

A STEP BACK: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There is some truth to the argument that Russia's initial failures in Grozny and Chechnya as a whole can be traced directly to Moscow's reliance on out-of-date Soviet strategic thinking. The Soviets, expecting to fight in central and western Europe, believed that the enemy would prefer to declare its cities open rather than have them destroyed by combat. To the Soviets, therefore, urban terrain presented two options: if a city was defended, it was to be bypassed; if it was not, it could be taken from the march. In the latter case, entering troop formations would conduct a show of force rather than fight. Tanks would lead, followed by mounted and dismounted infantry.¹ The unwillingness to include serious urban combat in the Soviet concept of future war severely hampered Russia's ability to prepare for it.

Russia's entry into Grozny at the close of 1994 was conducted as just such a show of force, with tanks followed by mounted infantry. The Russians entered Grozny in this way because they believed that the city was not well defended. While this simple explanation is accurate, a more complex understanding of a far greater failure of Russian military thought provides more insight. The Russian approach to

¹Lester W. Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, downloaded from call.army.mil/call/fmsol/fmsopubs/issues/grozny.htm. Originally published as "Russian Urban Tactics: Lessons from the Battle for Grozny," *INSS Strategic Forum*, No. 38, July 1995.

Grozny, in both its conception and its implementation, provides damning evidence of the loss of (or disregard for) a tremendous body of knowledge. The Soviet Union had learned a great deal about urban fighting in World War II. It incorporated that knowledge into training and studies for subsequent generations of officers. Had all of this experience, all of this thought, somehow disappeared along with the Red Army?

The World War II German invasion found Soviet forces so unprepared for urban combat that they relied on scanty tactical writings from the 1920s to plan and orchestrate their defenses. Unsurprisingly, this approach had limited success. But as the war progressed the Red Army got better and better—first at urban defense, and later, as the tide turned, at the even more difficult task of offensive urban combat. That the Soviets learned from their mistakes is clear from the progression of the fighting, from the rapid loss of cities in the early days of the war to the successful defenses of Tula and Leningrad, the victory at Stalingrad, and successes in Budapest, Vienna, Königsberg, and finally Berlin. Throughout the war, Soviet analysts recorded what worked and what did not, so that these lessons could be studied and understood long after the battles were over.²

This World War II experience became the basis of Soviet planning and training for urban terrain. One obvious lesson, despite early Soviet losses, was that urban warfare heavily favors the defense. Soviet tacticians argued that to capture and hold a city, the attacker requires an advantage of at least 4:1 (some said 6:1).³ Another prerequisite for a successful attack on an urban area is an effective blockade (i.e., an encirclement of the city, sealing off all approaches) prior to the start of operations, combined with comprehensive intelligence and reconnaissance and detailed contingency planning.⁴ Forces should enter the city in small teams prepared to fight hand-

²For a useful overview of World War II defensive tactics and the defensive lessons of that war, see G. P. Yefimov, "Features of the Defense of Large Cities and Industrial Areas," *Military Thought*, January 1, 1990.

³Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*; Andrei Raevsky, "Chechnya: Russian Military Performance in Chechnya: An Initial Evaluation," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, December, 1995, p. 682.

⁴N. N. Novichkov et al., *The Russian armed forces in the Chechen conflict: analysis, results, conclusions* (in Russian), Paris, Moscow: Kholveg-Infoglob, Trivola, 1995, p. 64.

to-hand and house-to-house. Capture of buildings may be effected either by simultaneous attack from several directions or by crossing over from neighboring structures. Regardless of how the attack begins, the first step, once in the building, is to establish control over stairway landings, stairs, and upper floors using hand and smoke grenades. Once a building is captured it must be defended indefinitely to prevent its recapture by the enemy. Supply lines and flanks are susceptible to enemy counterattack. There, and elsewhere, consistent tank and artillery cover fire must protect infantry movements. Soviet scholars emphasized the importance of clear communications, especially as positions changed. Finally, Soviet analysts repeatedly noted the usefulness of the flamethrower. This weapon's particular effectiveness for clearing rooms and buildings made it a key tool in the Russian World War II urban warrior's arsenal.⁵

