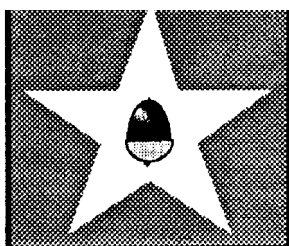


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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**Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions
An Interim Comparison and Assessment**

January 2000



P29

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CHECHNYA: TWO FEDERAL INTERVENTIONS AN INTERIM COMPARISON AND ASSESSMENT

C W Blandy

Introduction

Legacy of History

Before embarking on an interim comparison of the two recent Federal intervention operations into Chechnya, namely the 1994-1996 military intervention and the present campaign which embraces Federal action to counter the 'invasion' of Dagestan on 2 August 1999, the siege and destruction of the Kadar zone complex, the expulsion of Chechen and Islamic extremist groupings from Novolakskiy rayon and Chechnya's subsequent occupation by Federal forces, it is important to recall the factors that have formed the historical legacy in the Caucasus, in particular Chechen intractability with regard to Moscow following the demise of the Soviet Union, and Communist power, which have given rise to the long litany of destructive conflict and human misery throughout the region.

As most people are aware, the Caucasus is a region of complexities, rich in the diversity of peoples, nations and language, but to an extent still bearing the scars of earlier Tsarist conquest, the Long Caucasian War embodying the relentless southward march of the Caucasus Fortified Lines, subsequent colonial rule, the 'forced migrations' which resulted in the establishment of large North Caucasus diasporas in Turkey, Jordan, Syria and movement too of some of these peoples across the Black Sea to the Balkans.

It remains a region exploited and impoverished by the legacies of the former Soviet Union, a region confused and still suffering from the effects of the flawed territorial-administrative structures and nationalities' policy of Soviet Communist power in the furtherance of '*divide and rule*'. Certainly as flawed territorial-administrative structures Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria are but two examples. From a purist stance, even another small republic in the North Caucasus named the Checheno-Ingush ASSR on 5 December 1936, and now two different territorial-administrative entities, namely the Republic of Ingushetia and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, should possibly have been called the Vaynakh ASSR or even the Nakhcho-Galgay ASSR¹. One should remember the administrative status

¹ Letter from Colonel Anatoliy Sergeevich Smirnov, entitled "*Pochemu zabyvayut ob Ingushakh*", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 242 (2085), 25 December 1999, p8, as a result of an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 11 November 1999 "*Samyy trudnyy dlya Rossii narod*" by D Furman. Colonel Smirnov says: "... the division of the Vaynakh into Chechens and Ingush only took place in the period of the Russian conquest of the North Caucasus. A group of elders representing about a quarter of the Vaynakh People gathered by the Ingush mountain, voluntarily took the decision to belong to the Russian Empire in 1810. From that time this part of the Vaynakh became known as the Ingushi. Elders of the largest part of the Vaynakh teips gathered in Chechen aul, made the decision about armed resistance to the aspirations of the Russian Eagle. From then this part of the Vaynakh started to be called Chechens. The lands populated by the supporters of the decision taken at Chechen aul were joined to the Russian Empire only in 1859 as a result of murderous battles and

initially afforded to Abkhazia in December 1921, one of equality with Georgia through the Treaty of Alliance, only to be reduced in 1931 to that of an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR. Additionally, the anomalies stemming from the Treaty of Moscow of 16 March 1921 between the Bolsheviks and Turkey, and the later Treaty of Kars of 13 October 1921 could be held to have laid the foundations for the eruption of conflict and violence between Armenian and Azeri in Nagornyy Karabakh, which came to haunt the ebb of Communist power in the late 1980s.

It is a region whose internal social fabric became distorted not only by mass deportation during the Great Patriotic War, but also from the consequences of a return from exile, where rehabilitation was the victim of bureaucratic prejudice and inertia, leaving territorial disputes which still remain unsettled today as sources of social aggravation and conflict. In this context, the question of Prigorodnyy rayon in the dispute between Ingush and North Osetian is but one example. Another is the question of former Chechen lands, such as Aukhovskiy rayon, later renamed Novolakskiy rayon, which was transferred to Dagestan and repopulated by Laks in place of Chechens in 1944. Following the Chechen return from exile in 1957, Lak resettlement was attempted in 1991 by Makhachkala but led to conflict between Lak and plainsman Kumuk. Also worthy of note in this context is the fact that the Meskhetian Turk has still not been welcomed back to his Georgian homeland.

It is a region where *perestroyka* and *glasnost'* in the late 1980s gave false promise to people's aspirations but were in fact to herald severe ethnic strife, enforced migration, refugees, economic deprivation and large-scale unemployment. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought additional complication with the establishment of a new formal international frontier along the length of the Great Caucasus Range between the Russian Federation, fronted by the small North Caucasus Republics, and the newly-created Transcaucasus sovereign states. This impacted particularly on relations between North Caucasus Muslim and Muslim Abkhaz, the North and South Osetians and the Lezghin people split by the new frontier and the Samur River between Dagestan and Azerbaijan.

Legacy of Negative Perceptions

Additional factors which have in effect been conducive in preparing the ground and encouraging the desire for wide-scale change in some, but not all states, are found within the entangled complex of emotions, mutually corrosive feelings and negative perceptions fixed in the minds of both Russians and the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia. For, on the one hand, there exists the traditional contempt and hostility of the ordinary Russian, the 'power-wielding structures' in Moscow, and the military² toward the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus, Transcaucasus and Central Asia, whom the Russian variously describes in derogatory terms as being of 'Caucasian Nationality', 'Tatar', 'Asiatic', 'Tea Drinker'

political manoeuvres. It is important to remark that the names "Chechenets" and "Ingush" were in everyday usage by the Russians. The names used by these branches of the Vaynakh people - Nakhcho and Galgay - were not known to the population of Russia, neither were they used in Tsarist or contemporary documents of Russia."

² This arrogance was undoubtedly a factor which contributed to a lack of proper planning in the first Russo-Chechen conflict of recent times, namely, the wide-scale combat operations between 11 December 1994 and 30/31 August 1997.

from Azerbaijan or simply dismisses under the collective appellation of 'bandits', and more recently 'terrorists'. On the other hand, no less powerful emotions are reciprocated by the peoples of the North Caucasus, Transcaucasus and Central Asia toward Russia. In the northeast Caucasus a legacy of hate³, fear and anger toward Russia is present amongst the Muslim mountain peoples, due to their perceptions of economic exploitation, loss of history, literary heritage and Arabic scholarship, intensified by the long struggle for the independence of the Chechen and exacerbated by the violent, economically barren and socially disruptive aftermath. The Chechen position is encapsulated in the words of President Aslan Maskhadov⁴:

"The Chechen nation will continue to fight for their independence until Russians are off the soil of our country. We have been resisting them for 250-300 years and at no time have we ever accepted Russian domination. We know that we are on our own and that no one can help us".

³ NG – *Stsenarii*, No 7 (29), 8 July 1998, p12, "*Nasha bor'ba, ili povstancheskaya armiya imama*" by Magomed Tagayev. "Many naively believe that the war in the Caucasus began with the beginning of *perestroyka* ... we make haste to reply that the war in the Caucasus or in a different way the Caucasian War as an armed resistance against Russian expansion, has continued unceasingly"... "All those who knew about this, knew furthermore that the Russians will never be accepted in the Caucasus, as the Russians also knew this, and that Caucasians will be never be accepted in Moscow. For them it is understood that the people of the Caucasus and the Caucasus were always a thorn in the flesh in Russian eyes". On the question of exploitation: "It is a secret and well inspired action, directed on the seizure of other peoples' territories, which from the time of Ivan Kalita was called 'the collection of land'. From history it is well known how he throttled and oppressed, drank the blood and sweat of the population of the territories adjoining Moscow (Smerds, Kholops, Rabs) sucking everything out to the last kopek in order to pay all this to the leader of the Golden Horde, next to the Khan of the Great Order, then the Khans of Kazan', Astrakhan, and finally right up to 1701 to the Crimean Khan. Thus, having cleaned up the lands of free Novgorod and Pskov ... the lands of Vologda, Kostroma, Vyatka and Ryazan' and so up to infinity, having obtained the right to receive tribute in place of the Khans of the Golden Horde, the Russian consequently also outplayed their teachers in deception, cruelty, treachery and evil". *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Volume 10, 3rd Edition, 28 September 1972, p6 "Ivan I, Danilovich Kalita (date of birth unknown, died 31.3.1340) ... was cruel and cunning, intelligent and stubborn in the achievement of his aims as a ruler. Played a large role in the strengthening of the Moscow Principality collecting Rus lands around Moscow, using for these aims the assistance of the Golden Horde for which he collected from the population a huge tribute. Ruthlessly he crossed people, dissatisfaction summoned by heavy requisitions, he smoothed things out with political enemies - other Russian princes. The influence of Ivan I was spread over a series of lands of the north-east of Rus (Tver, Pskov, Novgorod and others). He amassed great riches (from here his nickname '*kalita*' – moneybags.)" S I Ozhegov "*Slovar' Russkogo Yazyka*", Moscow, "*Russkiy Yazyk*", 1978, definitions of: 'Smerd' p675 "*In ancient Rus': peasant-land cultivators*"; 'Kholops' p796 – (1) "*In ancient Rus' - a dependent person situated in a form close to slavery: in feudal Russia - a peasant, servant*". (2) "*A person prepared for anything out of servility, bootlicking, toadying*"; 'Rabs' p586 "*In a slave owning society: a person who has lost all rights and means of production and is the full responsibility of the landowner, who ordains his work and life*".

⁴ Stated by Major General Aslan Maskhadov on arrival of medical fact-finding mission under Dr Marie Bennigsen-Broxup in Chechnya on 3 December and again on 4 December 1995 to the author at Shali. See C W Blandy "*The Significance of Pervomayskoye*" P19, CSRC, April 1996, p54, Box 35.

Yet, strangely, within the confines of the Caucasus a closer affinity appeared to exist between Terek or Sundzha Cossack settler and a Chechen, Ingush or Dagestani than between Cossack and Russian because in many regards the Cossacks also came to believe themselves to be indigenous peoples of the Caucasus⁵.

There is a measure of bitterness remaining against Moscow from the Dagestani peoples caught up in the aftermath of Kizlyar and the debacle of Pervomayskoye in January 1996, although this may now be tempered to some degree by the rebuilding of Pervomayskoye which now "*sparkles with new houses*"⁶. However, the 1999 artillery and aerial bombardment of the villages in Botlikh rayon and the villages of Chabanmakhi, Karamakhi and Kadar comprising the Islamic extremist complex in Buynaksk rayon cannot be expected to have endeared the Federal Forces to them. However, the 6,000 or more inhabitants of Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony who fled as refugees to Makhachkala in August may benefit from the additional funding of 300 million rubles put aside by the Federal government to cover the reconstruction of 1,880 houses announced by Premier Vladimir Putin during his visit to Dagestan on 27 August 1999⁷. Nevertheless, before any rebuilding work can be undertaken there is an urgent requirement to complete the clearance of mines, unexploded artillery shells and bombs used by the Federal forces to dislodge the illegal bandit formations from Avaristan.

There is the mental confusion of the North Osetians, whether to remain tied to their Russian master or to become a people who are whole-heartedly part of the North Caucasus family; the smouldering embers of anger and mistrust of the Ingush remain toward Moscow over Prigorodnyy Rayon. It would not be surprising if Ingush mistrust of Moscow has been further fuelled by indiscriminate murder, brutality and inhuman treatment of their Vaynakh cousins, resulting in the presence of more than 200,000 refugees from Chechnya in Ingushetia.

Moving south to the Transcaucasus, as in the past Georgia lies uncomfortably between the Christian and Muslim worlds, where outwardly neither Russia nor Turkey are regarded as an enemy or a threat to Georgian national security or stability. However, Georgians recognise that Russia, in keeping with a long historical geopolitical strategy, perceived the need for a Transcaucasian buffer zone, resulting in the presence of a strong Russian military presence in the Republic. In the past Georgians realised that they could not survive without Russia, but at the same time they did not relish being under Russian control; in fact they resented Russian domination. Therefore, Georgia had to follow a pragmatic policy tailored to Russian foreign policy requirements. Today, to some extent this has resulted in an

⁵ In this context it is interesting to note from *Izvestiya* of 17 August 1999 that "Seventy nine years after the Communist government took away the Cossack's land in the North Caucasus, the Communist governor of Stavropol' Kray, Aleksandr Chernogorov, is giving it back. In the next week the governor will transfer 43,000 hectares of agricultural land to the Cossacks as a way of increasing the protection along the Chechen border."

⁶ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5 February 1998, p1. See C W Blandy "*Dagestan: The Gathering Storm*" S38, CSRC, April 1998, p34.

⁷ The Dagestan Ministry for Emergency Situations is considering two rehabilitation possibilities: either to open accounts for each family and transfer funds to them directly or for rebuilding work to be undertaken by military construction services. Nabi Abdullayev, Russian Regional Report, Vol 4, No 33, 'Putin offers Dagestan more money, but little diplomatic help'.

ambivalent attitude of the Georgian, with a tendency to cast blame on Russia, ignoring his own Georgian excesses of ill-discipline, seeing only the 'hidden hand of Russia' operating in a destructive mode. And yet at the same time the Georgian harbours concerns over his large regional neighbour to the southwest, as demonstrated by a reluctant attitude toward the rehabilitation of the Meskhetian Turk together with a degree of concern over the minority Armenian population in the districts of Akhaltsikhye and Akhalkalaki.

Azerbaijan desires escape from Russia, while at the same time Baku does not seek in its place a new 'Big Brother' relationship with Turkey. Instead it is anxious to secure approval and partnership with the West, in particular with the United States, together with the return of Nagornyy Karabakh under Baku's control and the restoration of territory currently under Armenian occupation. Conversely, small and landlocked Armenia seeks reassurance and security through a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with Russia⁸. Furthermore there would appear to be an element of respect from the Russian toward the Armenian not only as leading exponents of military art⁹, but also because of their other qualities¹⁰.

Global Context

However, it is important not to lose sight of the wider context when focussing on the Caucasus and to remember that far from still being imprisoned within the rigid, restrictive confines of Soviet Communist power, the Caucasus-Caspian region, of which the Russian North Caucasus is very much a part, is now fast becoming the focus of global interest. It is acquiring an increasing geostrategic significance in which not only do "*the interests of the United States, Western Europe, Russia, Iran and Turkey cut across one another at a regional level*"¹¹; the global dimension is illustrated by companies representing a world-wide diversity of states ranging from Argentina to Japan. There is also a dichotomy of interest expressed by Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in obtaining future benefit from the region's energy resources on the one hand and the impact of Caspian oil on other oil producers, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States on the other hand.

⁸ Signed in Moscow by Presidents Yel'tsin and Ter-Petrosyan on 29 August 1997.

⁹ General Bagration (1765-1812), Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan (1897-1982) and Marshal of Armoured Tank Troops Babadzhanian (1906-1977) were all Armenian.

¹⁰ Vanora Bennett "*Crying Wolf - The Return of the War to Chechnya*", Picador, 1998, p15, "... though she (Yevgeniya) did concede that Armenians were hard-nosed businessmen, drivers of vicious bargains".

¹¹ C W Blandy "*The Caspian: Comminatory Crosscurrents*" S40, CSRC, January 1999 p1. There is a strong belief from the Russian side that whoever secures the major share of oil pipeline transit will gain enhanced influence not only throughout the Caucasus and Central Asia but also on a global political scale. Hence Moscow's opposition to not only the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline link, but also the proposed pipeline under the Caspian Sea from Kazakhstan to Baku. Both these routes would enhance the influence of Turkey at the expense of Russia. See Blandy "*The Caucasus Region and Caspian Basin: Change, Complication and Challenge*", S36, CSRC, April 1998, p6-9.

