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CHECHNYA:

WAR AS A CONTINUATION OF POLICY

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CHECHNYA: WAR AS A CONTINUATION OF POLICY

With the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) and the formation of the federated states of Russia, many nations of the old U.S.S.R. believed the time was right for them to seek further autonomy, and join what they believed was their historic and rightful place in the community of nations. Further complicating the development and stability of the new Russian federation was the instability of the new Russian federal government, where cohesion and development of national policy and interests could easily find themselves in conflict with the personal objectives of those seeking power. A prime example of this friction is shown through Nikolai Grammatikov's observation in his article on the war in Chechnya that "Mr. Yeltsin himself: in his struggle with President Gorbachev proclaimed that 'the republics have to take as much sovereignty as they can'...."¹ With this statement Yeltsin appears to contradict Russia's stated goal of preservation of the sovereignty of the federation with the states taking more subservient role as republics within the federation.

One such region seeking to be an autonomous republic was that of Chechnya, an area slightly larger than the state of Connecticut, located in the Caucasus region.

The Russians used many different methods of statecraft to preserve the fragile federation, and in the case of Chechnya the instrument of



¹ Nikolai V. Grammatikov, "The Russian Intervention in Chechnya in December 1994: Issues and Decision-Making," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 11, no. 4, (December 1998) pg. 112.

statecraft finally chosen to keep Chechnya in the Federation was military intervention. While the use of military force may have maintained the federation, it is the position of this paper that the use of military force failed to fully accomplish the political and national objectives of Russia or Boris Yeltsin. This assertion is based on the fact that after militarily intervening, the Russian government entered into an uneasy truce that did not resolve the issue of Chechnya's position in the Russian federation and left overall control of the territory in the hands of the Chechens. Further, Russia is unable to exploit the economic strength of the region, especially its oil resources. One could even say that through the course of action taken by Russia that Chechnya moved from a member of the federation to an occupied territory.

Selecting the Instrument of Statecraft

There are a number of different tools of statecraft that can be used by a nation to advance its national interests and objects. These include the use of sanctions, preferential trade agreements, monetary aid, covert actions against a government in power, and the use of military forces to name a few. In selecting the most appropriate instrument, many factors come into play including: *national interests*; the *threats* to those interests; an examination of *domestic and international concerns and opinions*; what the *political objectives* are; *opportunities* being presented; and the *risks* associated with various actions or inactions. As one may be able to imagine, the selection of the optimum instrument is a complex process and nowhere was that complexity more apparent than in Yeltsin's decision-making process for Chechnya.

National Interests

The key national interest for Boris Yeltsin and the Russian leadership is the preservation of Russia. This was a continuous struggle since Boris Yeltsin took the reigns of leadership from Mikhail Gorbachev. Nickolai V. Grammatikov articulated this when he stated: “From 1991 President Yeltsin had to face the frictions between the center (Moscow’s federal government) and the periphery (the subjects of the Federation). The new Federation with 89 regions and autonomous republics often populated with the numerous national minorities was a great challenge.”² Complicating Yeltsin’s efforts to preserve the federation was the internal political instability of Yeltsin and the Russian Government. This instability within Russia’s political environment colored the actions of Boris Yeltsin and others as they sought a solution to Chechnya’s desire for independence.

Tied to the concern for the preservation of the federation was the concern that the loss of Chechnya would start a domino effect of the other republics within the Trans-Caucasus region. Most Russian political leaders believed that if Russia allowed any of the republics to become fully independent, it would ignite nationalist passions within other republics, leading to a cascading desire for independence throughout not only the Caucasus, but other regions within the Federation as well.³

Another national interest was the economic importance of Chechnya. Its location makes it a strategic crossroads for the movement of oil from the Caspian Sea and Trans-Caucasus states. Additionally, Chechnya was a major oil refining center providing specialty lubricants to all of

² Grammatikov, 112.

³ John Arquilla and Theodore Darasik, “Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (1999) 209.