Red Army World War II forces also created special assault (or "storm") detachments and groups, specifically developed for independent action in urban terrain. Each detachment included a rifle battalion, a sapper company, an armor company or self-propelled assault gun battery, two mortar batteries, a cannon or howitzer battery, 1 or 2 batteries of divisional artillery, and a flamethrower platoon. The detachment was subdivided into 3 to 6 assault groups as well as a support group and a reserve. Each assault group, in essence a rifle company (the source says "platoon or company," but the structure described seems more appropriate to a company), included 1 or 2 sapper detachments, an anti-tank rifle detachment, 2 to 5 individually carried flamethrowers, smoke devices, 3 or 4 other man-portable weapons, and 2 or 3 tanks or self-propelled assault guns. If necessary, groups could be further subdivided to better focus specifically on such missions as fire, command, reserves, reconnaissance, and obstacle clearing. Individual soldiers were supplied with a large number of grenades and explosives. Training and preparation for the urban environment emphasized independent thought and action from each soldier and warned of the pitfalls of standardized procedure.⁶

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Was all of this forgotten between the years of World War II and the post–Cold War battles in Grozny? To an extent, it was. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Soviet analysts and soldiers diligently studied the urban fighting of the past, but as time went on, attention focused elsewhere. By the 1980s, urban combat was no longer the focus of in-depth exercises, and military textbooks ignored the issue almost entirely.⁷ By 1994, neither the Ministry of Defense nor any of the other government organizations with troops at their command had any forces geared specifically to urban combat. The last such force was dissolved in February 1994, at which time 400 of its 430 officers retired.⁸

This is not to say that Russian forces were entirely untrained for operations in urban environments. The overall excellently prepared *Spetsnaz* (special forces units) and paratroopers continued to train for some urban contingencies.⁹ The preparation of *Spetsnaz* and FSB¹⁰ snipers, for instance, focused almost exclusively on urban situations. But with the end of the Cold War, the prognosis for urban deployments was that they would involve primarily small-scale counterterrorist actions, not full-blown warfare. Therefore, the special forces and others prepared for exactly this sort of contingency and Russian urban training sites supported such counterterrorism preparation, as well as perhaps some peacekeeping training. As a result, the motorized rifle troops that formed the bulk of the force in Grozny continued to prepare for the open-terrain warfare that was expected when the Cold War turned hot. Only five or six of the 151 total hours of squad, platoon, and company tactical training mandated by Russian training standards for forces bound for battle were dedicated to the urban environment. Moreover, the overall decline in actual training makes it unlikely that the troops that went into Grozny received even that preparation. For many, the sole preparation for the urban mission was an instructional pamphlet on urban combat prepared by the Main Combat Training Directorate of the

⁷Yefimov.

⁸Novichkov et al., pp. 67–68.

⁹*Spetsnaz* and paratroop forces are separate from the air force and ground forces in Russia.

¹⁰The Federal Security Service and the successor organization to the KGB. Like “KGB,” the acronym “FSB” reflects the Russian terminology.

Ground Forces and printed in such small numbers that troops had to share. Even army snipers had little specialized training. National sniper schools were shut down in 1952 and “sniper” training became a regimental responsibility, often limited to simply selecting soldiers and officers who appeared to be good shots. Although specific sniper roles were laid out in training exercises and formations, actual training and preparation were minimal.¹¹

INTO GROZNY

It is quite plausible that the Russian dictat to bypass defended cities was not a result of careful consideration but rather the only course available to a force that had stopped preparing for urban combat years before. Had the Russians believed Grozny to be well defended, then, they would almost certainly not have entered the city in 1994. Indeed, Russian commanders instructed their subordinates not to expect a fight.¹² Minister of Defense General Pavel Grachev probably expected minimal resistance—if not the experience of Prague in 1968, chastened dependents frightened into a stand-down by a show of force, then something only marginally more difficult.¹³ Instead, the Chechens were ready and willing to defend Grozny, and the Russians found themselves in a fight they did not want, expect, or prepare for. This was less a fault of strategic concepts, however, than an egregious failure to conduct necessary intelligence and reconnaissance in advance and to recognize the lessons of Chechen loyalists’ unsuccessful efforts to recapture the city in preceding months.

