

Appendix J

Lessons Learned from Russian Military Operations in Chechnya 1994-1996

1. Introduction. Many historical studies of urban combat have become dated. This is primarily the result of the impact that technology has had on military capabilities and evolving tactics. However, certain tenets of urban combat remain constant. The battles for the city of Grozny during the Russian intervention in the Republic of Chechnya represent a recent and critically important example of large scale operations in urban combat. Combat in Grozny was characterized by a large, technologically sophisticated military force (Russian) engaging and ultimately being defeated by a small, relatively primitive irregular force (Chechen). Grozny provides a number of fresh insights, and reinforcement of time honored tenets of urban warfare, across the scope of activities germane to modern urban combat.

2. Operations in Chechnya. Russia's war in Chechnya essentially began with the collapse of the Soviet Union, immediately after which pro-independence factions in Chechnya began agitating to free the Republic from Russian domination. This eventually led to civil war with pro-Russian factions within the Republic. Russia committed troops to Chechnya on 11 December 1994, for what many in the Russian government and military thought would be a quick campaign to restore Russian primacy. What followed was a bitter, costly, and protracted struggle that ended with the complete withdrawal of Russian military forces from Chechnya.

A primary focus of Russian operations in Chechnya was the capture of the capital city, Grozny. The initial attack on Grozny was conducted by a mechanized force, consisting of 6,000 troops mounted in tanks, BMP infantry fighting vehicles, and BTR armored personnel carriers. The Russians anticipated light opposition, but instead met a determined and heavy resistance from Chechens armed with a large number of antitank weapons. The attack was repulsed with significant Russian losses, both in personnel and armored vehicles (105 of 120 vehicles were lost). A second mechanized attack conducted on New Years Eve, 1994, was also repulsed with the loss of 140 of 200 tanks employed. The Russians captured Grozny some two months later, primarily through the use of excessive, overwhelming firepower, and at great cost to themselves and the local Chechen population.

The capture of Grozny marked the end of the first phase of Russian combat operations in Chechnya. Beginning in March 1995, the Russians became heavily engaged in anti-partisan operations as they tried to gain control of the country. Though the Russians controlled several major Chechen cities and a portion of the countryside by May 1995, they were never able to fully isolate the Republic. Chechen separatist fighters continued to receive a steady flow of arms and supplies from neighboring countries. Consequently, the Chechen fighters were able to maintain the initiative throughout this period, engaging Russian forces whenever and wherever they chose.

Even late in the campaign, Russian intelligence failed to detect Chechen fighters infiltrating Grozny, which enabled the Chechens to launch a major attack against the Russian-controlled city in early August 1996. The Chechens succeeded in capturing the city less than two weeks later.

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The recapture of Grozny was a significant loss for the Russians, precipitating a general cease-fire and the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Republic.

Besides the military aspects of combat in Chechnya, other issues such as ethnic, cultural, and religious divides impacted upon the nature of the conflict. The Russians failed to culturally orient their troops, which resulted in many serious cultural mistakes when dealing with the Chechen civilians. Once insulted or mistreated, the Chechen civilians became active participants in the struggle against Russia. The war eventually degenerated into one of abject ferocity and brutality on both sides. The Chechens are reported to have executed Russian prisoners, decapitated bodies, and boobytrapped the dead. Russian wounded and bodies were hung upside down outside of Chechen defensive positions in buildings, causing the Russians to have to shoot through their own people to engage the Chechens. The Russians, initially hesitant to cause civilian casualties, increasingly engaged Chechen units with a growing disregard for the safety of the local populace. As Russian discipline degraded, the incidences of Russian troops engaging in looting, arson, torture, even the summary execution of civilians, rose significantly. The result was the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians.

3. Lessons Learned. The intervention in Chechnya and the battles for Grozny generated many important lessons across the warfighting functions of combat in urbanized terrain. The following information is primarily from the Russian point of view, though some Chechen capabilities are included. The lessons learned are arrayed as warfighting functional considerations.

a. Command and Control.

(1) Russian military commanders lacked clear policy guidance. The Russian military's ability to attain and maintain steady, logical operational progress was hampered, if not negated, by a lack of clear governmental policy. The Russian government was split at the highest levels over the wisdom of committing forces to Chechnya, and the conduct of the intervention.

(2) Poor Russian command and control structure throughout all levels. There was no direct, unified chain of command for the operations in Chechnya. Operational directives often flowed from a number of governmental agencies directly to local unit commanders, often bypassing intermediate military commanders. This resulted in a lack of overall situational awareness, and exceptionally poor coordination among tactical forces.