Finally, giving rise to future apprehensions on the part of the Western powers, in addition to those concerns already stemming from the instabilities in the Russian Federation and Moscow's predilection and potential to cause trouble in the form of conflicts in the Caucasus which threaten the interests of the USA, there also stands the recent activity of the Peoples Republic of China in taking 'fills' of Kazakh oil and negotiating for Turkmen oil and gas from the eastern littoral of the Caspian to augment future serious shortfalls in domestic supplies.

In addition to the region becoming open to outside influence on a global scale, evidence has continued to accumulate on the waning of Russian influence in the Caucasus, in particular her inability to curb organised crime, restore law and order and provide security for the inhabitants of the North Caucasus, in turn raising the spectre of a repetition of the period immediately before and after the demise of Communist power.

Even before this second Russo-Chechen conflict, it was possible to postulate that the dangers of miscalculation and collision had increased in the Caucasus-Caspian region, for working at six mutually inter-related and overlapping levels are:

1. The slow-burning fuse and consequences of an enfeebled application of Russian power and influence;
2. The legal confusion over the definition of the Caspian Sea's status and the inability to obtain agreement from all five riparian states;
3. The re-emergence of historic, regional rivalry which is taking shape in a more subtle, but none the less ruthless form between Russia, Turkey and Iran, together with the possibility of proxy manipulation by minor players which may have the potential to attract major power interest, through hydrocarbon and mineral deposits or location and suitability of territory for their transport;
4. As mentioned above, the opening up of the Caucasus-Caspian Region on a global scale;
5. Relations between Russia and the Islamic World, with the possibility of the complete loss to Russia of the whole of the North Caucasus and the establishment of an Islamic Republic stretching from the Black Sea littoral and Kuban' in the west to Makhachkala and the Caspian littoral in the east;
6. The no-less serious environmental and ecological issues, the plight of the Caspian Sturgeon (*Osetr*) in its varieties, Beluga (*Huso Huso*), Sevruga (*Acipenser stellatus*) and Ship (*Acipenser nudiventurus*), and the decline in the Caspian fishing industry to some extent caused by the negative effects of oil exploration in conservation areas, organised poaching and the real concerns generated by the rising sea level of the Caspian.

Russian Sensitivities

However, it must not be forgotten that the North Caucasus, marking the southern boundary of the Russian Federation, and the Transcaucasus buffer zone remain areas of direct and vital concern to Moscow, in particular to the military mind, whose perceptions both in the past and now remain ever sensitive to penetration by influence or by the possibility of actual threats to the territorial integrity of Russia. These threats are not only those directly posed by the other two regional powers, but also in Moscow's eyes, any form of interference by the West. To this must be added the impact of NATO expansion, increased Western activity in Georgia,

Azerbaijan, and in the other littoral states of the Caspian Basin, perceived by Russia to run counter to her own vital interests. To the Russian, the Caspian Basin lies within his zone of influence, the North Caucasus is an inalienable part of Russia and furthermore:

“The North Caucasus and Transcaucasus must be considered as a part of a whole ‘security complex’ which includes: the southern oblasts and national republics of Russia; Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and also Turkey and Iran. This is reflected in the fact that the North Caucasus continues to play a decisive role in the fate of the Transcaucasus and Caucasian security complex as a whole”¹².

Therefore, events which occur in the North Caucasus will have an impact on life in the Transcaucasus and likewise those which take place immediately beyond the southern borders of the Russian Federation will also have an effect on life in the immediate hinterland, whether it be in the Caucasus or Central Asia.

Whilst at the present time Moscow perceives the need to reassert its constitutional authority over Chechnya, a second round of conflict in an unsettled and volatile Russian North Caucasus in itself threatens the peaceful and productive emergence of the Caucasus-Caspian region on to the world stage, particularly taking into account the vulnerable positions of the three relatively new sovereign states of the Southern Caucasus, especially where two of them border the Russian Federation. Georgia and Azerbaijan could suffer from Federal cross-border pursuit operations and interdiction of Chechen caravan routes bringing in arms and ammunition. The third, Armenia with Armenian Karabakh, could suffer from external, extremist Muslim reaction in the form of Chechen *boyeviki* [fighters] or other Muslim fighters offering assistance to enable the Azeris to recover territory occupied by Armenians. Both Movladi Udugov¹³ and Shamil’ Basayev are quoted as saying that having fulfilled their intention of establishing an Islamic state in the North Caucasus *“it would be the beginning of the process of liberating all remaining Muslim lands”*¹⁴. Whilst at the present time the occupation of the northern part of Chechnya and major population centres in the central plain by Federal Forces are possibly *“making the Basayev threat even more speculative, nevertheless, the possibility of*

¹² Eduard Ozghiganov in roundtable discussion in *NG-Religii*, No 6 (18), 17 June 1998, p12/13, *“Faktory destabilizatsii religiozno politicheskoy situatsii v Dagestane”*.

¹³ Movladi Udugov was originally a journalist with a Russian language newspaper in Groznyy. When Aslan Maskhadov was Dudayev’s military COS during the Russo-Chechen conflict, Udugov was Minister for Information (Chechen Republic of Ichkeria). During a visit to Chechnya in early December 1995, the author met Udugov and was impressed by his quick grasp of detail, although tousle-haired and fierce-eyed. He appeared to act as Maskhadov’s personal staff officer. Following the Chechen elections at the end of January 1997 Udugov became Foreign Minister with special responsibility for negotiating the status of Chechnya. The Russians were impressed by the Udugov’s voracious appetite for tearing into paperwork and producing early comment. Almost a fanatical Islamist, he is no longer a member of Maskhadov’s government team. Regarded as an Islamist ideologue, he is the Director of the Caucasus Research Centre and Kavkaz Tsentr web site.

¹⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 191 (2007), 13 October 1999, p5, *“Novyy vitok protivostaniya”* by Armen Khanbabayan. Shamil’ Basayev is the Chechen field commander who was responsible for the Budennovsk raid in June 1995.

the appearance of Chechen detachments arriving on the Karabakh Front exists and is realistic enough"¹⁵ to warrant the concern of Yerevan and Stepanakert.

¹⁵

Ibid.

The Russo-Chechen Conflict Of 1994-1996

Prelude to Conflict

Growth of Opposition to Dudayev

The actions of President Dzhokhar Dudayev between his declaration of independence from the Russian Federation in late 1991 and November 1994 maintained Chechnya on a collision course with Russia. Not only did a state of confusion and confrontation develop in the Chechen Parliament, but during 1994 open rebellion to his rule had taken over seven out of the 14 rayony of Chechnya. Furthermore his actions had caused seething unrest amongst the different peoples who lived in the former Checheno-Ingushetia, creating a position of uncertainty in matters of politics and territory for the Ingush, over and above their problems with Prigorodnyy rayon, precipitating demands by the Terek and Sunzhenskiy Cossacks for their own autonomous districts, and becoming instrumental in forcing a large exodus of other ethnic groups, including substantial numbers of Russians. Moreover, in September 1994, the Chechen Interim Council, who were firmly against Dudayev, emphasised the negative effects of Dudayev's rule¹⁶:

"The rule of Dzhokhar Dudayev, which has lasted for almost three years, has placed the Chechen Republic on the brink of political and economic catastrophe. The Republic's economy and social sphere has been completely ruined and almost no longer functions; unemployment has passed the 50% mark; the little which is produced and brings in revenue is pilfered by the mafioso-functionary clans, and the rest goes to maintain Dudayev's Junta and the inordinately swollen services apparatus, and the people find themselves on the brink of destitution, ... an orgy of embezzlement of public funds ... impoverishment of the Chechen people and furthermore the destruction of the age-old Chechen traditions, the launch of genocide against our own peoples and the spilling of fraternal blood".

Russian Concerns

There was no doubt that the continuation of Chechen "independence" came to be seen by the "power wielding structures" in the Kremlin as reducing the authority of Moscow and consequently damaging the viability of the Russian Federation. Whilst in the legitimate view of many, until the Chechen problem was resolved not only would the situation over Prigorodniyy rayon remain an intractable issue, but Chechen anarchy could threaten other political structures in the North Caucasus, in particular, those of Kabardino-Balkar and Dagestan, with North Osetia the main pillars of Russian policy in the North Caucasus. Furthermore, from a traditional Russian historical viewpoint, the maintenance of the Transcaucasus as a buffer zone to counter Turkish and Iranian ambitions was dependent on firm Russian rule and order in the North Caucasus. Preservation of influence in the Transcaucasus and the Caspian Basin was vital for the exploitation and control of raw materials, such as oil and gas and their pipelines.

A case could be made that it was only a matter of time before the Chechens sorted the matter out themselves, for it was becoming apparent that Dudayev was losing support throughout Chechnya. However, whilst it could even be argued that there

¹⁶ See C W Blandy, "The Chechen Conflict - A microcosm of the Russian Army's past, present and future", Janes Intelligence Review, Special Report No 11, 1996.

was no need for direct armed intervention by Russian Federal Forces, there were those occupying positions of authority in Moscow who came to believe that:

“The endemic divisiveness of the Chechen opposition and their failure to work together to dislodge the Dudayev regime without outside intervention; the failure of the covert operations led by the FSK and the capture of servicemen, reduced the options to two, direct assault on the illegal Grozny regime, or a de facto recognition of Dudayev as a legitimate negotiating partner; ... that regular forces could achieve a swift victory.”¹⁷

Emergence of “The Party of War”

The situation was further complicated by rival factions within the Kremlin in their bids to retain power, influence and in particular unrestricted funding during a period of financial stringency and cuts. The emergence of an increasingly influential and hard-line group, consisting of Major General Aleksandr Korzhakov, Head of the Presidential Security Service, Sergei Stepashin, Director of the Federal Counter-Intelligence Service (FSK), Viktor Yerin, Minister of Internal Affairs and Nikolai Yegorov, nominated as Yel'tsin's special representative in Chechnya, was to have profound implications for Russian politics, for the influence of this cabal was beyond parliamentary control.

“As with the decision to intervene in Afghanistan in 1979, policy over Chechnya seems to have been the product of informal “kitchen cabinet” deliberations by a handful of grandees driven above all by personal and institutional self-interests ¹⁸.

Some five years later there was a similar miasma of questions, uncertainties, suspicions and speculation of involvement by Federal secret services in the circumstances of the ‘invasion’ by illegal bandit formations into Dagestan in August 1999, which started the second Russo-Chechen conflict¹⁹.

The Creation of a National Leader

However, the involvement and subsequent capture of Russian Army officers and men in the Chechen opposition coup attempt against Dudayev on 26 November 1994 and the Yel'tsin ultimatum issued on 26 November were instrumental in rallying the majority of the Chechen people fully behind Dudayev in his stand against Russian intervention, despite his previous erratic rule and predilection for the exaggerated phrase and grandiose pronouncement. President Yel'tsin had created a national leader overnight. This ill-conceived ultimatum of President Yel'tsin requiring both factions in Chechnya to lay down their arms within 48 hours and to stop fighting did more to rally the Chechen behind Dudayev than any other factor, on the basis that even life under Dudayev was better than life under Russian military occupation. This act was to provide a focal point from which Chechen resistance to Russian armed intervention would stem, enabling the Chechen people to recall a parallel in the successful military operations of a past

¹⁷ Richard Sakwa, Draft paper from *“The Chechen Crisis and Russian Political Development”* at the Conference on Chechnya at the Royal Geographical Society, London, 26 October 1995, p5, *“Causes and Scope of the War”*.

¹⁸ Dr Mark Galeotti, *“Decline and Fall - Moscow's Chechen War”*, Janes Intelligence Review, February 1995, Volume 7, Number 2, p50.

¹⁹ See C W Blandy *“Dagestan: The Storm”*, CSRC, forthcoming.

talented commander and leader of a national liberation campaign during the Long Caucasian War, namely Imam Shamil III.

Federal Armed Intervention - Phase 1

The Fruits of Ignorance compounded by Arrogance

Perhaps this first Russo-Chechen conflict in recent times showed all too clearly, not only in the West, but also for the first time on Russian television screens and in the responsible press, that very little had changed since the days of the Long Caucasian War and later Soviet Communist power. The primary mind-set of some Russian political and military figures with regard to the Chechens appeared:

*“to consist of ignorance compounded by an arrogance, rooted in a centuries-old contempt for Muslims, Asiatics and Tatars. Further confirmation of the belief that nothing has changed is found in the extensive and overwhelming use of force supported by a massive concentration of tube artillery, multi-barrelled rocket launchers, missiles, mortars, tanks and aerial firepower, resulting in a degree of devastation and destruction not seen since the battles and operations of the Great Patriotic War”.*²⁰

Another illustration of arrogance was to achieve unsought-after notoriety: the subsequently oft-repeated remark accorded to General Pavel Grachev, the Defence Minister at the time, when he promised *“to take Grozny with one airborne assault regiment in two hours”*²¹.

However, this first wide-scale military operation against the Chechen in recent times, 11 December 1994 to 31 August 1996, was not a successful venture for Russia. Within some 18 months it led to the ignominious departure of the Federal Armed Forces from Chechen soil under the humiliating terms of the Khasavyurt Accords of 30/31 August 1996. To the question posed by Nikolai Yegorov earlier in 1994, *“Do you mean to say that with our tanks we can't beat a load of shepherds?”*²² painfully for the Russian military professional the answer was in the negative, as illustrated by the six Chechen 'victories' contained in Box 1 below. Perhaps more pertinently it was at the very top echelons of the political pyramid and power structures where the problem ultimately lay, in the seeming inability or unwillingness to grasp the new realities of life which led to the statement: *“... our former army, at one time unbeatable and legendary, is little by little falling to pieces”*²³.

²⁰ C W Blandy, *“The Chechen Conflict: Escalation and Expansion”* P15, CSRC, June 1995, p29.

²¹ The remark of Grachev was recently repeated in an interview with General Kazantsev. *Trud*, 10 November 1999, through Natsional'nya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka, *“General Kazantsev: V Chechne poydu do kontsa”*.

²² Nikolai Yegorov, President Yel'tsin's special representative in Chechnya quoted in an article entitled *“Vooruzhena i Ochen' Opasna”* by Aleksandr Bodolaz, *Ogonek*, No 8, February 1996, p18.

²³ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 2, 6 January 1996.

Box 1 - "Who beat us?"²⁴**In essence, there were six Chechen victories:**

1. The rout in the first days of the war in December 1994/January 1995 of the columns advancing into Grozny.
2. The seizure by Basayev's terrorists of the hospital in Budennovsk in June 1995.
3. A similar operation by Raduyev in Kizlyar and breakout from the siege of Pervomayskoye in January 1996.
4. The ambush and rout of a column from 245 [Motor Rifle] Regiment in April 1996.
5. The storming of Grozny in March 1996.
6. A similar storming of Grozny in August 1996.