General Grachev personally briefed the plan for the capture of Grozny. It consisted of three stages: Stage I would begin on November 29, 1994 and be over by December 6 (eight days). Over the course of this week, forces would prepare and secure locations from which

¹¹“Urban Warfare: Lessons from the Russian Experience in Chechnya 1994–1995,” <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6453/chechnyaA.html>; e-mail exchange with BG John Reppert (ret.), former U.S. Defense Attaché to Russia, December 10, 1999; Dmitri Litovkin, “Sniper signature,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Internet edition, April 14, 2000.

¹²Gregory J. Celestan, *Wounded Bear: The Ongoing Russian Military Operation in Chechnya*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, 1996, downloaded from call.army.mil/call/fmsol/fmsopubs/issues/wounded/wounded.htm.

¹³E-mail exchange with BG John Reppert (ret.), December 10, 1999, based on General Reppert’s personal conversations with General Grachev.

operations would later be conducted while forward aviation and attack helicopters attained air superiority and other units prepared for electronic warfare. Three days, December 7–9, were allocated for Stage II, during which Russian troops would approach Grozny from five directions and effect a double encirclement—of the city and of the republic as a whole—all the while protecting communications and carrying out reconnaissance. The next four days, December 10–14, would comprise Stage III: the actual assault on Grozny. Forces would move from the north and south of the city to capture the Presidential Palace and other key government buildings, television and radio facilities, and other significant sites.¹⁴

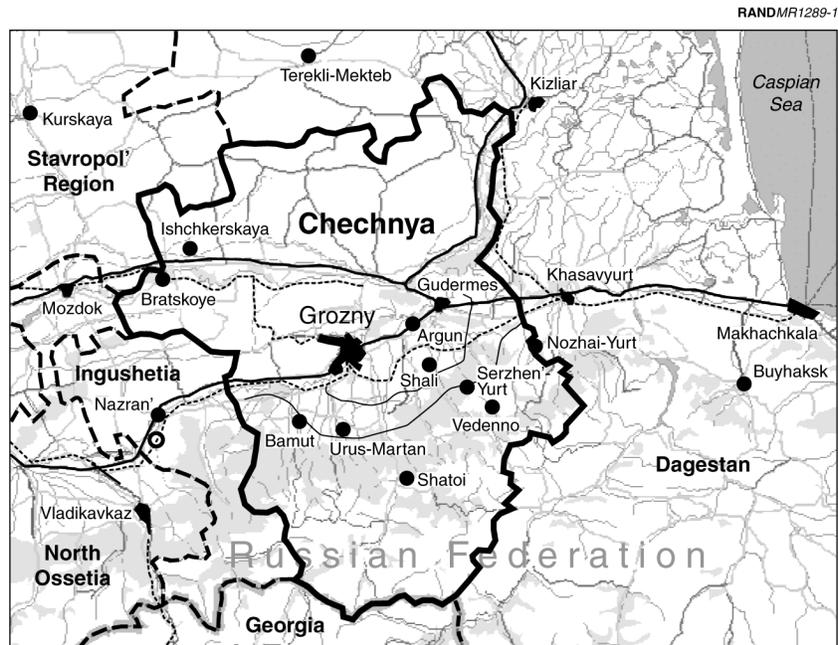
Grachev's ambitious timetable began slipping early. Although the Russian air force had little trouble eliminating Chechnya's 266 aircraft in late November, the mass of Russian troops did not begin to move until December 11. As they maneuvered through the North Caucasus, they met unexpected opposition from the local population. This slowed them down and forced revision of Grachev's schedule, for the troops were not in place around Grozny until December 26.¹⁵ Even then, and in fact throughout the campaign, the city stayed relatively porous, especially in the south. The planned "seal" never materialized.¹⁶ General-Colonel Leontiy Shevtsov claimed that this was done on purpose, to enable the evacuation of refugees. Whether or not this was true, the open approaches also enabled Chechen resistance fighters to move in and out of the city and ensure their forces' supply and reinforcement. Russia itself was a primary source of both rebel forces and supplies, which generally traveled to Chechnya by way of the Ingush Republic.¹⁷

¹⁴Novichkov et al., pp. 28–29; "Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: preparation for the beginning of military actions (December, 1994)" (in Russian), *Oborona i Bezopasnost'*, October 23, 1996; Vladimir Mukhin and Aleksandr Yavorskiy, "War was lost not by the army, but by politicians" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta—Osobaya Papka*, Internet edition, No. 37 (2099), February 29, 2000.