Russia⁴ and a vital cross-road for pipeline transportation systems and for rail and highway systems.⁵

Assumptions

On the international front, the Russian leadership held the basic assumption that the world would view Russia's actions within Chechnya as an internal conflict and therefore the international community would not seek to intervene or be overly critical of the government's actions. This view is likely to have been reinforced by the fact that, since Chechnya declared independence on November 1, 1991, no nation state within the international community had extended diplomatic recognition to the Chechen Republic.⁶ There had also been no international intervention, either politically or physically, in Russia's resolution of claims of independence by any of the other republics or ethnic regions within the federation.

On the domestic front, Russian leadership believed military actions against Chechnya would be welcomed by both the people of Russia and Chechnya as "doing something" about the "terrorist" acts and general lawlessness that were being attributed to Chechnya. The intensity of these acts of "terrorism" seemed to increase from 1991, especially in the first seven months of 1994, when there were four separate hijackings involving people trying to flee to Chechnya.⁷ This coupled with the fact that General Dzhokhar Dudayev, the Chechen President, had released a large number of prisoners in November 1991 to help in the defense of Chechnya helped

⁴ Arquilla and Darasik, 209.

⁵ John F. Antal, "A Glimpse of Wars to Come:," *Army* (June 1999) 30.

⁶ Edward Kline, "ASF Chechnya Brief," from *Andre Sakharov Foundation* [on-line]; available from <http://www.wdn.com/asf>.

⁷ Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: NYU Press, 1998) 148.

reinforce the Russian public's belief that Chechnya was without rules and military force would likely be needed to restore order.

One of the more critical assumptions was that the use of the military to establish a new government within Chechnya could not only be done quickly, but would be supported by the Chechens as an act of liberation from the corrupt government of General Dudayev. This assumption was based on a variety of factors, not least of which was the fact that there had been open opposition to the rule of General Dudayev for some time. This opposition had led to the dissolution of Chechnya's Parliament by Dudayev in mid-1993 and to physical conflict between pro and anti Dudayev forces in front of the Parliament building in June 1993. The use of the Russian military to support a war of liberation also fit with President Yeltsin's belief that his use of the military in this situation mirrored President Bill Clinton's use of the military to restore a democratic government in Haiti and would raise his popularity as elections approached.⁸

Objectives

The previously identified national interests form the core of the objectives the Russian government sought to accomplish by having Chechnya remain a part of the federation. Sergei Koalev states that the objectives of the Kremlin were (1) overthrow the regime of General Dzhokhar Dudayev, (2) prevent Chechnya from separating from Russia, (3) establish law and order in Chechnya, (4) protect the rights of Chechnya's Russian speaking population, and (5) prevent the creation of a center of Islamic fundamentalism in the North Caucasus.⁹

In addition to the five objectives identified by Kovalev above, it is generally agreed that Russia's objectives also included the following. First, keeping the Trans-Caucasus under

⁸ Gall and de Waal, 161.

Russian control, was believed necessary in order to limit outside influences in the region, especially those of Turkey and Iran. This action would provide “buffer states” from those ancient adversaries. It was also seen as providing stability to the region, especially the North Caucasus and Russia’s access to warm water ports on the Black Sea through Krasnodar.

Secondly there was a desire to retain control over the areas strategic resources, most notably the oil resources of the region. The oil fields of the Trans-Caucasus region provide a great deal of wealth to the Russian federation in addition to helping meet Russia’s energy needs.

Opportunities/Threats/Risks

There were three main opportunities that appeared to arise from military intervention in Chechnya. The first, and argued by some to be the *foremost* was that it would be a convincing demonstration of Russia’s resolve to keep the federation intact. As Charles Blandy put it, “Seen from the Russian point of view, there was no doubt that the continuation of the Chechen ‘running sore’ reduced the authority of Moscow and consequently damaged the viability of the Russian Federation.”¹⁰ Second was the preservation of Russian hegemony in the Caucasus region. This would help ensure stability in a region that not only contained oil resources but as importantly had the grain lands of the Kuban and Stavropol territories and access to the warm water ports of the Black Sea.