Initial Planning affected by Dissent

Right from its inception in the minds of the 'Party of War', during the planning stage and implementation of the operation a wide degree of dissent was manifest amongst senior military figures from deputy defence ministers²⁵, well aware of the open-ended nature of this conflict, either from previous knowledge of the Caucasus or experience in Afghanistan, down to formation commanders²⁶ who were reluctant initially to move against the civilian population, mindful of how the "politician" washed his hands in the aftermath of military action at Tbilisi, Baku and Vilnius in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many adduced military intervention into Chechnya to be illegal under the terms of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, in addition to the active turmoil due to conflicting loyalties in the minds of those who would have to plan and take responsibility for this controversial operation, the operation was rushed and showed little of the meticulous detailed planning, hitherto the hallmark of former Soviet military operations. They provided only an *ad hoc* grouping of units in ramshackle formations with raw, untried boy recruits in motor-rifle and tank sub-units, bolstered by a thin seasoning of hardened airborne troops; it is generally agreed that "*a major reason for the Russian Army's failure in the first war was its inability to mobilise and deploy a combat effective force to Chechnya*"²⁷.

Commencing at 0700 hrs on 11 December 1994 some 40,000 troops in three military columns were set in motion, with one coming from the main base of the North Caucasus Military District at Mozdok in North Osetia to the north-west of Chechnya, a second from Vladikavkaz to the south-west of Chechnya and the third from Dagestan to the east, converging on Chechnya, and in particular being

²⁴ Vladislav Shurygin, "*Voyna, Kotory Oni Proigrali*", *Zavtra*, No 37 (145), September 1996, p3.

²⁵ Colonel General Eduard Vorob'yev, Generals Boris Gromov, Georgy Kondrat'yev and Valery Mironov.

²⁶ Major General Ivan Babichev, commanding the western column from Vladikavkaz, refused to move against civilians in Ingushetia.

²⁷ Michael Orr in "*Some Provisional Notes on Current Russian Operations in Dagestan and Chechnya*", CSRC, 3 December 1999, <http://www.ppc.pims.org/csrc> He provides the following detail: "Men were posted into specialisations for which they had no training (for example a radar operator might become a sniper). Units never operated at anything approaching their notional strength. 20 Guards Motor Rifle Division deployed from its base in Volgograd with a total strength of 1,700 men, only about two-thirds of the wartime establishment of a single regiment... They were not trained in the type of combat in towns and mountains which they faced."

directed to a three-sided blockade of Groznyy. Perhaps they had no more of a directive than to impress on Dzhokhar Dudayev that Russia could crush Chechnya with ease, intimidate the Chechen and strike dread in the heart and minds of the local population through a display which had the ultimate menace of the use of unbridled and unrestrained force, reminiscent of the campaigns of General Yermolov in the opening stages of the Long Caucasian War.

The directive to restore constitutional order within three weeks by the mere posturing of a large-scale 'demonstration of force' to intimidate, menace and threaten by blockade was to prove ineffective, even in the early hours of the deployment, for no detailed orders were issued to cover the differing contingencies arising from the possible future actions of the Chechen opponent²⁸ to be coerced back into the Russian Federation. Nor was there an in-depth assessment of President Dudayev himself²⁹, or of the possibility of disruption of the deployment by other North Caucasus peoples blocking march routes. For example, crowds halted the south-western column under Major General Ivan Babichev in Ingushetia for over a week and the eastern column in Dagestan was also stopped by a crowd of civilians³⁰. Both episodes resulted in confusion and chaos "*which highlighted a debate that was convulsing the armed forces at all levels*"³¹, with only the northern column proceeding as far as Dolinskiy, still some 24 km from Groznyy. In fact the blockade of Groznyy was only completed on 25 December 1994, some "*two weeks after the commencement of the troop operation leaving the southern outskirts open for the departure of peaceful citizens*"³².

Any anticipated advantage through speed of deployment had been jeopardised by not taking account of the feelings of the local population or "*how troops would handle orders to move against their own people*"³³, in essence a failure of planning and foresight. One other factor delaying deployment from Mozdok was the fact that young drivers of tracked vehicles lacked the skills required to keep them on the road in icy conditions. Additionally, there were more than a few vehicles whose

²⁸ Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal "*Chechnya - A Small Victorious War*", Pan Books, London, 1997, p178 from an interview with Colonel General Eduard Vorob'yev: "When I heard all these people, and met them personally, I decided the operation was not prepared. There were no reserves organised, which is the most important part of an operation. They had not considered weather conditions, the snow, rain, mud, slush. The strength of these forces was based on aviation, which could not operate in such conditions, they could not work in the fog, and could not use their laser weapons. They could only drop bombs. Helicopters could not fly and could not provide the corresponding support".

²⁹ Ibid, p179. "Basic skills aside, Vorob'yev also realised that no one had properly studied the enemy they were facing. 'No one had assessed or appreciated Dudayev's fanaticism'".

³⁰ As a result of the bridge spanning the River Aktash or one of its tributaries at Khasavyurt which allowed the road to bypass the town to the south being blown up, traffic had to meander through the town, in places through deep mud, and negotiate a narrow passage across the dam/weir system below and north of the town.

³¹ Gall and de Waal, op cit, p179.

³² A Kol'yev "*Chechenskiy Kapkan*", Biblioteka Kongressa Russkikh Obshchin, Moskva 1997, p172.

³³ Gall and de Waal, op cit, p179.

radiators and coolant systems boiled over and had to be refilled - a reflection on deficiencies of driver maintenance, vehicle fleet maintenance and supervision at subunit and unit level.

Neglect of Traditional Planning Methods

It is perhaps worth recapitulating the Soviet mathematical methodology for calculating the battlefield, concentrating on some of the aspects of their previous meticulous detailed planning, which clearly should have been used and were ignored, due either to political expediency, the deep-rooted arrogance mentioned above or the fact that this operation on account of its scale should really have been under the control of the Ministry of Defence and General Staff. In practice responsibility seemed to slip and fall between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry for Internal Affairs. The primary purpose of Ministry of Defence ground forces is the defence and protection of the Russian Federation from external threat. Traditionally, the Army had always tried not to become involved in internal matters and disputes.

In the Soviet military view, as there still must be in the Russian military view, there were three overall laws of war³⁴, the knowledge of which, according to Colonel General F F Gayvronskiy and Colonel M I Gal'kin, authors of "*Kul'tura Voyennogo Myshleniya*" in 1991, was the basis of foresight, the working out of the principles of military art. The foresight of phenomena and events can serve as the main practical activity only when it is based on authentic facts. They describe foresight in battle as "*the most important component*"; "*to foresee means to control*" and "*In reality it is impossible to make the correct decision and to carry it out successfully, if the consequences of this decision are not produced. These consequences include: the probable changes of the situation under the influence of the actual actions of one's own troops and those of the enemy, the probable difficulties and obstacles, and the circumstances favourable for success*". Gayvronskiy and Gal'kin bring out three further points on the subject of foresight:

Box 2 - Foresight Three Additional Points:

The necessity to know the laws, the connections, the dependencies of military activity, the character of the causal-consequential links between its elements and processes. In order to predict, it is necessary to know the armament and organisation, the capabilities and typical methods of operation both of one's own troops and those of the enemy. This knowledge is obtained, constantly enriched and deepened throughout the service of an officer.

The necessity to understand thoroughly one's own task, correctly evaluating an increasingly complicated situation...

The necessity to combine correctly knowledge of the general and the particular, that which characterises the law-governed regularity of armed conflict, military organisation, military art, and also that which is related to an actual complicated situation. It follows that this is only possible according to the degree of practical experience of troop control in battle, based on correct logic of thought and the skilful use of existing methods of foresight.

V Ye Savkin in "*Osnovyie Printsipy Operativnogo Iskusstva i Taktiki*" as far back as 1975 set out the assistance that mathematical methods can provide to a commander in answering certain questions.

³⁴ For more detailed analysis and references see C W Blandy "*Calculating Combat Outcomes*" AA24 SSRC (CSRC), February 1993, p10 - "Soviet Approach to Planning Combat Operations and Decision Making".

Box 3 - Application of Mathematical Methods

The application of mathematical methods is able primarily to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the expected result of actions under the present plan for the use of assigned men and equipment?
2. What type of detail of men and weapons is required to achieve the result ordered taking into account enemy counter action?
3. What kind of optimum plan of operations for the men and weapons available must there be?

The Soviets believed that the most important aspect in all of these calculations is the correlation of forces and means. A correctly calculated correlation of forces and means is fundamental to the success of any operation and must also include the dynamic as well as static calculations, hence the need to take into account time and posture. Savkin underlines this point:

“The focal point in preparing a solution and developing a plan of operations (combat operations), and also in making decisions in the course of combat operations, lies with the calculation tasks related to determining the correlation of forces with consideration being given to their quantity and quality, determining the damage which can be achieved with a full amount of combat means (assets), estimating and forecasting enemy counter action, determining the detail of combat means (assets) for obtaining a given amount of damage: and it also lies with the tasks of optimum planning and target distribution, tasks of overcoming his defences and others”.

The sequence of the decision making process is the same at all levels of military art, at the strategic, operational and the tactical, but differs in scale and scope³⁵. However, it is of interest to note that Federal Forces, before the actual assault into Grozny, had intelligence information to the effect that by 20 December 1994:

³⁵ Blandy “*Calculating Combat Outcomes*”, p15-19, discusses three algorithms. **Figure 1** shows the decision making sequence at the tactical, unit level. **Figure 2 - Decision Making Sequence - Linkage between Final Objectives and Criteria of Effectiveness** is concerned with the preparation and execution of problems in the decision making process. In particular, it illustrates the connection between the final objectives of the operation and the criteria for the evaluation of effectiveness. It also shows the link between the criteria for the evaluation of effectiveness and the box where mathematical modelling takes place. **Figure 3** shows the sequential process of decision making in a simplified format, flowing from: **Clarification of Mission Received** [which includes clarification of commander's plan, clarification of own combat mission, determining roles, locations of own troops (sub-units, units, formations), clarification of neighbours' missions, definition/determination of area of combat operations, clarification of preparation and execution of mission]; **Evaluation of Situation** (Appreciation of Situation) [which includes evaluation of enemy forces, evaluation of own forces, evaluation of flanking entities, evaluation of ground/terrain, evaluation of meteorology and water conditions, evaluation of time of year and time of day, compilation of deductions from evaluation of situation]; **Making the Decision** [Working out concept of the Decision, formalising the Decision and issue of Tasks].

*“Up to 15,000 fighters were concentrated in Groznyy, around 60 guns and mortars, up to 30 ‘Grad’ rocket launchers, 50 tanks, approximately 100 BMPs and BTRs and 130 AA guns. On 3 January 1995 this powerful Chechen grouping in Groznyy opposed in all 5,000 Russian soldiers. The deficiencies of the troops were such that it became necessary to create composite regiments which were not trained or prepared for cooperation and interaction in battle. Besides, obsolete equipment was sent into battle which could well have been sent to the scrap yard”.*³⁶

A properly conducted correlation of forces and means calculation, had it been considered necessary, would surely have avoided the decimation of 131 Maikop Motor Rifle Brigade and the debacle that was to happen in Groznyy over the period of New Year's Eve, December 1994 and New Year's Day 1995.

Other problems which were to beset the Russian soldier were poor and unreliable communications: there were a number of occasions when radios, frequency range and radio nets were incompatible with each other. Furthermore, haphazard response, inaccurate observation and laying by Russian gunners led to a lack of effective and reliable fire support from artillery, and sometimes when fire support was produced there was more than one instance when forces were subjected to friendly fire. Logistic support was basic and bereft of comfort for the troops, certainly in the case of the Ministry of Defence serviceman who was the poor relation in comparison with his opposite number in the Internal Troops.

One can only conclude that in spite of a long tradition of using a mathematical methodology to calculate the battlefield, which even went down to calculating the different combat potentials as a result of the particular battlefield posture adopted, ie attack, defence in well-prepared positions, defence in hastily prepared positions, urban defence etc, not enough attention was paid to the Chechen fighter or the intentions of his commander, either due to the arrogance of Russian commanders or because of poor professionalism of Ministry of Defence formations, units, sub-units and personnel. It continually underlines the limitations and lack of expertise of senior officers and personnel in the Internal Troops. There was a lack of cooperation between Ministries which was not helped by attitudes and events such as the following: *“a shameful factor also illustrative of the situation at the time which gave rise to the Chechen war, was the order of Defence Minister Grachev concerning the issue of shells to Internal Troops only after payment”*³⁷.

It was to take until *“19 January 1995 before the Presidential Palace was taken, but it was not until 22 February 1995 that Groznyy was finally cleared of Chechen fighters”*³⁸. Russian casualties on 1 April 1995, according to official data, amounted to *“1,426 killed and 4,630 wounded”*³⁹.

³⁶ A Kol'yev *“Chechenskiy Kapkan”*, Biblioteka Kongressa Russkikh Obshchin, Moskva, 1997, p172.

³⁷ Ibid, p172.

³⁸ Ibid, p173.

³⁹ Ibid.

Acknowledgement of Phase 1 Shortcomings

Members of the Russian General Staff at a conference at Kubinka military base on 20 February 1995 reached certain conclusions regarding the shortcomings in performance of the Federal Forces during the first phase of intervention into Chechnya, including the Battle for Grozny.

Box 4 - Kubinka Conference 20 Feb 95⁴⁰
Shortcomings in Performance of Federal Forces

Lack of supervision by sub-unit commanders: failure to ensure proper maintenance of weapons, exacerbated by shortage of spare parts;

Lack of coordination between the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Counter-Intelligence Service and Border Troops;

At all levels commanders failed to optimise their own means for reconnaissance and relied on the uncertainties of air reconnaissance;

Headquarters failed to provide specific orders concerning the capture of vital objectives; officers were insufficiently prepared for the operation, losing the skill of command over extended deployment of sub-units, unpractised in radio procedures for the passage of orders or information in code;

Airborne assault units were not afforded means of evacuation at the critical moment;

Insufficient use of missile artillery, high tech-reconnaissance equipment and automatic command data systems and the absence of up to date equipment due to the three year demurrer on defence spending.

Federal Forces Intervention – Phase 2

Consolidation in Grozny and ‘Pacification’ of Rural Areas

As the Federal Forces slowly but inexorably tightened their hold on the capital, they moved into the second and subsequent phases of the intervention operation which included: consolidation in Grozny; the attempted pacification of Chechen rural areas in the Sundzha and Terek lowland plain; the liquidation of illegal bandit formations in important nodal points such as Argun and Gudermes; persuasion of the local indigenous population to lay down their arms; the introduction of a civil administration from the level of village or rural community through traditional leaders of religious orders or *teip* elders; the reinforcement of security at vulnerable sections along the railway line, namely between the stations of Ischerskaya and Chervlennaya-Uzlovaya and Kizlyar.

In fact, ‘pacification’ of the rural areas had been under way to a certain extent from 28 January 1995 with the bombing of the aul of Shatoy higher up the Argun valley together with: the bombing of the provincial centre of Shali in the main Sundzha valley, the strafing of Bamut in the ‘far’ west as a prelude to the subsequently long encirclement operation to achieve its surrender to Federal Forces; the shelling of Chernorech'ye and Samashki (the latter will be long remembered for the liquidation of the civilian population under dubious circumstances); the clearance of illegal

⁴⁰ See C W Blandy, “*The Chechen Conflict - Escalation and Expansion*” P15, CSRC, June 1995, p29.

bandit formations from the Shalinskiy, Staromyslavskiy and Vedenskoy rayony; the conduct of reconnaissance and search operations in the direction of Novyy Sharoy, Achkhoy Martan and Samashki, with the introduction of a passport regime in the village of Assinovskaya. Inevitably as the weather improved operations began to be conducted in the mountains to the south.