¹⁵Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Russia's Air Power at the Crossroads*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996, pp. 200–201; "Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: preparation for the beginning of military actions (December, 1994)"; Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

¹⁶Novichkov et al., p. 30.

¹⁷"Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: the Grozny operation" (in Russian), *Oborona i Bezopasnost'*, No. 133–134, November 11, 1996; Mukhin and Yavorskiy; Novichkov et al., p. 44.



SOURCE: Anatoly S. Kulikov, "The First Battle of Grozny," in Russell W. Glenn (ed.), *Capital Preservation: Preparing for Urban Operations in the Twenty-First Century—Proceedings of the RAND Arroyo-TRADOC-MCWL-OSD Urban Operations Conference March 22-23, 2000*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, CF-162-A, 2001. Used with permission of General Kulikov.

Figure 1—Chechnya

Grachev's plan and timetable reflect expectations of limited resistance. Poor intelligence and faulty planning were to blame. Preparation was sloppy, with reconnaissance limited to passive reports of what could be easily observed. Maps were inadequate and of the wrong scale.¹⁸ Intelligence gathering did not begin in earnest until after military operations were under way.¹⁹ Furthermore, ground

¹⁸Novichkov et al.; Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics*.

¹⁹"Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: the Grozny operation," op. cit., November 11, 1996.

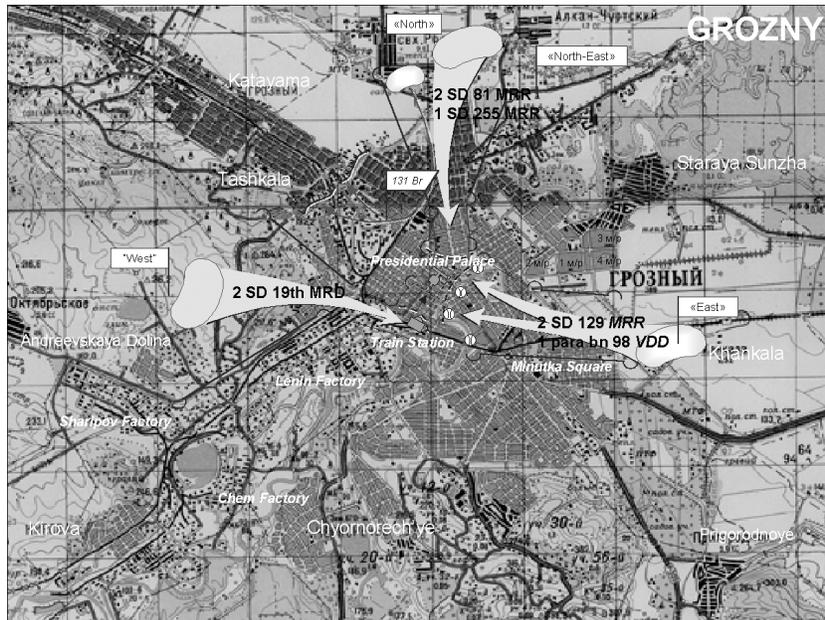
force commanders were loath to utilize their own resources for this mission, relying instead on air power. This, in turn, was hampered by poor weather conditions.²⁰ But even in perfect weather, air assets are a suboptimal reconnaissance tool over an urban battlefield, where enemy preparations can take place out of sight, e.g., within buildings. Planning also largely disregarded the experience of loyalist Chechen forces (which included some Russian troops) that had attempted assaults on Grozny in August, October, and November of 1994. If that experience had been studied, the Russian command would have been aware of the dangers that faced tank columns in Grozny. Only a few weeks before, in November, loyalist Chechen tank formations were surrounded and destroyed by RPG-armed rebels in the city.²¹

It was in part because of these failures of reconnaissance and planning that the Russian troops who entered Grozny thought their mission involved nothing more than a show of force. Three armored columns in herringbone formations were to move toward the city center from their camps in the outskirts in the north, east, and west. Then, with the assistance of special forces from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and FSB, they were to capture key buildings and seal off the central part of the city and the Katayama region. Forces moving from the north and northeast were responsible for taking control of the northern part of the city center and the Presidential Palace. The western force was to capture the railway station and then, moving north, seal off the palace from the south. To prevent enemy military operations in the south and to preclude enemy resupply, it was also to seal off the Zavod and Katayama regions. At the same time, forces from the east were to move along the rail line and capture the bridges over the Sunzha River. They would then link up with the northern and western forces and thus completely isolate the center of the city. This coordinated action was expected to effectively surround and isolate Chechen leader Djohar Dudaev's forces, assumed to be concentrated in the city center.²²

²⁰“Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: preparation for the beginning of military actions (December, 1994),” October 23, 1996. See also Lambeth.