A third objective was that military action in Chechnya would enhance Boris Yeltsin’s popularity and thereby enhance the likelihood he would be reelected as President of Russia. The Presidential elections were two years away, but in early 1994 Yeltsin’s popularity rating was

⁹ Sergi Kovalev, “Russia after Chechnya,” *The New York Review of Books*, 17 July 1997, 27.

¹⁰ Charles Blandy, “The Battle for Grozny,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 7 no. 2 (February 1995) 53.

below 10% and strong opposition was coming from the nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.¹¹ As the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Oleg Lobov stated, “It is not only the integrity of Russia. We need a small victorious war to raise the President’s ratings.”¹²

The use of military force was not without risks. Chief among these risks was that the war could be long and popular support of the Russian people would wane. In fact, based on the Russian people’s experiences from the war in Afghanistan, there was a distinct possibility that if the war did not end quickly the will of the Russian people would be for Russian forces to withdraw. Such a withdrawal of forces would serve to give Chechnya a more positive, rather than negative, outcome from the military’s intervention. Secondly, while the stated purpose of the Russian government was that any military action would be, as Lobov indicated, an action to liberate,¹³ it may not be viewed as such by the Chechens. Finally, there was the risk that military action would lead other countries in the region with Islamic heritage to rise to the support of the Chechen peoples, resulting in a push by other ethnic groups within the Caucasus to proclaim independence.

Means

The tools available for realizing the political objectives are numerous and include such actions as *diplomatic persuasion*, *incentives* and *coercive diplomacy*. Boris Yeltsin used a variety of these techniques between 1991 when Chechnya first declared its independence and his subsequent ordering of a military assault on Grozny in November of 1994. These techniques

¹¹ Gall and de Waal, 144.

¹² Gall and de Waal, 161.

¹³ Gall and de Waal, 120.

included: attempts to *negotiate a treaty solution*, similar to treaties that had been negotiated with other republics within the federation; use of *economic sanctions*; and, *covert* support of an alternate regime.

While Mr. Yeltsin utilized a variety of these tools to maintain Chechnya in the federation, in the end it was the military option that he elected to use to accomplish his objectives. There is debate as to whether the use of military force was necessary or if some other tool of statecraft may have been more effective. An analysis of which tool most appropriate is beyond the scope of this paper. We are focusing our analysis on the use of the military as the tool of statecraft and whether that instrument achieved the anticipated result.

Russian Military Strategy

The Russian Army did not completely solve Boris Yeltsin's political problem in Chechnya. How did the ragged band of Chechen soldiers stop what was then thought to be one of the most powerful armed forces in the world in 1994? Much of the answer may be found in an analysis of the military strategy devised by the Russians and their implementation and execution of that strategy. More insights surface with an analysis of whether or not the Russians truly understood what kind of war and enemy they were getting ready to fight.

Strategic Environment

Clausewitz said that the first and most important task of the strategist is to understand the nature of the war upon which a nation is about to embark. Only then can a successful strategy be devised. Analysis shows that the Russians failed to truly understand the nature of the coming Chechen war. As a result, the Russian strategy for gaining control of Chechnya was flawed both in both its conception and execution.

Clausewitz' describes a trinity, consisting of three major aspects of the nature of war: passion, chance, and rational control. Passion generally refers to the primordial violence, hate, fear and other emotions that affect how people conduct war or think about war. Chance refers to the inherent uncertainty and friction in warfare at every level, which results from the interaction of natural factors (weather and terrain, geography, etc), human error and misjudgments, and an infinite number of other unanticipated actions, reactions, and events. Rational control describes the role of the warring nation's leadership for the war, typically the government, and encompasses the reason for going to war, strategies selected, and other controlling decisions, procedures, or arrangements.