The cease-fire concluded in the summer of 1995 did not bring peace, but only an interlude before more bitter fighting broke out in December 1995, which led into the Gudermes operation, the Kizlyar raid by Raduyev, the siege and breakout from Pervomayskoye⁴¹ at the beginning of 1996, the first storm by the Chechens of Grozny in March 1996, the death of Dudayev in April 1996 and the second storming of Grozny by the Chechens in August 1996, and the Khasavyurt Accords of 30/31 August 1996 which brought a cessation of hostilities and the removal of Federal Forces from Chechnya. Perhaps the most crushing indictment is to remember that throughout the whole period of the armed intervention, *"The Russians did not control the country - they only controlled a few crossroads"*⁴².

Factors Working Against Federal Military Operations

However, there were certainly at least three factors working against any chance of Federal Forces' success in their operation to bring this 'mutinous' republic back within the fold of the Russian Federation and to appropriate subservience to Moscow. Moscow's policy was one of force and yet at the same time there was always the lure of further negotiation to achieve some form of solution favourable to Moscow. Robust, concerted and coordinated military action was always restricted by this dual approach of force and negotiation. The second factor, of course, was that at the crucial moment when the Chechen resistance campaign appeared to be on the point of collapse, the Chechens seized the initiative, with 'outrageous' operations such as Budennovsk in Stavropol' Kray, Kizlyar and Pervomayskoye, and the action against the column of 245 MR Regiment⁴³ mentioned above. The third factor, in a way tied to the first, was the fact that this war was not popular with "the people back home", in particular with the mothers of young untrained recruits whose sons suffered a premature death, either from action by the Chechens or because of inadequate care and supervision by their superiors, or who disappeared without trace.

The daily loss rates sustained by the Federal Armed Forces in Chechnya tell a tale of their own. Even an elementary examination into Russian Ministry of Defence and Ministry of the Interior troops losses between the cease-fire brokered at the end of July 1995 and April 1996, shows that on average 4/5 soldiers were killed every day and perhaps as many as 10/12 soldiers were wounded daily. For instance, the Russian Internal Troops Pyatigorsk Division participated in most of the actions in Chechnya. Over the year it lost 116 officers and men with 300

⁴¹ See Blandy, *"The Significance of Pervomayskoye"* P19, CSRC, April 1996, p35, Box 19, for tactical shortcomings of the operation.

⁴² One of several points made by Major General Aslan Maskhadov, Chief of Staff, Dudayev's Chechen Forces, during meeting with the author on 3 December 1995.

⁴³ A Kol'yev, op cit, p123: "16 April [1996] in the area of the village of Yaryshmaryd (25 km south of Grozny) a detachment of fighters numbering up to 100 men ambushed and fired from grenade launchers, mortars and infantry weapons on 30 Russian armoured vehicles. Almost 100 soldiers belonging to the Federal Forces were killed, only eight escaped with their lives. The majority were burned to death in BTRs or died from shock. Help only came some two hours later, because the first shots destroyed the radio".

wounded⁴⁴. In December 1995 alone, the division lost 45 killed during the Gudermes action. The sheer scale of manpower losses was not only a potent and worrying figure for any military organisation, let alone for a President trying to muster the support of the electorate for a second term of office, but also this horrifying litany implied low standards of combat readiness and effectiveness at the lower tactical level, illustrating a fundamental lack of funds and care by the military system for its own soldiers. Box 4 below provides a sad commentary on the losses sustained by the Federal Armed Forces.

Box 4 - Federal Armed Forces Official Casualty List from 11 Dec 94 to 1 Dec 95⁴⁵

Ministry of Defence:	Killed - 1568;	wounded - 4719
Internal Troops:	Killed - 366;	wounded - 1786
Other organisations:	Killed - 82;	wounded - 667
Overall losses & casualties:	Killed - 2034;	wounded - 7172 ⁴⁶
Prisoners & Missing⁴⁷	691	

The high scale of casualties sustained by the Russian Forces had its own inevitable effect on troop morale in Chechnya. A television broadcast from Moscow which commented on the assumption of command, by General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov in place of General Shkirko, of the temporary group of federal forces in Chechnya, made the following comments:

"The military in Chechnya are staking their hopes on Vyacheslav Tikhomirov for an end to the troops marking time, with futile casualties every day due to shelling and Chechen attacks. The overwhelming majority of federal troop officers are dissatisfied with the tactics conducted by the command of the group - in effect, Moscow - in Chechnya over the last few months. There is dissatisfaction even amongst those who occupy quite elevated posts, such as General Ibrahim Suleymenov, the military commissar of the Chechen Republic... Learning that an army general who had served under the former 14th Army commander [Aleksandr Lebed] had been appointed their commander, the military seemed to have taken heart"⁴⁸.

The situation in Chechnya had quite clearly developed into open warfare and thus a Russian Army commander once again should be in overall charge of operations.

⁴⁴ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), SU/2504, 9 January 1996. It should also be noted that 506 GMRR belonging to 27 MRD of Volga Military District lost 95 killed in January 1995.

⁴⁵ Figures *Ogonek*, No 6, February 1996, p32-33. "Dead and forgotten, servicemen who were sent to Chechnya to restore "constitutional order". Only their parents remember them."

⁴⁶ Some 144 unidentified bodies were housed in refrigerated wagons, in the so-called "train of death", awaiting identification by experts from the forensic-medical laboratory of the Ministry of Defence.

⁴⁷ From information supplied by the Committee of Soldiers Mothers.

⁴⁸ SWB, SU/2504 B/3 [6], 9 January 1996, NTV Moscow, in Russian 1800 hrs GMT 7 January 1996.

In the main, casualties were the result, not of any major Chechen raid or assault, but low combat readiness of Russian troops at the all-important, basic tactical level. However, in early December 1995, there were quite clear indicators of low levels of military training, preparation and lack of 'soldier care' in Grozny itself, at road blocks and check points along main roads in rural areas. One example, out of many, was the small detachment of Russian Internal troops outside the OSCE Mission⁴⁹, which clearly demonstrated low combat awareness, readiness and combat effectiveness. In an interview, General Lev Rokhlin, the former Commander of the Northern Group of Federal Forces in Grozny, was quoted as saying:

"Care for the combat readiness of the army and other forces is needed. From certain points of view the technical level [of the Russian Army] is so bad that it's below that of Dudayev's gangs. We cannot identify the coordinates 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 correct basic communication equipment. The "Dudayev supporters" intercept everything that is being communicated and take relevant measures"⁵⁰.

These facts were also reflected in the uncomplimentary reports and articles contained in the Russian press and media:

"A sensible observer, pondering the reason for the federal authorities' defeats in Chechnya, must reject the deliberately obtuse official arguments justifying what are, to put it mildly, the Russian Army's ineffective actions to impose constitutional order. That observer should not believe the tales of bad weather, which used to prevent potatoes from being harvested and which now prevents a target being hit from an aircraft. Neither must he fear certain mysterious Baltic women snipers who are stopping the mighty combined military operation of the Federal Counter-intelligence Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Defence Ministry. He should be struck by the utterly strange references to the arrival in Grozny of a whole 500 trained mujahedin from Afghanistan capable of resisting a military contingent of over 40,000, which incidentally has had an impenetrable ring of steel round Grozny for a whole month.

"A sensible observer must simply decide calmly: either his country, which still does not know how to milk a cow and make a sufficient quantity of butter, has neither that home-produced butter, nor proper power structures, nor a coherent authority. Or his country is, on the contrary, completely in order but its democratic army is simply being opposed by devilishly armed and incredibly well-trained, evil gunmen".⁵¹

⁴⁹ For details see Blandy, *"The Significance of Pervomayskoye"*, P19, CSRC, April 1996, p13, Box 5.

⁵⁰ SWB SU/2516 B/6 [15], 23 January 1996.

⁵¹ *Izvestiya*, quoted in SWB SU/2196 B/18, 9 January 1995.

Result of First Chechen Conflict

Much of Moscow's inept handling of the Chechen crisis came as part of a legacy of doubt and confusion arising from the period of absolute shock, utter paralysis and stultification following the demise of the Soviet Union and removal of Communist power. The Khasavyurt Accords resulted in the departure of Federal Armed Forces from Chechnya, the introduction of elections in Chechnya and the installation of a parliament and president through a democratic process.

However, the infrastructure and economic viability of Chechnya had been destroyed and laid waste. Not everyone on either the Chechen or the Russian side was entirely happy with the cessation of open conflict. Extreme, impatient Chechens wanted to continue the fight with Russia and take the armed struggle for independence into the Russian heartland. There were those in the power-wielding structures in Moscow who felt humiliated by a defeat at the hands of "mere shepherds". There were also those who harboured legitimate concerns about the possible break up and disintegration of the Russian Federation as a result of the defeat at the hand of the Chechen. The federal armed forces had certainly suffered ignominy in what was to all intents and purposes a devastating defeat, a defeat which had a direct bearing on the weakening of Russian power in the Caucasus-Caspian region, let alone throughout the Russian Federation and on its peripheries. There were others too in Moscow, both Chechen and Russian, who found that the war had been a means of increasing their material assets and influence.

Turmoil continued to ferment and simmer in Chechnya after the elections in January 1997, including the deteriorating situation which was beginning to assume alarming proportions throughout the North Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan along the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border with an increase in armed border incursions, the deteriorating situation over Prigorodnyy rayon in North Osetia, the impasse in Karachayev-Cherkessia between Cherkess and Karachay, together with the fact that the growth of Islamic extremism had started to become a major problem not only in Chechnya, but also in Dagestan. Federal prevarication in implementing subsidiary measures following the "Fig Leaf" Treaty of 12 May 1997 exacerbated the situation in Chechnya, making it impossible for a rational, reasonable, pragmatic president to govern his country in the face of extremist impatience.

Between The Wars

Lord Russell-Johnston, Chairman of the European Union Parliamentary Assembly on a fact-finding mission to Chechnya, and described as an “elderly, very experienced and an indisputably intelligent Briton” was recently quoted as saying:

*“We now know considerably more about the criminal character of the regime in Chechnya, about the complete collapse of economic and social structures ... the wide-scale crime in it. Moscow's negotiations with Grozny were ‘impeded’ due to the fact that Maskhadov had lost authority and was situated under the control of forces “which were never ever answerable”.*⁵²

The remarks prompt some form of response, for analysis of relations between Moscow and Grozny since the Khasavyurt Accords of 30/31 August 1996 provide another viewpoint. This viewpoint reveals and confirms that like his Soviet counterpart in the past, the Russian in the present day power-wielding structures in Moscow still has the capacity to think a long way into the future, to the situation to be achieved, and then to work back from that point to the present with the moves and actions that are required to ensure the fulfilment of his objective. This is exemplified by the lack of constructive Federal action from Khasavyurt in 1996 to the ‘invasion’ of Dagestan on 2 August 1999. It is possible to hold the view that Moscow is more than partly responsible for the deterioration of the situation in Chechnya and furthermore for the gradual but remorseless breakdown of stability and security throughout the North Caucasus as a whole. For the military, the Khasavyurt Accords were the start-point of Federal planning for the return of Chechnya to the Russian Federation not only as a *de jure* but a *de facto* subject in all respects under the Constitution.

Tasks Facing Maskhadov in January 1997

Not least of the tasks confronting President Maskhadov was the need to satisfy the expectations and aspirations of not only the majority of the Chechen people, but also to control and limit the actions of those possessing more extreme views⁵³, who were prepared to act outside the norms of international law or peace agreements and to ignore the will of the Chechen people, cogently and overwhelmingly expressed through the ballot box on 27 January 1997. The position of President Maskhadov in trying to restore a physically scarred, economically ruined and

⁵² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta – Politika*, No 10 (2072), 21 January 2000 Internet version “*Prozreniye Lorda Rassela - Glava PASE nazval rezhim Maskhadova prestupnym*” by Dmitriy Kosyrev.

⁵³ This must also include those belonging to the Islamist International. See *Defence and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, International Media Corp Ltd, London, 31 January 1996, p20, “Russia’s Persistent Chechen War” by Contributing Editor Yossef Bodansky. He advanced the view, at the beginning of 1996, that “Since the ‘Islamist international’ and sponsoring states strongly influence, if not directly control, the terrorist operations (especially the international strikes), the sponsoring states increasingly dictate the duration and intensity of the Chechen war at the expense of Dudayev and the Chechen nationalist leadership”.

psychologically damaged country to a semblance of normal life, was described at that time as being “*along a bridge that is finer than a hair and sharper than a knife*”⁵⁴. The situation facing President Maskhadov also drew a note of caution and sympathy from President Mintimer Shaymiyev of Tatarstan⁵⁵.

Whilst the Khasavyurt Accords not only provided the means for the official cessation of hostilities between Russia and Chechnya, more importantly, the Accords, in the words of Sergey Shakhray interrupted the circle of violence⁵⁶, established the foundations for the withdrawal of Federal Forces, and thus secured a longstanding Chechen objective. The Accords also elicited a tacit acknowledgement from the Federal side that they would accept the realities of power in Chechnya, namely the overall embrace of power enjoyed by the Chechen separatists under Yandarbiyev, by neither insisting on the form a new Chechen government should take nor on the degree of cooperation with the government of Doku Zavgayev. However, at Lebed’s insistence, the Chechen delegation accepted certain principles for inclusion in future Chechen legislation concerning the protection of non-Chechen citizens. In spite of the undoubted success of the Accords in arresting the cycle of violence, it is important to remember that they were only a first step on the road through negotiation to settlement and the much-hoped for lasting peace.

Whilst the Accords could be regarded as a first step in the process of negotiation, in the search for firm ground on which to construct and implement a mutually acceptable political treaty between Moscow and Groznyy, the vital question of the status of Chechnya in relation to Russia was perforce left on one side. However, this question has in fact remained the fundamental, most difficult and contentious issue, supposed to be determined within a five year period by the negotiating process itself.

The fact that this fundamental point of status was put on one side in order to achieve a cessation of hostilities may in itself have become an major obstacle to securing and maintaining an interim peace. Simply, it was difficult to devise an agreement in which relations between the two states could be consolidated, necessarily covering all those matters of a long term nature which directly affected the everyday lives of people, when it could be subject to major revision and alteration within the short term, with a final decision required by 31 December 2001. The question of Chechen status or “the demarcation of areas of responsibility and the mutual delegation of powers between the organs of state power of the Russian Federation and the organs of state power of the Republic of

⁵⁴ *Itoji*, 4 February 1997, p10.

⁵⁵ See SWB SU 2843B/10, 14 February 1997, “I would not advise Aslan Maskhadov to force the pace on the status issue... I am saying this because he (Maskhadov) will find things very difficult, regardless of whether he wants to hurry things or not. There are the people, there is public opinion. There have been elections, and the next thing we will see is a strong opposition... The opposition will be pressing for independence while he needs to rebuild the country... After a war or revolution or after anything like that, people always expect an improvement in their living standards.”

⁵⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 October 1996, p5, “The undoubted service of the Khasavyurt Accords of 1996 is that they tore apart the vicious circle, which entangled politics, economics and war on the territory of Chechen Republic. However, the cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of troops do not mean that peace itself will ensue in Chechnya”.

[Chechnya]" should have been agreed upon and defined sooner rather than later, because quite obviously, status was the basis on which all other matters rested⁵⁷.

The daunting array of challenges and problems facing the new President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria⁵⁸, the Chechen government and the people of Chechnya included the damage to the whole infrastructure of Chechnya as a result of 21 months of war. For example, there was only one building in Grozny deemed sufficiently 'damage free' to be used in the presidential inauguration ceremony in February 1997. This raised the question of compensation and reparations from the Russian Federation. Issues requiring more immediate action were: the payment of pensions to the elderly and infirm; medical treatment and the re-institution of programmes of preventative health care and medicine; the resumption of education for children; the creation of jobs enabling full employment in order to remove young men and women from the temptations of lawlessness, banditry and hostage taking; and the problems of locating sources of financial investment.

