were made to enhance interaction between the SOFs.[23] When deployment began in mid-December, Kvashnin's staff was unable to maintain continuous command and control over the field forces and no one monitored combat experience for lessons learned. Interaction at the tactical level was compromised by poor communications equipment and the failure to designate radio frequencies and use cyphers. Lieutenant General Rokhlin, commander of the Northern Group, later complained that '... the technical level [of the Russian Army] is so bad that it is below that of Dudayev's gangs. We cannot identify the co-ordinates of VHF, cellular and satellite stations because we do not have the necessary equipment. We cannot work with radio networks because we don't have the basic communications equipment. The Dudayev supporters intercept everything that is being communicated and take relevant measures.'[24]

Subjective factors also eroded combat capability. Russian columns assembled at Mozdok, Beslan and Vladikavkaz had been told that they were conducting a peacekeeping operation to stabilize the political situation and protect civilians from internecine violence. Morale sank when the columns encountered angry villagers blocking the road to Grozny. As the first week passed and the Security Council failed to declare martial law in the region, the rank-and-file began to question the motivations of their political leaders. Many high-ranking officers, including several deputy defense ministers, lodged protests and resigned their commissions. In the field the prevailing cynicism was best expressed by a soldier who declared, '... whatever they say in Moscow, I don't really think this is Russian land, and so this war has nothing to do with me. I don't want to die in a game by the leaders to cover up their mistakes and crimes.'[25] Any remaining belief in the peacekeeping nature of the operation was dispelled on 21 December when the Russian airforce began bombing Grozny and its inhabitants, combatants and civilians alike. On their way to Grozny, the columns were slowed down by traffic accidents, repeated breakdowns and harassing fire from Chechen snipers. Bounding overwatch and security measures learned during the war in Afghanistan were never used. When the columns reached Grozny's suburbs in late December they were in very poor combat condition.

Driving down a road is one thing, disarming a city full of armed fanatics is another. Urban warfare is the epitome of non-linear combat.[26] The scope of the battlefield is both horizontal and vertical, involving isolated combat in the streets and on the roof-tops. In these conditions operational command and control is extremely difficult to maintain. Sophisticated communications must be distributed to tactical sub-units in order to maintain a semblance of control. Success depends on large amounts of well-trained specialists organized into small groups. The exhausted airborne and motorized rifle units under the command of Rokhlin, Petruka and Stas'kov were not properly trained and equipped for full-scale urban warfare. Neither were the SOFs from the power ministries.[27] The most elite of these forces, the 'Alpha' group under the command of the FSK, was trained for counter-terrorist operations. 'Vympel', infamous for its covert activities abroad, had been transfered from the KGB to the MVD earlier in the year and most of its officers had left the service for more lucrative jobs in private security companies. The GRU's Spetsnaz were trained for long-range reconnaissance and sabotage. The only hope left to Kvashnin and his group commanders was that a show of force would be enough to intimidate the Chechens into laying down their arms.

Grachev made the decision to storm Grozny during a birthday party held in his honor at Mozdok. His plan was inspired by the Soviet *coup de main* against Kabul in 1979: ground troops would storm Grozny from three sides while SOFs seized the Presidential palace and government buildings, the railroad station and other important targets in the city center. All this was to be done without harm to civilians or buildings. Little attempt would be made to block Chechen forces in the south.

The Russian offensive began on New Year's Eve. The Northern Group commanded by Rokhlin made the most headway that day. The 131st Motorized Rifle Brigade and a battalion from 81st Motorized Rifle Regiment reached the central rail station without enemy resistance, while a second battalion from the 81st and a combined arms detachment from 20th Motorized Rifle Division approached the Presidential palace. Other groups encountered more resistance. An airborne regiment from Stas'kov's Eastern Group was stopped within the city limits by small arms and mortar fire and was forced to retreat. The Western Group never launched its offensive. The Chechen defenders then began to close the net, having isolated elements of the Northern Group. Their tactics were simple and very effective. Using the narrow streets of the city to their advantage, the Chechens attacked and destroyed the first tank of a Russian armored column, then chopped the column into isolated segments and destroyed them piecemeal. In the words of one Chechen fighter, 'The Russian infantry wouldn't get out of their armor to fight, so their vehicles had no cover. We

just stood on the balconies and dropped grenades on them as they drove by underneath.'[28] Some of Rokhlin's troops managed to pull back and consolidate their defenses but casualties by this time were very high. The 131st Brigade and the 81st Regiment were badly shot up. Out of 26 tanks in the brigade, 20 were destroyed, as well as 102 out of 120 BMPs. Other units suffered fratricidal fire from their own air cover. By 1 January 1995 the Russian offensive was out of control.