(3) Russians were unable to contain/prohibit Chechen operations against Russia. When the Russian forces finally began to achieve progress in late May 1995, the Chechens initiated attacks against targets inside Russia. The result was a major propaganda victory for the Chechens.

(4) Excessive senior officer (flag level) interference contributed to operational confusion. There were eight major changes at the senior command level during the course of the intervention. Additionally, there were approximately one hundred general officers on the

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operational scene, about one general officer per 3,000 troops, which resulted in confusion as they got in each others way.

(5) Poor small unit leadership, particularly at the NCO level, was a primary cause of Russian tactical failures in Grozny. While the Russians recognize that urban combat is small unit intensive, they do not possess a professional NCO corps. Additionally, Russian forces lacked some 12,000 platoon leaders when the intervention began. This had a crippling effect on small unit operations.

(6) Russian inability to isolate Chechnya/Grozny allowed a constant flow of reinforcements and supplies into the country/city. Russian control of any given area was at best, porous. The Chechens continued to receive outside support throughout the campaign, as well as, a large supply of arms and equipment from poorly disciplined Russian troops inside Chechnya.

(7) Both sides used commercial off-the-shelf communication assets. The information war was as vitally important as any other aspect of the campaign. The Chechens had to make do with commercially available communication equipment. They fully exploited the use of cellular telephones, Motorola radios, improvised television stations, video cameras, and the internet. The Russians lacked sufficient military communication equipment, and had to supplement with commercial assets.

(8) Russian tactical communication was very difficult in Grozny. Urban structures in Grozny interfered with Russian military radios, severely hindering tactical communications. The Russians had to establish ground-based and aircraft-based relay stations to overcome the interference.

(9) Boundaries between units were tactical weak points. Units had to think of boundaries in both a horizontal and vertical context. There were many instances when the Chechens held the third floor and above, while the Russians held the first two floors and maybe the roof. This caused a lack of coordination, and mutual support. Additionally, due to poor command and control and coordination between units, boundaries became seams through which the Chechens could pass unopposed.

b. Intelligence.

(1) Lack of high quality intelligence made operations much more difficult and dangerous. Russian intelligence collection and dissemination capabilities were poor throughout the intervention. In March 1996, the Russian Minister of the Interior complained that poor reconnaissance and intelligence allowed Chechen fighters to move in and out of Grozny without opposition, which contributed to the heavy Russian losses.

(2) Directives to minimize civilian casualties ultimately put the Russians at a disadvantage. An advantage accrues to the side with less concern for the safety of the civilian population. Initially, the Russians attempted to limit civilian casualties. The Chechen

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fighters took advantage of this reticence, often using civilians, schools, and apartment buildings as a shield. While this may seem to be cold-blooded of the Chechen fighters, what must be understood is that the majority of the populace in Grozny were actually ethnic Russians, and that the ethnic Chechens had no remorse in using them in this manner.

(3) Russian concerns for the safety of the Chechen populace and property declined. As the Russian troops became increasingly frustrated in their attempts to separate Chechen fighters from the local populace, and their casualties began to mount, concerns for civilian safety waned, resulting in greater civilian casualties and further alienating the Chechen people.

(4) Rigorous communications security is essential, even against less sophisticated enemies. Much of the Russian tactical radio traffic was broadcast in the clear, which allowed the Chechens to intercept it. The Chechens were able to redirect Russian airstrikes onto Russian targets, and engage Russian artillery forward observers who broadcast their own position coordinates.

(5) The Russians made extensive use of RPVs for reconnaissance. The Chechen campaign saw the first Russian use of unmanned aerial vehicles for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. There were primarily used by Russian airborne forces.

c. Maneuver.

(1) Inadequate training in the most basic maneuver and combat skills inhibited Russian operations. Overall, poor Russian combat performance could be traced to a lack of training in fundamental military skills, a situation that was then exacerbated by an additional lack of training in specific urban combat skills. Individual skills training was so inadequate that some units were entirely incapable of undertaking combat operations. The Russian's ability to conduct large scale operations had been seriously eroded by a complete cessation of exercises at the division level in the 2 years prior to the Chechen campaign. Even regimental and battalion level exercises had been curtailed by 75 percent or more. Additionally, The air forces were not any better trained or prepared for their operational role in Chechnya.