Other problems, no less important, were the questions of: borders in general terms, the border between Chechnya and Dagestan, in particular Novolakskiy (the former Aukhovskiy) rayon, including the ethnic problems associated with the Chechen-Akhin and other Dagestani nationalities; the security of the border between Chechnya and Georgia, the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia; increasing Cossack militancy in the areas to the north of the country along the course of the River Terek (there had been suggestions of re-allocating some Chechen territory to the Sundzha and Terek Cossacks or to Stavropol' Kray); questions arising from the oil pipeline linking Baku with Novorossyisk via Grozny, security and transit revenue; communications - the passage of rail traffic between the Russian Federation and the Transcaucasus states; the granting of an amnesty by Moscow to Chechen fighters. Perhaps the more intractable problems were those concerned with religion, the possible formation of an Islamic state subject to Shari'at and the deep-rooted apprehensions of Russians toward Islam, and the divisions between the Chechens themselves concerning the magnitude of the desire for independence from Russia.

Vulnerability of Aslan Maskhadov

As I wrote some two and a half years ago⁵⁹:

⁵⁷ With Chechnya on the southern borders of the Russian Federation, matters of importance were the organisation of real control over open borders, regulation and control of goods and cargoes, customs service, banking and financial means, organs of protecting law and order, taxation police and oil pipeline transit revenues, in addition to the usual clauses such as those contained in the Russian Federation-Tatarstan Treaty, Articles II to IX.

⁵⁸ Whilst Aslan Maskhadov may not have been elected within the Constitution of the Russian Federation, he was elected by the Chechen people with almost 60% support of the electorate at the end of January 1997. OSCE monitors found only a few minor breaches in the election procedure. Yel'tsin even sent his congratulations. The 'Fig Leaf' Treaty of 12 May 1997 was signed by both Yel'tsin and Maskhadov and could possibly be said to establish some degree of legitimacy of Maskhadov's Presidency.

⁵⁹ C W Blandy *"Chechen Connections: An End to Conflict in Chechnya?"* P25, CSRC, August 1997, p9. Footnotes not reproduced.

“There could be a vulnerability in the Presidency of Maskhadov to Dudayev’s former circle of disciples should they perceive a lack of progress in the negotiations and attainment of independence. The main danger from the more extremist Chechens who have found a new way of life, or indeed reverted to their traditional ways of perceived Chechen lawlessness, banditry, kidnapping, hijacking and criminal financial dealing, albeit under the publicised mantle of continuing the armed struggle for independence against Russia, lies not only in the fact that terrorist actions against the Russian population may precipitate retaliatory action on the part of the Federal authorities, but that, every time one such incident occurs, the image of Maskhadov is damaged, the credibility and authority of the elected Chechen government is diminished.

Damage and diminishment of a reasoned approach in this instance are manna to the ‘hardliners’ or ‘extremists’ present on both sides, the hardline Kulikov model on the one side wishing to expunge the stain of defeat and military incompetence, evoking the perils facing the Russian Federation of Chechen secession or the wild, irresponsible extremist model of Raduyev, cult leader, commander of the so-called “General Dudayev’s Army” pursuing the ideology of “Dzhokar’s Path”.

To all these factors the influence of the powerful Islamic International⁶⁰ must be added. Subsequent events have shown that the cynical manipulation of these factors was able to bring the Chechen bid for independence to naught.

Prevarication by Moscow

There is no doubt that the continued delay, prevarication and failure by Moscow following the Khasavyurt Accords and the “Fig Leaf” Treaty, to tackle the problem of Chechen status made it increasingly difficult and now impossible for moderate, rational counsel and forces to retain any authority and effectiveness. On every single occasion since 12 May 1997 that a meeting was scheduled to take place between the Chechen President and the President of the Russian Federation, some form of escalatory event or act of terrorism took place which enabled the immediate circle around President Yel’tsin to advise against any such meeting. Frequent changes of Prime Minister and government in Moscow were not conducive to the development of a policy for Chechnya and the North Caucasus⁶¹. In many ways

⁶⁰ See Bodanskiy, op cit.

⁶¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 145 (1961), 10 August 1999, p1, “*Za poltora goda – Shest’ glav kabineta*”, as shown in the table below:

Name of Prime Minister	Date of Appointment	Date of dismissal
Victor Chernomyrdin	Pre 1998	23 March 1998
Sergey Kiriyenko	24 April 1998	23 August 1998
Viktor Chernomyrdin	23 August 1998	10 September 1999
Yevgeniy Primakov	11 September 1998	12 May 1999
Sergey Stepashin	19 May 1999	9 August 1999
Vladimir Putin	9 August 1999	(31 December 1999) acting president

the situation could have been ameliorated by political action well before it reached the stage of a further round of military conflict.

However, more than a suspicion lingers in the mind that the Federal structures in Moscow calculated that by continued prevarication, the position of Aslan Maskhadov would be undermined, allowing the impatience and ill discipline of some of the so-called Chechen field commanders to prevail over the reason and commonsense of their President. For whilst Maskhadov was a person with whom the Russian authorities could work⁶², they perhaps recognised too, that he was possibly the greatest threat to Russian ambitions of keeping Chechnya within the Russian Federation.

The prevarication by Moscow over the status of Chechnya led Maskhadov's rule to be described in the following rather bleak and uncomplimentary terms:

"the whole of the republic is like a big chicken house, where in each corner its own rooster sits, who openly does not give a rap for the crowing from Khankala" and "therefore the relationship between Maskhadov and the field commander follows that same logic which reflects a relationship between a weak king and the independently minded barons of the Middle Ages".⁶³

Events have come to show all too clearly the vulnerability of Maskhadov's Presidency to Dudayev's former circle of disciples and other more extreme elements, as they came to perceive a lack of progress in the negotiations and attainment of independence, as the *"attempts at reconciliation between Russia and Chechnya and the reconstruction of Chechnya were feeble at best"*⁶⁴.

The fault of this further round of conflict lies at Moscow's door, not at the feet of Maskhadov. The Federal response to increased lawlessness and bandit activity gradually became more robust with the use of preventative strikes onto Chechen territory. Perhaps, indeed, there was an element of provocation.

Moscow's Intrigues

A number of reports were published and still continue to circulate concerning the possible involvement of Boris Berezovskiy not only in providing money for hospitals and a cement works in Chechnya, but in initiating and financing the conflict in Dagestan by paying Chechen and Islamic extremists to undertake an 'invasion of Dagestan'. Speculation is centred around meetings and alleged money transfers

⁶² *Ogonek*, No 3, January 1997, p23, "9 Krugov Aslana Maskhadova", "Neither did Maskhadov break off his friendship with former soviet brother officers during the period of Dudayev's government, nor even after the start of hostilities ... [but for] high level political activity, where, it is well known friends do not exist".

⁶³ *Izvestiya*, No 186, 1 October 1997, 'Piratskaya respublika ichkeriya'.

⁶⁴ Fiona Hill, Director of Strategic Planning, Eurasia Fund, statement to Helsinki Commission Hearing on the "Chechen Crisis and Its Implications for Russian Democracy", 3 November 1999.

between Boris Berezovskiy and Shamil Basayev⁶⁵ and Movladi Udugov⁶⁶. These and other contacts aroused the concern and disapproval of President Maskhadov. However, the web of alleged conspiracy becomes even more tangled in view of the speculation that it was in conjunction with the Russian secret services that Berezovskiy “organised the war in Dagestan”⁶⁷. Vitaliy Tretyakov, the Editor of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a paper owned by Boris Berezovskiy himself offered, “... my personal hypothesis, Berezovskiy in the worst case could have been used unwittingly by the Russian secret services, but most likely operated in conjunction with them”⁶⁸ to set up events so that the Chechen illegal bandit formations and Islamic extremists would invade Dagestan. However, “it is very difficult to believe in the accidental coincidence of three events: the beginning of the election campaign, the nomination of Putin as Premier and the sortie of Basayev”⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka), 23 September 1999 gave a digest of an interview of Berezovskiy by *Le Figaro* on his discharge from hospital in Paris “*Boris Berezovskiy: dal Basayevu 2 milliona dollarov. Na rekonstruktsiyu Chechni*”. “At the present time there is much speculation about the provision of money which I gave to the Chechens. Yes I gave it and there are many people who know about it. But I gave it for the reconstruction of a cement factory with the agreement of Maskhadov. Chernomyrdin was informed, and the money went directly to Basayev. Then he was a Deputy Prime Minister of Chechnya. This money was tightly controlled and was necessary for the reconstruction of the republic because the government was doing nothing”.

⁶⁶ *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 27 September 1999, p3, “*Maskhadov: This War was provoked by Berezovskiy*” by Arbi Arbiyev. “**Question:** Is it true that Boris Berezovskiy, who has some contacts with Udugov, has something to do with this war in Dagestan?” **Answer:** When I read the transcripts of Berezovskiy’s telephone conversations in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, I wanted to call your editorial office and say that you were on the right track. All these conversations ... it is true ... I know Berezovskiy all too well. I have never liked his contacts with Basayev and other leaders. I particularly disliked the fact that Berezovskiy personally gave a million dollars to Basayev. I have always disliked his constant mediation in hostage and POW exchanges. Berezovskiy is a man who constitutes a danger to Russia and Chechnya”.

⁶⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 190 (2006), 12 October 1999, “*Goniteli sem'i i Annibali "Otechestva"*”. Other articles appeared in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* and the *Moscow Times*.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 215 (2031), 17 November 1999, p3, “*Mne trudno ne verit Basayevu*” by Vadim Belotserkovskiy.

The Second Russo-Chechen Conflict In Recent Times

Start of Open Conflict

Against a background of increasing lawlessness⁷⁰, the latest serious manifestation of the deteriorating the situation in the Russian North Caucasus began at the beginning of August 1999 with the massing of *boyeviki* on the Chechen side of the administrative border with Dagestan, directly opposite the high mountain villages, steep mountainous terrain, deep gorges and narrow passes of historic Avaristan. Early in the morning of 2 August 1999 groups of fighters from Chechnya crossed over the Snegovyy Pass, which divides Chechnya from Dagestan, and “entered the village of Agvali in Tsumadinskiy rayon and attempted to establish their ‘control and Islamic order there’. According to certain information, after a clash with the local militia who were supported by the local inhabitants, the fighters were forced to leave the rayon centre and fortify themselves in three other villages, namely Echeda, Gigatl’ and Gakko”⁷¹.

In the subsequent course of events on 7 and 8 August 1999, it became clear that this was no ordinary raid, but an ‘invasion’, a large-scale penetration into Dagestani territory to secure a bridgehead as part of a wider operation. Chechen ‘bandit formations’ and Islamic fundamentalists numbering up to 2,000 men led by Shamil’ Basayev and the Saudi Arabian field commander Khattab seized a number of villages in Botlikhskiy and Tsumadinskiy rayony:

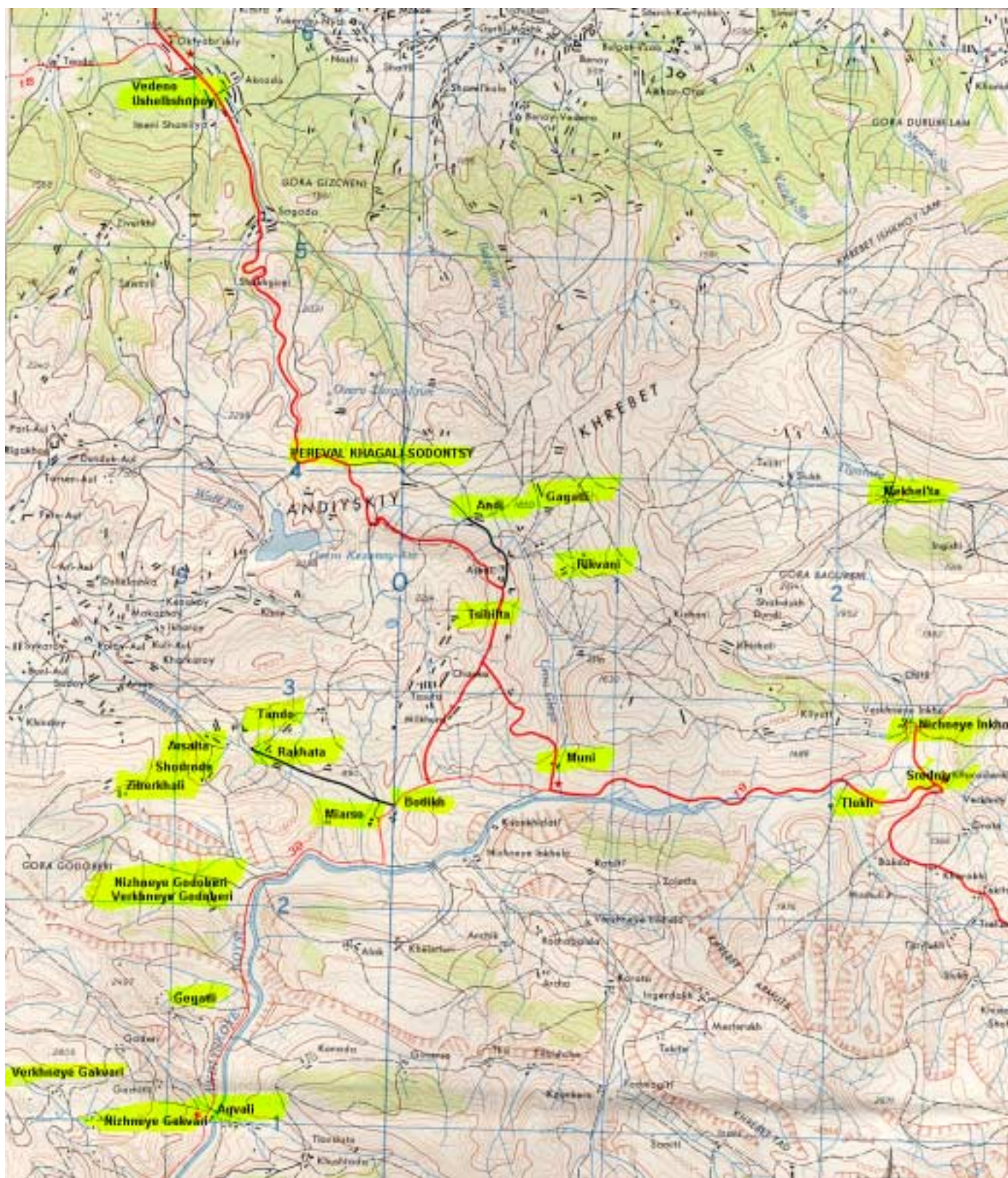
*“At 0400 hrs on 7 August uninvited guests had already occupied the first Dagestani village of Ansalta. They went through the forest in groups of 12-15 men not meeting any resistance. Waking up at 0530 hrs for morning prayers the inhabitants of Ansalta caught glimpses of fighters sitting on roofs, crossroads and in yards. By 1000 hrs the fighters, not encountering any resistance, were in the aul of Rakhata ... By 8 August Shadroda, Ziberkhali and Tando, one of the highest villages in the region, were all occupied”.*⁷²

⁷⁰ To name but a few of the more serious incidents: 21 Dec 97 – Buynaksk raid; 17 Apr 98 – Khurikau, death of senior Russian Army officers on reconnaissance mission in North Osetia; 6 Mar 99 – Kidnap of Major General Gennady Shpigun in Chechnya; 19 Mar 99 – Vladikavkaz, explosion in the market place on market day; 21 Mar 99 – Fourth assassination attempt on Maskhadov; 12 May 99 – Kidnap of naval cdr in Makhachkala; 14 May 99 – Karachayev-Cherkess elections followed by continuing tense and unresolved situation; 15 May 99 – Stavropol’ Kray, Disturbance with Nogay; 15 May 99 – Kidnap of International Red Cross representative in Nal’chik; 17 May 99 – Vladikavkaz explosion in Sputnik district, military township. See also *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 136 (1952), 28 July 1999, p2, “*Rushaylo razdrazhet situatsiya na Kavkaze*” by Igor Ageychev. The thrust of Rushaylo’s first press conference as Interior Affairs Minister was that in the last year in the North Caucasus crime had increased by 16%; there had been 240 bandit attacks; since 1 January 1997 there had been 1,094 kidnappings.