²¹“How it was taken” (in Russian), *Vremya Moscow News*, February 7, 2000.

²²Novichkov et al., p. 46; Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*.



SOURCE: Kulikov. Used with permission.

Figure 2—Grozny: Plan of Attack, December 1994

All might have gone as planned if Russian expectations had proved correct. But instead of light resistance from a few small bands, the 6,000-man Russian force that attempted to penetrate the city on New Year's Eve found itself fighting an enemy far better prepared for battle and much larger than expected (estimates vary widely, from a low of about 1,000 to a high of ten times that amount). Moreover, the Chechens enjoyed the advantages of defense in an urban environment, while the Russians were faced with the far more difficult offensive task. Within the first hours of battle, Russian units were trapped in the streets, their armored vehicles destroyed by enemy troops shooting from upper and lower stories of buildings that main tank guns could not effectively engage. As had happened fifty years before in Berlin, entire tank columns were effectively paralyzed by

the immobilization of the lead and trail vehicles.²³ Russian infantry troops unwittingly collaborated in their destruction by remaining within their APCs, mistakenly believing they were safer inside the armored vehicles than out. Russian soldiers fell by the hundreds.²⁴

If a lack of preparation and reconnaissance had brought the Russian troops into central Grozny in the first place, a wide array of additional factors made up the debacle of how they fought once they got there. The force that moved on Grozny was not adequately trained or prepared for the urban battlefield or for any other. Composed of conscripts and haphazardly assembled ad hoc units, few of its soldiers had trained together before they were sent into Grozny's streets. But an individual lack of experience among young conscripts was not the only problem. Older contract soldiers who had signed up voluntarily did not do much better.²⁵ The Russian army was simply in no shape to fight a war. It had not held a divisional or regimental field exercise since 1992. It suffered tremendous shortages of junior officers and qualified NCOs.²⁶ The military was receiving perhaps 30–40 percent of its requirements for funding and supplies, and not a single regiment was at full strength.²⁷

Another key problem was coordination. The troops deployed to Chechnya reported to a number of different ministries and organizations (Ministry of Defense, MVD, Federal Security Bureau, etc.) and included air, ground, paratroop, and *Spetsnaz* forces. These ministries and organizations had little experience working together, and their efforts to do so were often ineffectual. MVD forces could not coordinate with air and heavy armor forces or vice versa. The plethora of commanders that each group insisted on sending complicated decisionmaking and planning. Because communications procedures and equipment were often incompatible, intelligence frequently could not be shared, and units were unable to transmit their locations to supporting air forces. Such difficulties hampered

²³Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*.

²⁴Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶“Special Report, The Chechen Conflict: No End of a Lesson?” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 1, 1996.

²⁷Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

operations and increased tension, particularly between the Ministry of Defense and MVD troops. This was exacerbated as fighting continued and MoD troops accused their MVD counterparts of lagging behind when entering the more dangerous areas in Grozny.²⁸

Even unhampered by their colleagues, the various units and groups deployed had their share of problems. Some of these were imposed from above. Russian units on the ground were hampered by impractical rules of engagement forbidding fire unless the enemy had shot first.²⁹ Fixed-wing aircraft were blocked from providing support for the New Year's Eve attack on the city by a December 24 presidential order prohibiting bombing of Grozny. Although Russian air assets had flown bombing missions over Chechnya and Grozny in November and December, among other things destroying the Chechen 266-plane air force on the ground, Su-25 and Su-24 planes did not support the ground attack on the city until January 3.³⁰

When air assets did join the battle, their efforts were significantly constrained by poor weather. Russian forces therefore relied heavily on Su-24M attack aircraft, which are capable of operating in adverse weather conditions and at night. Flying at an altitude of 4,000–5,000 meters, the Su-24M generally carried 500-kg bombs with laser and TV guidance systems and Kh-25 ML (AS-10) missiles. The 1,500-kg laser-guided bombs were used less frequently, and a variety of standard munitions were also dropped on the city. In addition, MiG-31s and Su-27s flew patrols to prevent any Chechen air resupply. But the dominant role played by attack aircraft in Grozny was the destruction of bridges, buildings, and other structures designated by ground forces. Predictably these missions were often affected by communication failures and the fog of war, with some disastrous results.³¹ On more than one occasion, aircraft targeted Russian troops instead of

²⁸Novichkov et al., p. 25; "Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: the Grozny operation."