Russian assessment of the nature of a potential war with Chechnya was severely flawed. From the outset, they failed to fully appreciate the "passion" with which the Chechens would resist. General Pavel Grachev, Minister of Defense, had little respect for the fighting abilities of the Chechens and anticipated their hasty withdrawal or surrender as soon as the first Russian troops arrived on the scene. The day after the failure of the initial attack on Grozny on November 26, 1994, by Chechen opposition fighters with some Russian "volunteers", Grachev said, "If the Army had fought, we would have needed one parachute regiment to decide the whole affair in two hours."¹⁴ Instead, the Chechens, when faced with an invasion of their country by the Russians, resisted to the fullest extent possible, uniting solidly behind Dudayev. The ferocity of their resistance throughout the war and the support of the Chechen population indicated a powerful will to resist the invaders that completely surprised the Russians.

In considering "Chance", "the realm of the Army", the Russians appeared unprepared for the difficulties of street fighting against tough Chechen defenders in the rubble center of Grozny

¹⁴ Gall and de Waal, 157.

and the mountainous terrain of the Caucasus. The difficulties inherent in all military operations were multiplied many times over by tough environmental factors such as those. The degree to which the Chechens had organized themselves for effective resistance, to include a sophisticated electronic warfare capability for lateral communications as well as direction-finding, was another surprise to the Russians.¹⁵ Their difficulties were further exacerbated by the cumbersome command and control structure of the Russian Army (especially when compared to the flexible and decentralized command and control structure of the Chechens, ideal for the small unit fighting in the city and mountains), and the low level of competence of many of the initial Russian units engaged. In fact, several senior Russian commanders had advised against using the Army because they knew that the Army was not prepared.¹⁶

“Rational Control”, the “realm of the Government”, was not often evident in the preparation and execution of Russian military strategy in Chechnya. The political decision-making process in Russia that led to the decision to use the military option has already been discussed in detail earlier in this strategic analysis and will not be further discussed here.

Given that the Russians did not fully appreciate the true nature of the war in which they were embarking, it is not surprising that they would develop a defective strategy for accomplishing their military objectives, and that the Army, at least initially, would not be prepared for the competent conduct of that strategy. Analysis of this strategy, using the “Ends-Ways-Means-Risks” model will show the flaws in the Russian strategy.

¹⁵ Antal, 33.

¹⁶ Antal, 33.

Ends

The “End” of Russian military strategy in Chechnya appears to have consisted of the military objective of capturing Grozny and the other key cities of Chechnya since the great majority of the one million Chechens lived in those densely populated cities. The Russians believed this action of capturing the capital of Chechnya would lead to a quick end to the resistance by the Chechens and their withdrawal into the Caucasus Mountains hopefully avoiding a protracted guerrilla war.¹⁷ In fact, in their initial rules of engagement, the Russians were told to shoot only if they received fire from the Chechens, presumably in the belief that they would be able to bloodlessly roll into Grozny and end the resistance.¹⁸ This was not to be the case. After the initial setback of the Russian attack on Grozny in December 1994, the Russians began to refine their military objectives. When it became apparent that the Chechens intended to defend Grozny, Grachev ordered a full assault on the city to destroy all resistance. He also ordered the capture of General Dudayev, now the recognized leader of the Chechen resistance.¹⁹ There were no clearly defined strategic military objectives beyond these. As the fighting dragged on, the elimination of all Chechen forces became an additional objective, but for the purposes of this analysis, the principal military objective was the capture of Grozny.

The Army was hampered from the beginning by the absence of a clearly defined objective. Confusion as to the intent of the attack on Grozny is evident in the comments of two senior Russian leaders. General Grachev stated on December 29, 1994, just days before the initial attack on the city, “that Grozny would not be stormed ‘in the classical sense’ but that ‘movement

¹⁷ Antal, 31.

¹⁸ Antal, 32.