⁷¹ Enver Kisriyev “*Voyna prishla v gornyye rayony Dagestana*”, Tsentr po izucheniyu I uregulirovaniyu konfliktov Instituta etnologii antropologii RAN, 17 August 1999, through Natsional’naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, 18 August 1999.

⁷² *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, 15 August 1999, p5, “*Chechenskoy agressii protivostoyat sel’sovety*” by Sergey Gerasimenko (our special correspondent, Botlikh).

Dagestan



Slow Response of Federal and Republic Authorities

There was strong criticism from a number of quarters concerning the slow response of the Federal and Dagestani authorities to the 'invasion' of Avaristan, with one complaint coming from Aslambek Aslakhonov, former Internal Troops (MVD) General, who expressed bewilderment at the fact that:

"The Federal and Dagestani law enforcement agencies did not react earlier on the information concerning a forthcoming seizure of villages in Botlikhskiy and Tsumadinskiy rayony - I know that such information was known in the law enforcement organs and special forces two to three months earlier - the date of the invasion was already being named as 6 August".⁷³

General Aleksandr Lebed' as long ago as January 1999 had remarked publicly that:

"Several thousand fighters are ready at any moment to be thrown into the border districts of Dagestan and Ichkeria to begin an armed rebellion having been trained at Khattab's sabotage school; the minimum task - the overthrow of Maskhadov, the maximum task - an exit to the Caspian Sea and Vladikavkaz".⁷⁴

When the authorities took their time in responding effectively to the threat from Chechen bandit formations, as if taken by surprise in spite of all the previous indicators and warnings, it not only seemed that nothing had been learnt from the last Russo-Chechen conflict but that history was almost repeating itself from the time of Imam Shamil and the campaigns in Avaristan of the 19th Century, in particular in the vicinity of Andi, where Imperial Russian military might was constantly being 'wrong-footed' by the Chechens and becoming unwitting victims of surprise:

"The Russians' surprise was the result of an intelligence failure on their part. As in so many cases throughout history, this was essentially a failure of analysis. The facts were known to the Russians - the numbers of Shamil's forces, their structure, the fact that Shamil' was building an artillery corps and was even trying to cast his own guns - but their established view of Shamil' and the mountaineers prevented them from deducing the right conclusions. Thus the Russians' failure was not merely strategic or tactical, it was conceptual. They were completely unprepared for the kind of war Shamil' was fighting".⁷⁵

⁷³ *Khronika Krizisa - Sobitiya*, Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, 10 August 1999.

⁷⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 4 (1820), 14 January 1999, p1, "Aleksandr Lebed' preduprezhdayet ob opasnosti novoy voyny". Lebed' is Governor of Krasnoyarsk Kray and Chairman of the Peacekeeping Mission to the North Caucasus.

⁷⁵ Moshe Gammer, "Muslim Resistance to The Tsar - Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan", Frank Cass & Co Ltd, London, 1994, Chapter 14 "Avaristan" p147.

Criticism of Initial Military Reaction

Even when the authorities responded to the threat there were further questions relating to the conduct and method of operations to clear Avaristan of the illegal bandit formations. The former Defence Minister, General Igor Rodionov, stated that the operation to destroy the terrorists who had penetrated into Dagestan was badly prepared:

*"I am convinced that much is being done irresponsibly and frivolously both there and in Chechnya. In one day we have lost more troops than NATO lost in three months of bombing Yugoslavia. This is taking place because society is accustomed to blood in the Caucasus, to blood in the army, casualties do not shock anyone"*⁷⁶.

There were certainly grounds for General Rodionov's concerns. First, there was an event of great significance which took place on 4 August 1999 and may well come to haunt the republic authorities in Makhachkala at some time in the future, as having the potential to cause further uncontrollable confrontation and conflict, remembering the delicate balance between the 14 titular nationalities and other ethnic groups in Dagestan⁷⁷. The Dagestani authorities, almost in a state of panic, announced the need for the formation of self defence detachments of local inhabitants, namely men who had had previous military experience. This measure was dictated by the desperate situation which was developing in the republic. Two years ago this idea had been turned down on the grounds that such detachments would not be effective. As an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* of 5 August 1999 said "*Now, the 'opolchentsy' in all likelihood will be armed with virtually useless rifles with a magazine capacity of only five rounds*". It should be noted that the militia to whom the 'opolchentsy' were subordinated did not have sufficient weapons either. It could well enhance the danger of another collection of weapons being used in the 'inter-ethnic game'. Additional army subunits from 136 Separate Motor Rifle Brigade stationed in Buynaksk were dispatched to the area of 'battles' which had taken place on 2/3 August 1999. However in view of 136 MR Bde's low reputation, its combat effectiveness must have been in some doubt as well ⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ *Khronika Krizisa - Sobitiya*, Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, 13 August 1999.

⁷⁷ See C W Blandy "*Dagestan: The Gathering Storm*", CSRC, S38, June 1998, in particular p3, Table 1 - Population and Distribution of Posts in Government, Organs and Enterprises; p14 - Political Groupings: "The disagreements between supporters and opponents of federalism are becoming increasingly marked, intensified by recent changes and amendments to the Constitution threatening to alter the balance of power in the republic".

⁷⁸ *Kommersant-Daily*, 27 February 1999, p1, "*Soldiers sold their own people to the Chechens*" by Leonid Berres and Yury Safronov, translated by Kirill Frolov. "Lieutenant Colonel Ramazan Salmanov, Commander of the Buynaksk garrison, announced that: '*Soldiers and officers of the 136th motorized-rifle brigade located in the Dagestani town of Buynaksk have been engaged in slave trading*'. During the last two years, 46 soldiers and officers of this detachment were sold to Chechens. The 136th motorized-rifle brigade consists of about 5,000 people, and has long had a bad reputation. Suffice it to say that in 1997 Chechen thugs from the gang of Khattab shot at the base of this brigade with automatic guns and grenade cup discharges for several hours but were never seriously counterattacked. Magomed Tolboyev, a former secretary of the Dagestani Security Council, announced: '*I know that this brigade has the most up-to-date arms, and I also know that servicemen of this detachment sold mines, automatic guns, and grenade cup dischargers*'.

Secondly, if the daily small arms fire of Internal Troops' piquets, blockposts and check points in the northern part of Dagestan finally led to the administrative border with Chechnya being reliably constructed and fortified with personnel reinforced with armour and aviation, then in no way could the same be said concerning the protection of the administrative border traversing mountainous ground. The day before the incident, some assault subunits which had been deployed in the two adjacent rayony of Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy, were singled out as examples of being poorly equipped.

“Responsibility for the protection of the sector comprising the border traversing broken mountainous ground was placed on members of the local ROVD, who did not possess any night vision devices, armoured equipment or even binoculars. It had, however, been known for a long time that on this particular territory around 600 Wahhabis, natives of Tsumadinskiy rayon had gathered”⁷⁹.

Nothing seemed to have changed since the Chechen War of 1994-1996. Some of the details are listed in Box 5 below.

Box 5 - Shortcomings, Advantages and Lessons Learnt by Federal Forces⁸⁰

Once again formations of temporary groupings have appeared, in which subunits are included (for example local militia) who are not trained to carry out modern battle; neither do the militia have the necessary individual skills and training. They do not have principally the practice of cooperation with artillery and aviation. They are not familiar with target indication procedures in calling for fire support, likewise with communications, communication security, map reading.

Friendly fire, bombing own troops; 17 men from the Botlikh Detachment Dagestan MVD wounded and 4 killed.

There should be one commander in charge and not a forum of high-ranking generals who find it hard to define the hierarchical relations between themselves.

Superior weapons and equipment.

Media blackout; one thing has been learnt from first Russo-Chechen conflict.

Both the belated awareness and the delay in providing an effective antidote to the bandit incursion into Dagestan tended to confirm opinion among some analysts that nothing had changed from the earlier Russo-Chechen conflict, conjuring up some memories of that past conflict as shown in the rather biased account in Box 6 overleaf.

Some of these weapons later returned to Dagestan, and our law enforcement agencies confiscated some of them on the black market of Khasavyurt'. On February 26 [1999], Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin flew to Dagestan. On the eve of his trip, he announced that over 100 servicemen are currently being kept hostage by Chechens, and that the Buynaksk brigade has the highest number of kidnapped men”.

⁷⁹ *Nezvisimaya Gazeta*, No 142 (1958), 5 August 1999, p2.

⁸⁰ *Nezvisimaya Gazeta*, No 145 (1961), 10 August 1999, p1, 4.

Box 6 – Chechen Conflict: Example of Russian Military Mind Set ⁸¹

Kvashnin has never got the hang of planning combat operations. When commander of the Caucasus Military District, he was unmatched in the art of concocting triumphant reports for superiors. Short of other candidates, Grachev turned to Kvashnin, who leaped at the offer.

This was followed by the attack on Grozny in January, planned by Minister Grachev and Commander Kvashnin. It was not merely incompetence that made the generals throw four columns of tanks against the city in an uncoordinated rush: both were confident that the Chechens would run away at the first sight of the clanking armor. Predictably enough, both were stunned and at a complete loss when the feds encountered spirited and correctly organized resistance. 131 Maikop Brigade, which was all but decimated in the attack, was part of the Northern Group commanded personally by Kvashnin.

In August 1996, the Chechens isolated checkpoints of the feds and seized Grozny almost at their leisure, and Kvashnin ordered the 205th Brigade to take the city from the rebels again. The general, who had somehow missed the Chechen convergence on the city, assured the Kremlin that there were only several dozen commandos in Grozny and that they would soon be cut to pieces. Once again, as during the ill fated winter attack on Grozny, the operation was executed without proper organization. Even cooperation and coordination with the nearby 161 Brigade was not established. The operation cost Russia 205 Brigade, a logical finale of the general's "Chechen period".

Three other events seemed to confirm the view that nothing had changed in the Federal military approach. In the first, three Russian Interior Ministry generals were wounded on 11 August as a result of coming under fire in a Mi-8 helicopter belonging to Internal Troops. The wounded were: the Deputy Head of the Main Organisational-Inspection Directorate Viktor Rakutin, and the Chiefs of the Reconnaissance Directorate and Aviation, Generals Viktor Kuznetsov and Viktor Yakunov. Two other helicopters which landed at the Botlikh landing strip were also destroyed by fire from terrorist positions. Both these events demonstrated a complete lack of awareness on the part of the Internal Troops' commanders and pilots. The other event concerned the bombing, in error, of a Georgian village by Federal aviation, when a Su-25 ground-attack aircraft violated the air space of Georgia in the area of the village of Bochormi in Akhmeta rayon which borders Chechnya and Dagestan. One of the bombs exploded on the territory of the village of Zemo Omalo, as a result of which two local inhabitants received wounds. The remaining bombs exploded in nearby forested massif.

However, there is a need to take account of the position that the authorities faced in countering the threat of some 2,500 terrorists in Avaristan. While Colonel General Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov, Deputy Interior Minister and Commander-in-Chief of Internal Troops, known as 'The Hawk', in an interview at the beginning of July 1999 was of the opinion that "*we will be able to neutralize the gangs, maintain the territorial integrity of the country, and protect its residents*"⁸², he also detailed some of the threats currently facing the Caucasus and Russia as a whole and the actions being taken by the Internal Troops to counter them.

⁸¹ *Itogi*, No 27, 6 July 1999, p20-23, "The Staff General" by Matvey Pokatilov.

⁸² *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 6 July 1999, p1, "Threats to Russia's Interests in the Caucasus are becoming more serious" by Konstantin Petrov.

**Box 7- Colonel General Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov's Assessment of Situation
as at 6 July 1999⁸³**

The Mozdok direction, first and foremost the border with Dagestan, particularly its southern stretch, as well as the Botlikhskiy, Tsumadinskiy and Kazbekovskiy rayony, which are poorly controlled by republic and federal forces. This is the territory where pro-Wahhabi Dagestani extremists feel at home.

The notorious field commanders Raduyev, Khattab and Basayev see this territory as a bridgehead from which to carry out raids into Dagestan. If the truth be known, we are very unlikely to be able to avoid a drastic activation of terrorists. They do not conceal their intention to continue carrying out terrorist acts and murders.

There is a whole plan whose objective is the withdrawal of federal troops from the territory of Dagestan.

The stated aim of the 'invasion' at the beginning of August 1999 by the illegal Chechen bandit formations under Shamil' Basayev and Islamic extremists under Emir al Khattab was to create an Islamic Republic having first established a bridgehead in Avaristan, remembering the ancient saying that "*who rules Avaristan rules Dagestan and who rules Dagestan rules the North Caucasus*", and the second phase of the operation was to overthrow the Dagestani government in Makhachkala⁸⁴. There were several reasons for the selection of Avaristan as a bridgehead for the further expansion of anti-government formations into Dagestan. However, "*Judging by the frequency of attacks and the importance of the objects on the territory of Dagestan, it is possible three cleaving strikes could be inflicted: on Kizlyar, Khasavyurt and Buynaksk*".⁸⁵

On the assumption that the 'invasion' was a real operation planned in earnest by Basayev and Khattab, having carried out over the previous months an escalatory series of terrorist activity and raids in the direction of Kizlyar, Babayurt and Khasavyurt from Chechen territory, noting that the main Gudermes-Khasavyurt road led directly and speedily to Makhachkala, this would be high up on the list of

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ramazan Abdulatipov in interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 16 August 1999 from *Obzor Tsentralnoy Pressy, Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka*.