(2) Lack of cohesiveness among the Russian forces led to confusion and antagonism. The Russian ground forces consisted primarily of regular army units and Ministry of Interior Internal Troops, which were essentially a police force. With no real unified command and control, the two groups were usually conducting uncoordinated missions, which led to confusion and fratricide.

(3) The nature of cities channels combat operations along narrow lanes of activity. Combat conditions in Grozny were characterized by narrow fields of view, limited fields of fire, and constricted avenues of approach. For the Russians, this meant movement along approaches well known and heavily defended by the Chechens.

(4) Night fighting was the most difficult activity for Russian infantry. The Russian infantry, at all levels, was inadequately trained for night operations, and lacked night vision equipment.

(5) Armored vehicles cannot operate in cities without extensive dismounted infantry support. The Chechens formed antitank hunter-killer teams equipped with RPG-7 and RPG-18 antitank missiles. They engaged Russian tanks with volley fire from above, behind, and the sides. Armor columns not supported by dismounted infantry suffered great losses.

(6) Armored engineer vehicles are indispensable for removing obstacles. The Russians found that armored engineer vehicles were critical to restoring or improving mobility in Grozny. Eventually, the Russians formed special assault groups that included armored engineer vehicles in each group.

(7) The Chechens preferred small unit, hit-and-run ambush tactics. The Chechens relied on small units (15 to 20 troops) to conduct quick, sharp ambushes, from which they would disengage before the Russians could bring significant firepower to bear. Ambushes were often conducted in three tiers, with Chechens in the underground, on the ground floor, and on the roof, with each element having a different task in the ambush. They also used ambush tactics against Russian helicopters.

(8) Urban combat is extremely manpower intensive, and results in significant attrition of personnel and materiel for the attacker. The Russians discovered that a 5 to 1 manpower ratio was often not enough, due to the high casualty rates consistent with urban combat and the requirement to guard virtually every building taken.

(10) Tracked vehicles are preferable to wheeled vehicles in the urban environment. Tracked vehicles provided better mobility than wheeled vehicles due to their significantly greater ability to negotiate obstacles and rubble.

(11) Armored vehicles required additional protection (i.e., reactive armor, sandbags, wire mesh, etc.) to negate attacks from the sides, rear, and top. Russian tank design emphasized greater armor protection on the frontal arc, and less on other areas of the vehicle. This proved inadequate for urban combat, where attacks can come from any direction. The majority of lethal hits came from above, easily penetrating turrets and engine decks, and from the rear.

(12) The spatial qualities and perspectives of urban combat are more "vertical" than non-urban combat. The Chechens regularly fought from basements, rooftops, and upper-floor rooms, making them difficult to locate and engage. Russian soldiers trained in open areas, had to reorient to a confined, highly vertical environment.

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(13) Standard Russian military unit configurations were inappropriate for urban combat. Typical Russian army unit organizations, oriented to open spaces and mechanized operations, proved to be inadequate for urban combat. They eventually had to adopt specially configured assault teams that included, among other assets, significantly greater firepower and engineer assets. Essentially, they moved towards a better combined arms team.

(14) The Russians found their helicopters to be far too vulnerable to rooftop snipers and ambushes in the urban setting. While Russian doctrine had long specified the capture of a building from the top-down, it became apparent in Grozny that this tactic was too expensive in terms of helicopter losses. The Chechens made effective use of snipers and RPG-equipped ambush teams to damage or destroy helicopters supporting Russian ground forces.

d. Fires.

(1) Artillery was invaluable in the direct fire mode. The Russians found artillery, to include rocket launchers and mortars, to be very effective for direct fire against point targets, usually at ranges of 150 to 200 meters.

(2) Obscurants (smoke, white phosphorous, tear gas) are especially useful in urban combat. The Russians used significant amounts of smoke and white phosphorus to mask the movement of forces. Every fourth or fifth artillery or mortar round was either smoke or WP. WP also had a toxic effect, easily penetrating Chechen protective masks.

(3) The Chechens effectively used RPGs against helicopters. The Chechens made effective use of ambush teams equipped with RPGs to engage Russian helicopters, either by damaging or destroying the helicopter or simply prohibiting helicopterborne operations.

(4) Air defense guns (i.e., ZSU-23-4) were valuable in suppressing ground targets. The Russians found air defense guns effective against multi-story buildings because they had sufficient elevation to hit targets in the upper stories. Air defense guns became a primary asset in the Russian special assault groups.