¹⁹ Antal, 33.

inside the city will continue to confiscate arms and liquidate criminal groups””. Oleg Lobov, Secretary of the Security Council “insisted that Grozny would be ‘liberated’ not ‘stormed.’”²⁰ This kind of ambiguous language makes it virtually impossible for commanders to plan effective operations that accomplish the intent of the political leadership. Clearly, any commander would deduce from this kind of guidance that nobody is expecting a serious fight for the city and that resistance would most likely fall apart as soon as powerful armored columns drove into the city. The danger of issuing poorly conceived and defined objectives works its way down to the lowest levels. For example, the deputy brigade commander for one of the units in the initial attack on Grozny “complained about the lack of planning and reiterated that his orders were simply to ‘go into the city, and then take the major buildings and hold them for the Interior Ministry troops to come in and take over.’”²¹ A more accurate and thorough analysis of the nature of the Chechen resistance would have given the Russian leadership a more sobering appreciation of what they would have to do in Grozny. The senior Russian commanders, many of whom were veterans of the fierce struggle in Afghanistan, were experienced and intelligent enough to devise an effective strategy for dealing with the Chechens. However, when the strategy begins with a faulty analysis of the overall strategic situation and is further hindered by the lack of clarity in specifying military objectives, it is to be expected that military operations derived from such a beginning will fail. Unfortunately for the Russians, this problem would never be fully solved and the Russians would finally have to depart Chechnya in humiliation in 1996 having never defeated the Chechen defenders.

²⁰ Pontus Siren, “The Battle for Grozny: The Military Failure,” in *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, ed. Ben Fowkes (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998) 120.

²¹ Siren, 120.

Means

The “Means” of the Russian military strategy for Chechnya were the Russian armed forces. In terms of sheer size, the Army was large enough and possessed sufficient modern arms to successfully combat the Chechens. They could count on total air domination, especially after the first day of the invasion in which Chechnya’s tiny “air force” was destroyed. However, the quality of the Russian Army was nowhere near what Russian political leaders assumed, at least in comparison to the level of quality they assessed for the Chechens. The Russians had not trained at division level for two years which meant that division and corps staffs would not be fully prepared for the coordination of large scale combined arms operations nor, just as importantly, the huge logistical requirements over extremely long and vulnerable lines of communications necessary to sustain a modern army in the field.²² In fact, the level of training across the board was well below what is considered acceptable for a modern army. Budget shortfalls had resulted in: a low level of maintenance and equipment readiness and appropriate levels of stocks of supply, especially fuel; and perhaps as damaging, they contributed to a huge decline in morale in the Russian forces. The natural consequence of this kind of situation is poor discipline and dramatic reductions in the combat effectiveness of individuals and units.²³

An additional shortcoming of the higher-level Russian staffs about to embark on combat operations in Chechnya was that their planning was based on some faulty assumptions and lessons learned from prior training. Just three months before the Russian invasion, in anticipation of the coming conflict, the North Caucasus Military District had conducted staff training and command post exercises using a Chechen invasion scenario. These exercises were

²² Antal, 31.

²³ Siren, 122.

“based on the premise that Chechen resistance would be weak” and the General in charge of the planning assumed that resistance would fold in just a few days. These were the assumptions of Grachev as well when he certified to Boris Yeltsin that fall that the Army was ready to conduct combat operations in Chechnya.²⁴

Another “means” problem was the failure of the Ministry of Defense, the Interior Ministry, and the Federal Counter Intelligence Service to develop a unified command structure. Interagency competition, jealousy, and rivalry made it very difficult, if not impossible, for the military leadership to devise and execute a well-coordinated strategy for operations in Chechnya.²⁵ Paradoxically, within the Russian Army, the command structure was extremely centralized, which resulted in a complete lack of initiative on the part of junior leaders at the tactical level and a cumbersome mechanism for issuing and carrying out orders. Given the fluid and distributed nature of combat in cities like Grozny and the mountains of the Caucasus, this type of command structure and mentality were exactly the opposite of what was needed.