⁸⁵ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 137 (1953), 29 July 1999, p1, "*Terroristy zhdut signala*" by Dimitry Nikolayev. "Analysis of more than 80 recent attacks on police checkpoints and frontier posts of the interior troops, the tactics of military operations carried out by guerrilla groups, and terrorist acts and diversions allows certain conclusions to be drawn. It appears that guerrilla groups have learned the strength and composition of the grouping of the Russian Interior Ministry's regional departments and interior troops along the Chechen administrative border, the composition of the defence system and its weak points, as well as the defects in the organization of the troops' routine service procedures and combat duties". See also *Kommersant-DAILY*, 24 July 1999, p4, by the Crime Correspondent. "Located on the river Terek on the outskirts of the town of Kizlyar, Dagestan, the Kopai dam complex has always attracted Chechen terrorists. Its defenders have already repelled several attacks and raids. The logic is simple: blow up the dam, and the river will flow out of control and flood most of Kizlyar and the vineyards of the Nagaysk and Kochubey districts. It will be a real catastrophe for the republic ... More often than not, terrorists attack the outposts in the villages of Pervomayskoye (Khasavyurt rayon), Krasnooktyabrskoye (Kizlyar rayon), and the ones that defend the Grebenskiy Bridge across the Terek and the Kopai complex".

priorities which the Federal and Dagestani authorities needed to deny to the bandit formations, to block and intercept. As a result of the build-up of terrorist activity in this area, the Federal and Dagestani authorities would probably have their minds and resultant operational assessments fixed on Khasavyurtovskiy, Kizlyarskiy and Novolakskiy rayony as being the most likely to be threatened by Chechen formations⁸⁶. For the Chechen field commander Basayev and Emir al Khattab there was obviously the need to launch the 'invasion' some way away from where Federal and Dagestani forces were situated. A demonstration of force, in the shape of an 'invasion', into Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony could serve to draw Federal forces into an area where major roads were noticeable by their absence, and the few in existence did not readily lend themselves to wide scale vehicle movement, speedy military reaction and smooth logistical supply, thus inhibiting any rapid deployment Federal or Dagestani forces. A military force moving from Buynaksk, the base location of 136 Separate Motor Rifle Brigade, whether in armoured or soft-skinned vehicles is vulnerable to disruption through mining and ambush by guerrilla forces, in particular along the stretch between Tlokh and Muni which follows the up-stream course of the Andi Kousu. It is interesting to note that one of the first orders that Colonel General Kazantsev issued on return from leave was to ensure the protection of the vitally important road from Buynaksk to Botlikh and especially the 5 kilometre road tunnel under the Gimrinskiy range.

Repulse of 'Invaders' from Avaristan

On the departure from office of Premier Stepashin and the installation of Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister the situation began to change⁸⁷. One of the first important steps to be implemented on the direction of Putin was the establishment, following the 3rd meeting of the Anti-Terrorist Commission dedicated to the situation in the North Caucasus, of a **single data bank** on problems associated with the battle against terrorism. Vladimir Putin stated that responsibility for carrying out this decision lay on the apparatus of the Commission, which mainly consisted of FSB operatives and employees. This was a vital step to take for the apprehension of terrorists. The fact that there was to be only one data bank could only enhance the passage of information and its dissemination to relevant parties. It will be remembered that in the first Russo-Chechen conflict, the three main power-wielding structures involved were housed in separate buildings in Mozdok.

Vladimir Putin also brought another consideration to the operation to combat terrorism, to eject the Chechen illegal bandit formations from Dagestan and to make the immediate area around Chechnya, such as Stavropol' Kray, a 'quieter' and safer place. This was the question of funds from abroad helping Chechen field commanders to pay their fighters, procure arms and weapons, as well as food, clothing and equipment. According to Major General of Militia Kuz'ma Shalnikov, the First Deputy Director of the Main Directorate against Organised Economic

⁸⁶ Salman Raduyev's raid on Kizlyar in January 1996 and subsequent siege at Pervomayskoye were still very much in the minds of the Dagestani authorities.

⁸⁷ V Shpak, *Vremya MN*, 11 August 1999, p1-2, Chief of the General Staff General Kvashnin on 10 August 1999 is reported to have said at his meeting with Vladimir Putin, the recently appointed Prime Minister, that "The situation in Dagestan at this precise moment has changed, but it is controllable." Shpak adds: "however, he did not say by whom".

Crime (Ministry of Internal Affairs) there are three channels through which financial assistance and support flow to the Chechen field commanders and their illegal bandit formations. They are listed in Box 8 below, together with estimates from the proceeds of Chechen control over the Russian banking system and income from drugs and hostage-taking. Some other methods of support to Chechen field commanders used during the earlier Chechen conflict have been dealt with in an earlier paper⁸⁸.

Box 8 – Channels used to Support Chechen Illegal Bandit Formations

Official Internal Channel

Funding from the Federal Budget. In 1997 Russia issued Chechnya 963 mlrd (963 x 10⁹) 'old roubles'.⁸⁹

Unofficial Internal Channel

Financial and technical-material aid from Russian businessmen, occupied in legal business, but sympathetic to the Chechen 'fighters' cause.⁹⁰

Illegal External Channel

This channel includes the activities of extremist pro-Islamic organisations. Reports concerning the recent 'invasion of Dagestan' with financial support from Usama bin Laden suggest figures of around US\$25 mln and later US\$30 mln. In the USA there are more than 50 pro-Islamic social non-commercial organisations, one of which is the International Relief Organisation which has collected US\$1.6 mln and another, Islamic Relief Worldwide, more than US\$6 mln for the Chechens⁹¹.

Control over Russian Banking World

According to official information, control over the Russian banking world brings the Chechen terrorists a further US\$600 mln annually. Trading oil and oil products – US \$ 1.2 mlrd, 'rackets' approximately US\$1 mlrd.⁹²

Narcotics, Hostages and Counterfeit Currency

Income to Chechen fighters from narcotics is thought to be in the region of US\$0.8 mlrd plus the income from hostage taking which can be no less than US\$500 mln and counterfeit currency US\$1.5 mln⁹³.

⁸⁸ C W Blandy "Chechen Caravan Trails", CSRC, P21, April 1996, p1: "The infrastructure, both regional and further afield, that has been created by Dudayev to sustain Chechen operations against the Russians is indeed impressive: the web of inward and outward routes, the tight knot of secret finance facilities together with combat training establishments and finally the number of countries involved".

⁸⁹ *Stavropol'skaya Pravda* (Electronic version), 4 October 1999, "Otkuda u boyevikov deng'gi?" by A Lazarev.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *Press-Dos'ye* (Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka), 25 October 1999, "Zapadnya" by Sergey Pashayev (Agenstvo Voyennykh Novostey – spetsial'no dlya "Profiliya").

⁹² *Stavropol'skaya Pravda*, ibid.

⁹³ Pashayev, op cit.

The creation of a **joint press centre** in Makhachkala led to an improvement in the handling of the situation for the Combined Group of Federal Forces. It issued monitored and sanitised reports, and there was an absence of Western journalists. Again, the Federal authorities had learnt from the earlier war and had put a stop to the highly critical reports from the pens of journalists.

The most important step of all was the transfer of **control of the operation** from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Defence on 17 August 1999, a step of great significance which acknowledged the grave seriousness of the situation, the numbers involved and went some way to head off the criticisms outlined in Box 5 above.

Perhaps more importantly, it became clear that Basayev and Khattab were not able to **mobilise local support** from the Dagestanis – the reluctance of Nadirshakh Kachilayev was but one example. In the Buynaksk raid on 21 December 1997, the local inhabitants had done more against the raiders than the Russian military.

Buynaksk Rayon (Dagestan)

Subsequent combat operations by the Combined Group of Federal Forces in Dagestan, following the cleansing of the settlements in Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony of the remnants of Chechen formations, invited further questions concerning the reasons for the encirclement and siege of Islamic extremists located in and around the populated points of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar in Buynaksk rayon. Questions inevitably arose not only over the publication of Federal forces' casualty figures, the perhaps exaggerated strength of the opposing bandit formations involved, but also the veracity of progress reports and bulletins emanating from the press centre in Makhachkala of the Combined Group of Federal Forces in Dagestan. In a similar manner, a degree of scepticism needs to be applied to the claims of Shamil' Basayev, Khattab and Movladi Udugov in the announcements emanating from the Kavkaz Tsentru concerning the withdrawal of Chechen formations long before the Federal Group of Forces were aware of the fact.

Criticism and comment were also focussed on the restrictions imposed on the activities of the media. Particular attention needs to be paid to the actions of Federal forces involved in the later operation to remove the 'invaders' from Novolakskiy rayon and the removal of threats to the Kizlyar, Babayurt and Khasavyurt axes. A question keeps coming to mind concerning the actual strength of the bandit formations in the invasion of Avaristan, the numbers of Islamists involved in the Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi complex and the subsequent 'invasion' of Novolakskiy rayon: did they really number in excess of 2,000 men?

Novolakskiy Rayon and Explosions

At about the same time as Federal Forces were engaged in trying to eradicate Islamic extremists in the Kadar-Chabanmakhi-Kharamakhi fortified complex, the terrorists switched their efforts to Novolakskiy rayon in an attempt to relieve the pressure on Karamakhi. Another element was introduced into the spiralling terrorist incursions with the planting of explosive devices and the blowing up of various residential blocks and a shopping arcade. These involved a military apartment block in Buynaksk belonging to families of 136 Separate Motor Rifle Brigade, together with a shopping arcade and apartment blocks in Moscow, St Petersburg and Volgograd. Understandably Chechens and others of the 'despised' Caucasus nationalities came to be regarded as prime suspects for these terrorist outrages by frightened citizens in Moscow and elsewhere. Information, reports and

allegations began to appear in the media about the involvement of Usma bin Laden and his financial support to the followers of Islamic radical extremism settled in Dagestan and in Chechnya.

Operations in Chechnya

Establishment of Cordon around Chechnya

The bombing of Chechen villages along the eastern section of the administrative border with Dagestan had commenced as part of the cleansing operation by the Combined Group of Federal Forces in Avaristan. Following the Novolakskiy offensive 'demonstration' by the bandit formations and their return to Chechen territory, the conflict took on another aspect. It brought the war to Chechnya itself as the Combined Group of Federal Forces switched their air offensive to the bombing of the Chechen capital Grozny, supplemented by artillery strikes aimed at destroying the will of the population to resist and the complete ruin of the internal infrastructure of Chechnya. The repeated targetting of the dams, weir combinations and water storage facilities on the River Argun between Novyy Atagi and the town of Argun and the water distribution system at Khankala in addition to strikes against concentrations of fighters, ammunition stores, fuel dumps and installations belonging to the oil industry are examples of this offensive action, to some extent drawing a parallel with NATO's air campaign against Serbia. The start of encirclement by ground forces evoked the ominous spectre of another military invasion by the Combined Group of Federal Forces North Caucasus. This resulted in Chechen menfolk concentrating on removing their women, children and aged, infirm dependents from the area of impending combat operations. Refugees fleeing to Ingushetia were said to number in excess of 200,000 people.

Prelude to Assault on Chechnya South of River Terek

By 7 October 1999, Chechnya was faced by an ever-strengthening *Cordon Sanitaire* being established in depth consisting of formations, units and subunits belonging to the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior and subunits of the Federal Border Service. The moves by the ground forces of the Combined Group of Federal Forces appeared to be more considered and cautious than in 1994. One particular difference between the last Federal operation and the present one was the introduction in October 1999 into the 'liberated' rayony north of the River Terek of military commandants' offices, *voyennyye komendatury*, which were headed not by Interior Ministry generals but by those belonging to the Ministry of Defence: "Lieutenant-General Gennadiy Troshhev, Deputy Commander of North Caucasus Military District, was nominated as Commandant of Shelkovskiy rayon in the east and in Naurskiy rayon in the west Major General Vladimir Shamanov, Commander 58 Army"⁹⁴, thus securing a firm base in the north for future operations. The question at this stage was simply, would this merely be a *cordon sanitaire* or the prelude for an all-out assault on Grozny and Chechnya south of the River Terek into the central plain of Chechnya proper, now, soon or at some later period when weather conditions became more suitable?

Encirclement of Grozny

By the middle of December 1999 Grozny had been encircled following the occupation of Gudermes, the fall of Argun and other populated points. At the end

⁹⁴ *Nezavisimoye Voyny i Konflikty*, No 40 (163), Internet version, dated 15 October 1999, "Zimovka v Pole" by Vladimir Mukhin.

of December 1999, airborne assault units had occupied areas adjacent to the Georgian border in the south, thus cutting off the Argun-Utum Kale route to Georgia in a bid to stop reinforcements, arms and ammunition getting through to the Chechen fighters. Gradually the Federal net was closing in with forays into Grozny, but their casualty lists grew. From the Federal point of view, the military operation up until the middle of December could be classified as being successful, but by 31 December 1999 the operation had become bogged down because of fighters holding out in Grozny and taking Federal Forces off-guard by attacks on Gudermes, Argun and Shali from the south and east.

Assessment of Federal Performance up to 31 December 1999

It is perhaps apposite to tie an interim assessment of the performance of the Combined Group of Federal Forces in Chechnya and Dagestan to the date that Boris Yel'tsin announced his resignation as President of the Russian Federation. Not only does it bring a change from an elderly man, failing in health and lacking consistency and vigour to a younger man possessing energy and zeal, but it is also a convenient point at which to assess military progress in the first step of returning Chechnya properly within the complete ambit of the Russian Federation. It is useful to take into account the assessment of senior Russian officers with regard to military progress and the steps which distinguish this campaign from the earlier Russo-Chechen conflict.

Views of Colonel General Viktor Kazantsev, Commander North Caucasus Military District

General Kazantsev made some illuminating remarks⁹⁵ concerning the preparation and progress of the Combined Group of Federal Forces in Chechnya and Dagestan, remembering that this campaign started with the incursion by Basayev's and Khattab's bandit formations into Dagestan. Kazantsev admitted that whilst the security structures were aware of an impending incursion into Dagestan, they were getting ready, but there was an element of slovenliness, something failed somewhere. However, he believed that there were at least four factors which led to the collapse of the bandit incursions into Dagestan; in fact Shamil' Basayev and Khattab made four fundamental, fatal mistakes.

Box 9 - General Kazantsev - Fatal Mistakes of Basayev and Khattab

They were sure that Dagestani Muslims would support their invasion. But as it happened, they burst into a stranger's house with weapons, committing a bloody offence against those who in the last war fed and watered them, tended their wounds and ensured rest. This was against all Caucasian customs, and the Dagestanis cursed them.

The Basayevites leaned too heavily on the experience of the first Chechen campaign. They were convinced that Russia could not in the short time gather together sufficient forces for a vigorous repulse.

Following from that experience Basayev and Khattab considered that we would not succeed in quickly organising the coordination of all the power structures... Over the last three years we have made several important steps forward. Taking account of predictable bandit

⁹⁵ *Trud*, 10 November 1999, through Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, "Interv'yu Nedeli", "General Kazantsev: "V Chechne poydu do kontsa".

'outings', a series of joint exercises were carried out with the MVD, Border Service and FAPSI (Government Communications Service). And we were ready. Finally, they thought that the Federal authorities would be at a loss. But both the President and the Prime Minister acted in a resolute manner and set the armed forces their combat tasks.

Views of Colonel General (Retd) Eduard Vorob'yev

It will be remembered that Colonel General Vorob'yev in the winter of 1994 was First Deputy C-in-C of Ground Forces and that he, *"together with more than 500 officers refused to participate in combat operations in Chechnya"*⁹⁶. Colonel General Vorob'yev emphasised the requirement for something more than just a military solution. Vorob'yev believed that the events which took place in Chechnya in 1994-1996 differed fundamentally from those which were now taking place there. During the summer the fighters had initiated combat operations on the territory of Dagestan. But then, having received a repulse, they departed back to the territory of Chechnya. Federal troops quite simply had to respond to the challenge of the terrorists. Secondly, the preparation and training of Federal troops was much better. The tactics being used testified to the fact that the military command had refrained from frontal or 'storming' assaults. According to him, it has been evident in the main that the Federal operation rested on the principle of avoiding direct troop contact and close quarter battle, but played to their strengths by destruction of the illegal bandit formations by direct and indirect 'fire for effect' from self-propelled and towed tube artillery, multi-launch rocket systems such as Grad and Uragan, other missile attacks using some form of Scud and strikes by federal aviation. Then and only then, after that form of 'preparation', were troops used.

He added that the Command understood the need in the course of combat operations to ensure the maximum safety of the civilian population. (There is evidence to the effect that this has not always been the case in practice.) He was also of the opinion that *"all branches of government and society, including the majority of the mass media and press"* supported the Federal operation in Chechnya.