What started as a rapid offensive by supposedly-elite mobile forces had degenerated into a desperate positional struggle reminiscent of World War II. Control had to be reimposed and the offensive continued to its bitter end or the Russian army risked ignominious defeat. In Stalin's time the Soviet high command responded to similar crises by shifting to a temporary defense, appointing new commanders, organizing new staffs, evaluating lessons learned, retraining and reinforcing the troops, and *then* launching a new offensive. Nothing as centralized as that occured during the battle for Grozny. Even so, control was re-established and a new offensive launched within a week.[29] Responsibility for this reversal of fortune lies with the personal initiative of Rokhlin and Major General Ivan Babichev, the new commander of the Western Group, with assistance from Kvashnin at operational headquarters. These commanders recognized that a modern city could not be stormed by lightly armored infantry and airborne units. The only hope of success was to create storm detachments, establish strongholds, and then clear the city building by building.

The infantry storm detachments were a doctrinal innovation inspired by the use of *bronegruppy* during the Afghan war and 8th Guards Army's experience in Stalingrad and Berlin during World War II. A storm detachment was an infantry battalion equipped with a tank or engineer platoon, two mortar batteries, smoke generating equipment, a howitzer battery and one or two divisional artillery batteries. The detachment was, in turn, divided into three to six storm groups. These storm groups were infantry companies equipped with one or two engineer sections, an artillery platoon or single artillery piece, smoke equipment and a *bronegruppa* formed from two tanks and a BMP or two BMPs and a tank, depending on the nature of the objective. During combat, cover and support groups would draw enemy fire while the storm group would move in for the kill. Fire support came from 122mm and 152mm self-propelled howitzers and anti-aircraft guns. Helicopter gunships were used against snipers and Chechen fire positions in the tower blocks.[30] The storm detachments were reinforced by sections of GRU Spetsnaz. This improvised doctrine and force structure had its drawbacks. Poorly trained battalion and company commanders were barely able to control all the assets assigned to them. What little unit cohesion existed was destroyed by continual force re-packaging. Bad

communications and the lack of fire support co-ordinators obliged sub-unit commanders to rely on direct fire from their artillery. The resulting collateral damage was enormous. All pretension to preserving life and property was dropped and Grozny began to resemble war ravaged Berlin. However, the storm groups and detachments eventually accomplished their mission.

On 6 January 1995 Rokhlin and Babichev relaunched the offensive against Grozny's defenders after receiving motorized rifle, naval infantry and Spetsnaz reinforcements. The naval infantry proved to be the most proficient in the new force structure and tactics.[31] Marines from the Pacific, Baltic and Northern Fleets were given a week to train in storming techniques and develop unit cohesion. During this time they received a few tactical tips from the operations department at Kvashnin's headquarters, but mainly relied on information from troops returning from battle. On 19 January, the 876th Naval Infantry Detachment and a reconnaissance battalion from Rokhlin's 20th Guards Division destroyed the last Chechen strongpoints in the city center and seized the Presidential Palace. By the end of the month the Russians had pushed their Chechen opponents out of Grozny

Despite this victory, Dudayev's army survived to fight another day. Fighting soon resumed in the villages south and east of Grozny in the spring of 1995.[32] Chechen defenses at Argun, Gudermes and Shali were stormed by marines supported by guided missile fire from helicopter gunships. Spetsnaz units stormed Bamut in mid-April but the Chechens escaped annihilation. In June Russian ground troops and heliborne assault units stormed the mountain strongholds at Vedeno and Shatoi using non-linear tactics developed in Afghanistan. However, superior firepower has proven no match for local knowledge and a savage determination to prevail. From the hostage siege at Pervomaiskoe in January 1996 to the Chechen recapture of Grozny in August the Russian army has been unable to respond to the realities of intensified warfare. Now that hostilities have died down, the new Minister of Defense, General I. N. Rodionov, and the Russian General Staff must return to their herculean task: the most fundamental doctrinal reform and force restructuring of the Russian armed forces since the Crimean War. How this will be accomplished in an era of unprecedented fiscal crisis, political instability and social dislocation remains to be seen.