The litany of problems affecting the quality of the “means” of Russian military strategy may seem in some cases to be below the threshold of concern of a strategic planner (i.e. problems with individual training and discipline within the Russian armed forces). However, this kind of rot within a military establishment can eventually have catastrophic consequences if other problems are also present. The “passion” with which the Chechens intended to fight, the morale and leadership of the fighting forces of the Chechens, the decentralized organization and command structure, and the competence with which they fought stand in stark contrast to the mass of the Russian conscripts sent to fight in Chechnya. When this is coupled with the other

²⁴ Antal, 31.

²⁵ Siren, 121.

shortcomings of the Russian military machine, such as a poor command structure and faulty planning based on incorrect assumptions, the ability or, rather, the inability of the Russian soldier to somehow overcome those shortcomings is magnified. This reveals the failure of the Russians to truly understand the true nature of the war in Chechnya and clearly undercut their ability to develop an effective strategy that would emphasize the strengths of the Russian armed forces against the vulnerabilities of the Chechens.

Ways

The “Ways” of the Russian strategy for military operations in Chechnya describes the concept of operations, i.e. their plan, for defeating the Chechens and regaining control of the region. Keeping in mind the earlier analysis of “Ends” (the military objectives) and “Means” (the forces to be employed in executing the strategy), it is to be expected that the “Ways” might be similarly flawed. This is especially so since logically the development of a plan of action must flow from the objective to be achieved, and if the objective is not clearly defined, then the plan for achieving that objective will be deficient from the very start. This was clearly the case in the initial Russian plan for seizing Grozny.

The objective of the Russian invasion of Chechnya was to seize, or “liberate” Grozny. The intention of the Russian political leadership, as described above, was to do this with as little bloodshed as possible. The concept of operation was to isolate the Chechen leadership within Grozny, as well as the city itself, with a combination of attacks and political demands by the Russians. On December 11th, the Russian Army entered Chechnya with armored formations converging on Grozny from the north, east, and west. The plan was to isolate Grozny and seize

it as quickly as possible and then turn the city over to the MVD (Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs) who would then establish a new government in Chechnya.²⁶

Key to the plan was the rapid isolation of Grozny because the Russians wanted to avoid a protracted guerrilla war. If the capital city and Chechen leadership were not quickly seized, then they would most likely escape to the Caucasus Mountains to the south and begin what could be expected to be a long, agonizing insurgency against the occupying Russians. However, the Russians failed to properly execute their plan to isolate Grozny. The border between Chechnya and Dagestan was left open which allowed the Chechens to move to sanctuary when necessary as well as to receive resupply. Other gaps included the failure to immediately destroy the television tower in Grozny until December 19, 1994, almost three weeks after the operation started. This allowed the Chechens to broadcast not only to their countrymen about the danger of the Russian invasion but also to begin what was to be a very successful public information campaign on an international stage, a campaign the Russians would eventually lose, at home and abroad. The Russians did not knock out the telephone system in Grozny until December 21st which allowed the Chechens three full weeks to organize their defenses before part of their informal communications structure was knocked out.²⁷ The failure to fully isolate the city of Grozny, and figuratively speaking, the Chechen leadership, from the rest of the country and the outside world at the outset, enabled them to begin establishing their plan of resistance as well as get a head start in the international press. The result was to be a significant setback to the Russian timetable for their operation. Friction in military operations, such as that which results from significant disruptions to a timetable, has an exaggerated impact on organizations as inflexible and

²⁶ Antal, 32.

²⁷ Antal, 33.

centralized as the Russian Army. This was going to make it that much harder for them to organize a coherent attack on the city and ultimately the rest of the country.