(5) The Russians determined that overwhelming firepower can make-up for organizational and tactical deficiencies in the short run if collateral damage is disregarded. Whenever Russian military units proved incapable of effective urban operations, the Russians simply fell back on massive, overwhelming firepower to reduce a strong point. It was through the use of excessive, unrestrained firepower, and a complete lack of regard for collateral damage, that finally enabled the Russians to gain control of Grozny.

(6) The Chechens negated Russian supporting fires by "hugging" Russian units. Whenever possible, Chechen fighters adopted the tactic of staying as physically close to Russian units as possible, so that the Russians could not employ supporting arms without the risk of injuring their own troops.

(7) The Russians found "bunker busting" weapons to be invaluable. The Russians came to rely heavily on "bunker busting" weapons for engaging Chechens, primarily snipers, entrenched in buildings.

(8) Russian helicopters needed stand-off weapons, that would allow them to engage targets while outside the range of Chechen weapons. The Chechens employed 23mm cannons and heavy machine guns against Russian helicopters, causing the Russian's helicopter gunships to fire from ranges of 3,000 meters or more. This required the use of wire-guided munitions and large caliber (240mm) rockets.

(9) The Russians made extensive use of precision-guided weapons. When the weather allowed, the Russians were able to use precision guided weapons, such as laser-guided bombs and missiles. They had great effect against priority targets such as bridges, major road intersections, and buildings.

e. Logistics.

(1) Deficiencies in the Russian logistics system degraded combat effectiveness. Significant inadequacies in the Russian logistics apparatus effected virtually all combat forces and operations. Some soldiers actually entered combat in Grozny without weapons or ammunition. The Russian transportation system failed. Supply officers were unprepared for the high volume demands for ammunition, hand grenades, smoke grenades, demolition charges, and one-shot antitank weapons.

(2) Russian logistics personnel were ill-prepared in basic soldier skills. Russian infantry often had to be used to conduct logistics operations into Grozny, because the logistics personnel lack the basic skills to defend themselves against the Chechens.

(3) The Russian ground forces required special equipment not normally found in unit T/Es. The T/E for the typical Russian infantry unit did not include such items as ropes, grappling hooks, and ladders, all of which proved essential for urban combat.

(4) Armored vehicle recovery is extremely difficult and dangerous. The Russians found the recovery of vehicles to be extremely difficult due to the terrain (i.e., narrow streets, rubble and debris), and Chechen opposition.

(5) Some Russian equipment was modified in the field to counter Chechen tactics and equipment. The Russians had to adopt add-on armor for their vehicles. They fabricated metal screens and wire mesh guards, which helped to defeat RPG and Molotov cocktail attacks.

(6) Medical support was of great importance. Russian casualty evacuation was difficult due to the lack of vehicular mobility, and the vulnerability of helicopters to Chechen fire. Many casualties were psychological, due in great part to the intense, violent nature of

close quarter combat. The Russians were ill-prepared for the level of mental health problems they encountered. Additionally, logistics units were often unable to provide fresh drinking water, which caused Russian troops to consume contaminated water that resulted in other health problems.

f. Force Protection.

(1) Operations took much longer than expected, and the cost in terms of casualties was much greater than anticipated. The Russians committed unprepared, poorly trained and poorly equipped forces to Chechnya, based on an unrealistic operational time frame. Ultimately, this cost the Russians significant casualties and the war.

(2) Fratricide was a serious and continuing problem throughout the campaign. The situation facing Russian combat forces was ripe for fratricide. Poorly trained units, operating in a confused and uncertain urban environment, often unable to tell friend from foe, and lacking quality leadership and inter-unit coordination, were often as dangerous to themselves as they were to the Chechens .

(3) Chechen use of adhoc air defense systems eliminated Russian air support, particularly helicopters, in Grozny. The Chechens were able to improvise effective anti-air defenses using a mixture of anti-air and ground (i.e., heavy machine guns, RPGs) weapons, and ambush tactics specifically adapted to the urban environment.

(4) The Chechens made extensive and effective use of snipers. Snipers fired from well inside rooms versus near window openings, as well as, from rooftops and basements. The Russians lacked an effective sniper and counter-sniper capability of their own.

(5) The Chechens improvised crude chemical weapons. The Chechens, lacking access to military chemical weapons, Used off-the-shelf materials and equipment to make chemical mines (i.e., chlorine gas), detonated remotely by radio.

(6) The Chechens made extensive and effective use of boobytraps. It seemed that the Chechens mined and boobytrapped 7-8everything. They had a good understanding of the average Russian soldier's actions and reactions, and boobytrapped accordingly. Additionally, the Russians found it difficult to maintain boobytrap awareness among their troops.