Conclusion

What effect has the war in Afghanistan and the 1994–96 Chechen conflict had on Russian military doctrine? At the strategic level political and military leaders still seem haunted by the social-darwinistic principle of 'forward

defense' left over from the Soviet era. The first battle for Grozny indicated a return to this geostrategic world-view and military solutions for the purpose of protecting the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and, by implication, the re-integration of the FSU into a collective security system. According to a 1996 study published by the Institute of Defense Studies in Moscow, Russia's primary security concern is 'aggressive non-Russian nationalism' in the Baltic region, the Caucasus and the Caspian basin, with the expansion of NATO as a medium to long-term threat.[33] Presidential elections and humiliation at the hands of the Chechens have not discredited this world-view. The current political and economic situation in Russia dictates the pursuit of state interests by more conciliatory means, but this may change when serious reform of the military is completed.

As yet there is no consensus on the details of military reform. However, many voices within the Russian defense community, including that of Rodionov, agree that the Russian armed forces must be prepared for the modern equivalent of 'lightning war' – limited conventional war conducted by small detachments and air mobile force using non-linear tactics. The most appropriate force structure would be some type of rapid reaction force similar to the Mobile Forces, although many questions remain concerning its composition and relationship to the military district system. Unified military-political command has also gained support, with Rodionov actively promoting the General Staff in its traditional role as co-ordinator between the various power structures.

Ultimately, these two wars have illustrated the 'knowledge deficit' that exists between central planners and field commanders in the Soviet and Russian armed forces; a deficit that undermines individual initiative, corrodes morale and results in indiscriminate violence. Future conflicts will require more capable units at lower levels using more intensive staff methods. Tactical commanders will need to become more proficient in both automated control systems and standard field practices if they expect to overcome their opponent. This knowledge deficit can only be addressed by a fundamental review of doctrine and a thorough study of lessons learned in Afghanistan and Chechnya.

NOTES

1. These issues have been extensively discussed in print over the last 15 years. For recent synopses see J. Kipp, 'Russian Military Forecasting and the Revolution in Military Affairs', *Jnl of Slavic Military Studies* [hereafter *JSMS*] 9/1 (March 1996) pp.1–45, and M.C. FitzGerald, 'The Russian Military's Strategy for "Sixth Generation" Warfare', *Orbis* (Summer 1994) pp.457–476. See also M. Gareev, *Esli zavtra voina ...?* (Moscow: VlaDar 1995) p.7 This article was originally prepared for a seminar presentation at the US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Dept of National Security Affairs, 8 Aug. 1996. I

wish to thank William O'Malley at RAND, Greg Celestan, Jake Kipp, Tim Sanz, Tim Thomas and Les Grau at the Foreign Army Studies Office and John Arquilla at the Naval Postgraduate School, for their helpful advice and encouragement.