Russian leadership realized after just a couple of weeks that their plan to just roll into Grozny was no longer viable. The powerful force of 40,000 soldiers had taken over two weeks to travel a mere 120 km, averaging little more than five miles a day. Numerous ambushes along every route revealed a tenacious foe that clearly intended to fight for the capital city. The effect was going to necessitate a revision of the Russian plan. The Russians then reorganized into strike forces of approximately brigade size and sent them in to seize key parts of the city, destroying Chechen resistance in the process. The intent was to seize the city in a rapid, surprise attack while hopefully minimizing civilian casualties.

The Chechens skillfully prepared the city of Grozny for defense. Their organization and equipment were ideally suited for the close-quarters combat and their tactics did much to neutralize the Russians' firepower advantage. The extreme "will" demonstrated by the Chechens stood in vivid contrast to the poorly disciplined Russian troops, most of whom had no idea what their mission was or why they were in Chechnya. Heavy Russian casualties contributed to their already low morale. A failure to effectively coordinate their combined arms attacks negated what should have been a huge Russian advantage. This coordination is inherently difficult and requires well-trained commanders, staffs, and units working with a flexible and coherent plan and command structure. The Russians were deficient in each of these areas with the result that the friction that is native to every battlefield was present throughout the Russian assault. Russian frustration with the slow progress, heavy casualties, and fierce defense led them to change their plan and attitude about collateral damage. In other words, the Russians decided it was more important to destroy the Chechen resistance than preserve any of the city's structures or avoid

casualties to civilians. They began to bring their firepower advantage to bear and accepted the destruction attendant to the use of so much firepower in a city. This again illustrates the Russians' failure to realize the nature of the war. The Chechens had already gained the upper hand initially in terms of defining the war to the rest of the world on their own terms. They were able to portray this as a war of independence being fought by a small republic against a much stronger oppressor. The Russian tactics played right into the hands of the Chechen leadership. Perhaps even more damaging, the Chechens were able to tell this story to the Russian people who were beginning to grow weary of the stories of the fighting and frustration and the increasing lists of Russian casualties. The effect would lead to an eventual weariness with the war that would threaten the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, thereby defeating one of the very reasons Yeltsin had used to go to war: strengthening his domestic leadership. A failure to recognize the true nature of the war in Chechnya had begun to rear its head in Russian domestic politics and would eventually lead to a negotiated settlement between the Russians and the Chechens, albeit a year and a half later.

Risk

The fourth element of the strategic analysis model is "Risk". Ideally, at this point, analysis would consider the risks that the Russians considered and evaluate whether or not they correctly determined the risks associated with their strategy. Ironically, though, it appears that they did not see much risk. This is evidenced by their presumption that resistance would be light and that they would be able to just roll into Grozny and the rest of Chechnya against relatively negligible resistance. The primary risk that the Russians seemed to have considered was that of a protracted guerrilla war. They knew that if they were not able to capture Grozny quickly and eliminate the Chechen leadership early in the operation, the Chechens would shift the center of

gravity of their resistance to the mountainous regions to the south of Grozny resulting in a much longer and more difficult operation. The Russians still held fresh memories of the difficulties of fighting insurgents in the mountains from their war in Afghanistan. They also remembered the centuries of fighting the Chechens in previous wars and knew that a war in the mountains would be tough. This risk assessment then is what led them to stake so much on a rapid conquest of Grozny.

Another significant risk that the Russians should have anticipated was that the war in Chechnya might turn into a public relations nightmare, especially after they changed tactics and decided to level the city without real regard for civilian casualties. They failed to anticipate the sophisticated psychological response of the Chechens who broadcast reports of the behavior of the Russian troops and the devastation they were visiting upon the Chechens back to Russia as well as the rest of the world. The risk was that a protracted war in which the Chechens were winning the fight for public opinion would significantly undermine public support in Russia. This could ultimately lead to an unfavorable settlement for a conclusion to the war at best, and at worst to a military disaster in Chechnya and the fall of the current Russian government.