However, the problem of Chechen status as a subject of the Russian Federation would not be resolved by military means. This question must be addressed and could only be addressed after the liberation of Chechen territory from the fighters and their liquidation. Whilst the situation at the moment *"was going favourably for troop operation, he felt that any feelings of euphoria were premature, because there were more serious combat operations ahead"*⁹⁷.

Views of Colonel General Mikhail Karatuyev, Chief of Rocket Troops and Artillery

In an interview in November 1999⁹⁸, Colonel General Karatuyev started by saying that peculiarities and special factors in carrying out the tasks in the North Caucasus had compelled the introduction of *"corrections to the methods of the creation and combat use of artillery groupings. We have proceeded from the principle*

⁹⁶ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 44 (167), 12-18 November 1999, p2, "Nuzhny ne tol'ko voyennye resheniya". Interviewed by Andrey Korbut.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 45 (168), 19-25 November 1999, p1, "Bog Voyny' menyayet taktiku" by Sergey Sokut.

that each motor rifle company, each airborne company must be reinforced with an artillery or mortar battery. Additionally, for the execution of tasks of a grouping as a whole or groupings on axes, the artillery commander (or Chief of rocket troops and artillery) of each of these groupings has artillery units and subunits directly subordinated to him". In other words decentralisation, so that even at company level an artillery or mortar battery would be in direct support of the combined arms commander of that subunit.

He reminded readers that in past Soviet/Russian operations great emphasis was placed on the direct fire role because of the greater shock effect on the battlefield. (Television screen in recent weeks have provided many pictures of Federal self-propelled artillery in the direct fire role from a higher feature 'shooting up' Chechen villages and homes lower down on the central plain.)

General Karatuyev went on to state that "*the second speciality of artillery in the course of operations included the fact that in the first place we have adopted the objective-zonal method of engaging targets*". It was not in general use in the first Chechen conflict, but was carried out in a much less complete manner. Details of this method are shown in Box 10 below.

Box 10 – The Objective-Zonal Method of Engaging Targets⁹⁹

In the classical approach to the engagement of enemy targets, all forms of target acquisition data are gathered together at the very highest headquarters, which then carries out the allocation of targets to be engaged by fire up to and including mortar batteries.

Such a method has serious shortcomings. First, it has a serious lack of momentum, for [fire] planning and target allocation takes up too much time. Secondly, there is a rigid centralisation of control. Thirdly, there is a lowering of initiative at the lower links [in the chain of command] of combined arms commanders - company, battalion, regiment, division in the organisation and planning of fire preparation.

The objective-zonal method envisages in each troop entity from battalion and higher that the combined arms commander is responsible for reconnaissance, target acquisition and engagement of targets within his zone of responsibility. As a result, inertia is reduced and decentralisation is effected. Commanders of lower links, on the one hand, have the opportunity to display initiative and to make more active use of artillery for the benefit of their subunits, and on the other, their responsibility for target engagement is increased.

Another point of interest arising from the interview was the fact that several artillery regiments in Chechnya operate with mixed equipments, which include tube artillery and rocket artillery subunits. Some have been included in the establishment of permanent readiness formations and units, others were brought up to strength in preparation for the operation.

In answer to a question concerning problems which had appeared in the course of operations during this Chechen conflict, General Karatuyev made a number of points. The first point was that because of deficiencies in reconnaissance and control, the combat capabilities of artillery were no more than 50%. To carry out reconnaissance and determine the coordinates of objects and targets could only be done within the limits of optical vision.

⁹⁹

Ibid.

The second problem related to the automatic control system. Federal Forces have obsolete automatic control systems. They are being improved, but because of insufficient funding they cannot be issued to troops in the immediate future in sufficient quantities. Automated control systems only exist in the artillery at the tactical level from artillery battalion to the senior battery officer. The link from the senior battery officer to the guns has not been completed. In essence an automated control system link exists above the artillery battalion to regiment, artillery or rocket brigade, to artillery of a division, army corps or army.

The Chechen Side

Unity in Battle but Schisms Remain

Whilst most Chechen fighting elements, the official and the unofficial, have joined together in fighting the common enemy, it would appear that there are still fundamental divisions in Chechen society, ranging from the supporters of President Maskhadov; the Mufti of Chechnya and those opposed to Wahhabism; Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev; Movladi Udugov; Wahhabites and those with external links to Afghanistan, the Taliban and Pakistan; and finally the civilian population of Chechnya who are utterly incensed with the damage and suffering that they have had to endure, coupled with the fact that any chance of the independence that they fought for earlier has now been irretrievably lost.

War weariness and the divisions within Chechnya can only help the Russian operation, particularly if there are different Chechen governments in exile which would foster and advocate the separate causes of each claimant to be the only genuine Chechen government in exile, thus 'confirming' that the Chechens are incapable of governing themselves, reducing any chance of external economic support to rebuild their ruined infrastructure, still ruined after the first conflict, but which received further devastation.

A Future of Exile

A recent article in *Segodnya* postulated that there could well be three governments in exile as a result of a Russian 'victory'¹⁰⁰. Their analysis is shown below. Although any outright victory by the Federal Forces at this stage must be considered premature, consideration of the possibilities may provide an opportunity for those who seek to promote threats to other states in the Caucasus-Caspian Region.

Box 11 - First Power Centre - President Aslan Maskhadov

The government of Maskhadov, which will "handle" Europe and the United States. Most probably, this government will settle in Georgia, in Turkey, in one of the Baltic states, or somewhere in Eastern Europe. It is there that Maskhadov is known and sympathized with. The Russian secret services will have to cut him off from the financial resources of the Middle East, and constantly emphasize Maskhadov's weakness and incompetence.

Maskhadov will never forgive Udugov and Yandarbiyev their past offences and humiliations, least of all the fact that they drew Chechnya into a new war. The moral and political support of the West have made Maskhadov a traitor in the eyes of the two other governments.

¹⁰⁰ *Segodnya*, 30 December 1999, p1-2, "Maskhadov is not needed as a prisoner" by Igor Galichin.

Box 12 - Second Power Centre - Movladi Udugov

This will be much more powerful, and therefore dangerous. It will appear in Afghanistan, under the protection of the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. The Chechen government in exile there will probably be headed by Movladi Udugov. According to Russian secret services, Udugov has already cleared this with the Taliban, and has been given a sector of the Asian drug market to replenish his "governmental resources".

The eternal ideological opponent of Maskhadov and Yandarbiyev, Udugov believes the former to be too weak, and the latter to be too stupid, pompous, and greedy. He is not likely to forgive Maskhadov for what he considers past humiliations. Moreover, he believes Maskhadov to be working for Moscow. A tactical union with Yandarbiyev is possible in principle, but only if the Taliban and bin Laden experience financial difficulties because of international sanctions.

Box 13 - Third Government in Exile - Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev

It will be formed in Middle East. Yandarbiyev is there already, raising funds for the "jihad". This government will handle the most civilized, and therefore wealthiest, part of the Islamic world. Yandarbiyev's image will be that of a "trader". His government may concentrate considerable sources of finance in its hands. The Russian secret services will have to isolate Yandarbiyev's government from the others, and present it as a structure whose officials are out to line their own pockets.

He hates both Maskhadov and Udugov. Yandarbiyev is certain that it is he who was destined to be Dudayev's successor, and thinks that Maskhadov and Udugov conspired to deprive him of what should have been his. His government will advocate bringing back the purity of Dudayev's ideas on the independence of Chechnya and "Islamic solidarity". On the other hand, greedy as he is (his greed is the talk of the day in Chechnya), Yandarbiyev will never share anything with his "brothers in the jihad".

According to *Segodnya*, this arrangement would suit Russia perfectly. All these three structures would work for different masters, and simultaneously fight one another for sponsors. On this assumption, in 18 months time or so Chechen "resistance" would be thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the world community; Moscow's task will be clear, but not simple to achieve. The Taliban regime together with the "Chechen" enclave will require to be isolated. All terrorist acts and trouble-spots in the CIS and perhaps globally would inevitably be attributed to activities of "Udugov's government". *Segodnya* expects that the Russian Foreign Ministry will use Udugov and his followers as a perfect example of the terrorist nature of the Chechen "resistance", and may well present an opportunity for United States and Russian cooperation to fight international terrorism.

Conclusions

The 'invasion' of Dagestan by Chechen bandit formations and Islamic extremists provided an opportunity for the implementation of deep-laid military plans, which originated from the military failure in the first conflict, to make another attempt to bring Chechnya back within the fold of the Russian Federation by the application of massive military force. It was not so much the desire to avenge the defeat of 1996, though that had a part in it, but the fact that continued Chechen 'rebellion' and the perception that Islamic extremism was a threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and Constitution, particularly when Islamic extremist activity could be linked to a wider international terrorism.

It is not simply the aspersion that the Chechen government under Maskhadov is a criminal regime, or the inference that Maskhadov is a criminal, but Moscow has manipulated the situation to bring further chaos and disunity to Chechnya through her age-old policy of '*divide and rule*', '*knout and honey*', so that Chechnya could come to be recognised as an ungovernable state, and a haven for wrongdoing. The clear message is that at no stage did Moscow ever contemplate giving Chechnya independence outside the Russian Federation.

Undoubtedly, the Russian success up until 31 December 1999 was due, as General Viktor Kazantsev, Commander North Caucasus Military District said, to the **analysis of past mistakes**, coordination of power-wielding structures, planning, combined exercises and activities over the previous three years. In particular, the massive mobilisation of at least 100,000 troops in support of the anti-terrorist operations in Dagestan and Chechnya bears witness to careful, detailed planning and coordination. But perhaps the main difference between the first Russo-Chechen conflict and the present operation has been the consistent, resolute firmness of the political authorities in prosecuting the war in Chechnya, having secured the backing of Russian society as a whole.

Massive Use of Artillery and Air Power

Second, the wide-scale use of artillery and air power inflicted devastating punishment on the enemy from a distance, preserving infantry fighting strength and combat effectiveness, with a slow, careful, methodical approach through the northern part of Chechnya, and establishing as Federal Forces advanced southwards to the River Terek, military administrations in the two northern rayony of Naurskiy and Shelkovskiy, each under a general officer. The aim was to establish a deep encirclement of Groznyy, having first secured in the north west, the Terskiy and Sunzhenskiy features which command the Mozdok road in the west and which on their eastern extremities afford good observation and command of the terrain overlooking Groznyy.

Greater Flexibility in Groupings and Artillery Target Engagement

Third, the appearance of a more flexible form of troop grouping and the greater flexibility in the provision of fire support through decentralisation has ensured a faster response. However, it should be noted that because of deficiencies in reconnaissance equipment, artillery could not achieve combat capabilities of more than 50%.

Misappreciations of Basayev and Khattab

Fourth, Federal Forces received an unexpected bonus through the errors and misappreciations of Basayev and Kattab, whose belief in Dagestani support proved

to be ill-founded. They leaned too heavily on the experience of the first Chechen campaign. They were convinced that Russia could not in the short time gather together sufficient forces for a vigorous repulse. Basayev and Khattab considered that the Federal Forces would not succeed in quickly organising the coordination of all the power structures. Finally, they made the wrong assumption that the Federal authorities would be at a loss, but both the President and the Prime Minister acted in a positive and resolute manner.

Internal Divisions Within Chechnya

Fifth, whilst most Chechen fighting elements, the official and the unofficial, belonging to certain field commanders, joined together in fighting the common enemy, it would appear that there are still fundamental schisms and divisions in Chechen society. The toll of the effort in the first Chechen conflict, war weariness, and the divisions within Chechnya can only help the Russian operation, particularly if different Chechen governments in exile appear. They would provide another example to show that the Chechens are incapable of governing themselves, reducing any chance of external economic support to rebuild their ruined infrastructure.

Availability of Former Southern Direction Arms Dump

Sixth, the Federal Forces have been very fortunate to secure a large percentage of the weapons, equipment and ammunition complexes prepositioned from Soviet times in Transdnestr (Moldova) to support the Southern Direction.

Future Problems for the Federal Forces

Competence of Russian Soldier

Whilst the planning, mobilisation and execution of this operation have secured an almost trouble-free movement and occupation of the northern part of Chechnya, apart from the battle at Goragorsk, situated between the Terskiy and Sundzhenskiy features in the north west, south of the Terek River, there were no great battles in the earlier stages, but in the latter day confrontations between Russian and Chechen to the south of Groznyy, the ordinary Russian soldier has still not shown himself to be well-trained, disciplined and competent.

High Price in Manpower and Equipment

The problems of movement into Groznyy and its ultimate capture by Federal Forces have already shown that a high price will be exacted in the shape of manpower and equipment. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers has already become concerned about the mounting death and casualty roll. Public opinion could still turn against the military campaign before the operation in its present form has been completed.

The concentration of such a large number of troops has already involved monumental expenditure, that the Russian Federation and the Federal Armed Forces can ill afford. The cost of the war has to some extent been offset by the high price of oil on the world market. However, despite enlargement of the military budget, the difficulties of staying within it while financing an ongoing conflict may have a debilitating effect on the priority need for modernisation of equipment. The much publicised announcement of a further 40,000 troops being sent to Chechnya is probably not an increase in troop strength there, but to take account of casualties and the departure of troops whose period of service has terminated and are due to return to civilian life.

Furthermore, as the Federal Forces turn to engage Chechen bandit formations in their southern mountain retreats and bases, Russian forces could also become vulnerable to guerrilla attacks in their rear. Additionally, in having 'pacified' the central plain there will remain in the longer term a minimum requirement to station at least the equivalent of one motor rifle division in Chechnya on a wartime establishment and footing.

Future Situation in North Caucasus

In the northeast Caucasus, the obliteration of everything and anything Chechen will impact on the prevalent hate, fear and anger toward Russia present amongst the Muslim mountain peoples, due to their perceptions of economic exploitation, loss of history, literary heritage and Arabic scholarship.

Whilst fighting continues in Chechnya, Dagestan will remain an explosive entity. Certainly, the evacuation of 10,000 local inhabitants from Avaristan to Makhachkala and the destruction of their houses by artillery and aerial bombardment will do little to enhance their attitude towards the Russian military machine.

Over and above the prevalent trend for movement of people, particularly young people, to the towns, the latest dislocation will further reduce the everyday regular attention needed to maintain the mountain terraces. Dissatisfaction over the corrupt political regime in Makhachkala will continue. Basayev in his 'invasion' of Dagestan attempted to exploit the differences within the 14 titular nationality system of government, the rivalry between the ruling Darghin-Kumyk alignment and the Avar-Lak communities. Religious restriction of Wahhabism following the invasion will provide further causes of friction and unhappiness.

The situation throughout the North Caucasus will remain tense: the fraught situation between the Ingush and North Osetia over Prigorodnyy rayon and the tensions in Kabardino-Balkar, Karachayev-Cherkessia and Adygeya are but four examples. There is also the added danger that both Georgia and Azerbaijan could become involved in the conflict as a result of Federal action in cross-border pursuit operations or the interdiction of the movement of reinforcements, weapons, equipment and ammunition through their territory to Chechnya or elsewhere in the North Caucasus.

Pollution of the war zone by oil products, chlorine and other noxious substances, and their inevitable leaching into the northern Caspian Basin could well have an effect on the breeding grounds for the sturgeon in the Northeast Caspian Sea.

Finally, not only has Chechnya lost the chance to obtain independence, but Russia has probably lit the slow-burning fuse of a greater, more wide-spread movement, involvement and focus for the forces of international terrorism under the guise of Islamic extremism.

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