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3. J. Erickson and L. Hansen, *Soviet Combined Arms: Past and Present,* College Station Papers No.1, Center for Strategic Technology (College Station: Texas A & M U. 1981) pp.2, 17–18.
4. D. Glantz, (ed.) *Soviet Documents on the Use of War Experience* (London: Frank Cass 1991). See also R.H. Scales, Jr., *Firepower in Limited War* (Washington DC: National Defense UP 1990) pp.163–8.
5. R. Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,* Leavenworth Papers No.20 (Ft Leavenworth: Combat Studies Inst. 1993).
6. S.R. McMichael, *Stumbling Bear: Soviet Military Performance in Afghanistan* (London: Brassey's 1991). See also L. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Tactics and Tactical Lessons Learned during their War in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: National Defense UP, 1996). [Also available in Vol.7, issues 3 & 4 (1994) and Vol.8, issue 1 (March 1995) of *JSMS*].
7. L. Grau, 'Soviet Nonlinear Combat in Future Conflict', *Military Review* (Dec. 1990) p.17.
8. Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* (note 6) pp.178–81, and McMichael, *Stumbling Bear* (note 6) pp.67–71.
9. For a more detailed description of this process see Grau, 'Soviet Nonlinear Combat in Future Conflict' (note 7) pp.26–7.
10. McMichael, *Stumbling Bear,* (note 6) pp.72–4, 78–9, 118–21.
11. W. O'Malley and E. McDonald, *Russia's New Mobile Forces.* Project Memorandum 250–AF/A (Santa Monica, CA RAND 1994) p.15.
12. J.W.R. Lepingwell, 'Restructuring the Russian Military', *RFE/RL Research Report* 2/25 (18 June 1993) p.17.
13. I.N. Vorobyev, 'Tactics in Local Wars and Armed Conflicts', *Voennaia Mysl'* [English trans.] No.1 (Jan.–Feb.1995) pp.39–45. See also N.N. Ostroumov *et al. Voennye iskusstvo v lokal'nykh voinakh (1945–1990)* (Moscow: Institut Voennoi Istorii MO SSSR 1991) pp.2–7, 76–80. For more commentary see M.C. FitzGerald, 'The Soviet Image of Future War: The Impact of Desert Storm', Ch.14 in W.C. Frank Jr and P.S. Gillette, (eds.) *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915–1991* (NY: Greenwood Press 1992) pp.362–86.
14. 'Creation of New Mobile Forces Planned' [trans. of D. Kholodov, 'President Yeltsin's Mobile Soldiers: Army Will Deal with Terrorism' *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 12 Feb.1994, p.1] FBIS-SOV-95.
15. O'Malley, *Russia's New Mobile Forces* (note 11) pp.12–15.
16. See Grau's recent article for more details: 'Peacekeeper '95: 27th Guards Train with 'Big Red One', *Military Review* No.2 (March–April 1996) pp.5–11.
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18. Lepingwell, 'Restructuring the Russian Military' (note 12) p.20.
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22. P. Felgenhauer, 'The Character of Military Operations in Chechnya', Conference paper presented to the Dept of National Security Affairs, The Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey CA, Nov. 1995, p.5. See also N.N. Novichkov *et al. Rossiiskie vooruzhennye sily v chechskom konflikte: analiz, itogi, vyvody* (Moscow: Kholveg-Infoglob 1995) pp.14–15, and Thomas (note 19) p.6 estimate.

23. Novichkov (note 22) pp.30–6. Novichkov cites a report on the operational preparedness of the NCMD prepared by General Staff representatives and military district staff and leaked to the press: 'Raport', *Novaia ezhednevnaia gazeta*, 28 Jan. 1995.
24. C.W. Blandy, *The Significance of Pervomaiskoe* (Camberley: RMAS Combat Studies Research Centre 1996) p.12.
25. A. Lieven, 'The Meaning of the Chechen War', unpub.MS (Spring, 1996) p.7.
26. R. Peters, 'Our Soldiers, Their Cities', *Parameters* 26/1 (Spring 1996) pp.43–50.
27. Novichkov (note 22) p.67.
28. Lieven (note 25) p.4.
29. This process of regaining control of the combat situation is described by Felgenhauer (note 22) pp.14–17. See also Novichkov (note 22) pp.61–5 for more details.
30. Grau, 'Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Groznyi', *INSS Strategic Forum*, No.38, July 1995. This article is also available from the Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft Leavenworth, KS. See *Publications*. http://www.leav.army.mil/fmso. (5 May 1996). See also G. Celestan, 'Artillery Use in Groznyi', unpub. paper FMSO, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS July 1996).
31. I. Aleshin, 'My segodnia ne te ...', *Morskoi sbornik*, No.3 (March 1995) pp.19–22.
32. A more detailed account is given in Novichkov (note 22) pp.74–94. Russian air power in Chechnya is described in V. Kondratiev, 'The Awesome Sky Over Chechnya', *Krylya Rodina* No.1 (Jan. 1996 tran. in FBIS-UMA-96-055-S, 20 March 1996). See also Blandy (note 24).
33. V.A. Dement'iev and A.V. Surikov, 'Kontseptual'nye polozheniia strategii reformirovaniia Vooruzhennykh sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii', unpub. paper (Moscow: Institut Oboronnykh Issledovanii Feb. 1996). Additional commentary is provided by D. Hearst, 'Limping giant beats a slow retreat', *Guardian Weekly*, 11 Feb. 1996, p.11.