Conclusion

While it is clear there were a variety of methods Yeltsin might have utilized in reaching his goal of keeping Chechnya in the federation, he selected military intervention as his primary tool. He succeeded in keeping Chechnya from declaring full independence, but this does not appear to be the full measure of the outcome he had envisioned. When General Dudayev was killed, the new Chechen leadership did not provide any greater acceptance of the Russian federation, the Chechnians had become unified in their desire to be free and the oil resources of the region

remained at risk. In the end, it appears that Yeltsin fell into a trap that seems to be all too alluring, using the military tool of statecraft as the primary means to accomplish national objectives as it provides the illusion of being a quick and clean solution to a complex problem. Further, when the military option was chosen, its application was flawed. The Russians failed to understand the nature of the war on which they had embarked. The political goals were unclear. The “means” they sought to employ were based on an inflexible organization which stifled initiatives at the lowest levels. Finally, the lack of a cohesive plan that utilized all the tools of statecraft to achieve Russia’s political objectives added to the chance for failure of the policies implemented.

As Kovalev²⁸ points out in his article, the only one of these objectives to be realized after Russia’s use of military forces was the ouster of General Dudayev, and even that could not be considered a full success as the Russians had no say in the naming of his replacement. Additionally, the status of Chechnya remained basically unchanged with no resolution on its claim to independence.

President Bill Clinton is said to have compared the struggles of Boris Yeltsin with those of President Abraham Lincoln in that Yeltsin was seeking to preserve his nation and retain a vital economic region. While the American Civil War could be construed as being a successful use of the military to reach a political goal, it is not clear that the same could be said of Russia’s use of the military in Chechnya.

²⁸ Kovalev, 27.

Chronology of Events in the Russia-Chechen Conflict²⁹

Associated Press

1791	Chechens lose key battle to Russians. Leader Sheikh Mansur captured.
1830-59	Russian Empire seeks to expand into the Caucasus and attacks Chechens to secure its borders with the Ottoman Empire. In 1859, Russia finally succeeds in conquering the Chechens.
1917	Russian Revolution leads to the creation of a joint Ingush, Chechen republic within Soviet Russia.
1944	Stalin sends troops to the region to exile the entire population to central Asia. Stalin feared the restless Chechens might have Nazi sympathies. Hundreds of thousands died either fighting or in transit.
1957	Chechens allowed to return to their homeland.
October 27, 1991	Dzhokhar Dudayev elected president of Chechnya.
November 1, 1991	Dudayev declares Chechnya independent.
November 1994	Former President Boris Yeltsin tells Chechens to lay down arms or face direct Russian intervention. Russian jets bomb Grozny.
December 1994	Russian tanks, about 40,000 troops roll into Chechnya, begin near-daily bombing and shelling that destroys many towns. Russian troops take weeks to recapture Grozny; accusations of bungled military campaign costs Kremlin prestige.
April 1995	Yeltsin orders unilateral cease-fire. Sporadic fighting continues.
June 1995	Dozens of pro-Dudayev rebels attack southern Russian city of Budyonnovsk, take 2,000 civilians hostage in a hospital. Russian troops unsuccessfully storm the hospital twice, then reach deal in which Chechens free hostages, escape into mountains. Peace talks begin in Grozny; negotiators call cease-fire.

²⁹ Associated Press at <http://www.chechnyanews.com/?t=chechnya/conflict.txt>.

January 1996	Rebels seize hospital in Dagestan, a republic bordering Chechnya, take more than 100 hostages. Russian forces launch four-day bombardment of Dagestani village where rebels hold hostages. Dozens are killed.
March 31, 1996	Yeltsin announces end to combat operations in Chechnya, limited withdrawal of Russian troops, negotiations through mediator, and elections to a Chechen parliament. Fighting continues uninterrupted.
April 21 1996	Dudayev killed in rocket attack.
August 6, 1996	Rebel fighters overrun Grozny, taking control of much of the city and inflicting heavy casualties.
August 31, 1996	Recently named national security chief Alexander Lebed signs pact with rebels tabling question of independence; declares war over.

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