²⁹Novichkov et al., p. 26.

³⁰Aleksandr Yavorskiy, "Pilots not given time to turn around" (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, December 10, 1999; Lambeth, pp. 200–203.

³¹*Ibid.*

the adversary. In one instance, aircraft destroyed the five lead vehicles of the 104th Russian Airborne Division.³²

Aviation was not alone in causing fratricide. Poor training and the lack of coordination also contributed to a significant number of such incidents. One participant estimated that fratricide accounted for as much as 60 percent of Russian casualties in Chechnya.³³ Russian motorized rifle troops were particularly in danger of both inflicting and becoming “friendly” casualties. Untrained troops who panicked and shot wildly at anything that moved were at least as likely to hit a fellow Russian as they were the enemy. Night-vision equipment proved ineffective in the smoke, fire, and steam of the city and led to accidental attacks on friendly forces. Inaccurate maps added further to the confusion. Poor use of equipment also helped the enemy. Russian infrared night-vision devices highlighted their users when viewed through the passive night-vision goggles used by the rebels.³⁴

IN GROZNY: CHECHEN STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The Russians' lack of advance planning placed them in stark contrast to their adversary. According to Russian sources, Chechens had been preparing for the battle of Grozny for at least 3–4 months before Russian troops entered the city. During this time they developed war plans, divided up zones of responsibility, trained their militia, and set up effective communications.³⁵ In fact, they were putting into practice all the things that Soviet analysts had identified as key lessons of World War II.³⁶ Russian press descriptions of the rebel force as a set of loose groupings of bandits were inaccurate. The rebels were well-trained and drilled, many of them veterans of the

³²Novichkov et al.

³³Ibid., p. 70, citing an unnamed counterintelligence officer quoted in an *Izvestia* article of February 15, 1995.

³⁴Vasily Geranin, “Terrible lessons of Grozny” (in Russian), *Armeyskiy Sbornik*, May 1998, pp. 22–24; Timothy Jackson, *David Slays Goliath: A Chechen Perspective on the War in Chechnya (1994–1996)*, Appendix C, “Chechen Technique for Urban Ambushes,” Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, 2000.

³⁵Bakar Taysumov, “On the eve of a metropolitan clash” (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 6, 1997.

³⁶Yefimov.

Soviet military who had apparently retained more of their training than had many of their Russian counterparts. As fighting continued, the rebel force would prove itself an effective military organization, albeit one with a less hierarchical structure than typically found in state armies. Furthermore, the rebel soldiers knew their city well, and their relatively light weapons (automatic rifles, grenades, and portable anti-tank weapons) tremendously enhanced the mobility that was central to their tactics. Closely set buildings and a network of underground passages enabled them to change position unseen by the Russians. (There is some uncertainty as to whether or not the sewage tunnel system was used. Russian sources insist that it was; some Chechen sources argue otherwise.) In addition to small arms, the rebel arsenal included truck-mounted multibarrel *Grad* rocket launchers, a handful of T-72 and T-62 tanks, BTR-70s, some self-propelled assault guns as well as anti-tank cannon, and some portable anti-aircraft missiles (difficult-to-credit reports suggest that these included U.S.-manufactured Stingers). Ammunition included shaped charges.³⁷ While there were reports that Chechens improvised chlorine gas weapons from industrial chemicals, these are difficult to confirm. It is clear that the bulk of the weaponry at the rebels' disposal had been left in Chechnya or sold by departing Russian troops in 1992.³⁸ Some items had even been officially transferred to Chechen forces by the Russian army.³⁹ Of those Chechen militia members who were not veterans of the Soviet/Russian armed forces, a good number may have trained abroad, for instance in Azerbaijan, Pakistan, or Turkey.⁴⁰

³⁷It is possible, but not likely, that Stingers were brought by volunteers from other Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan, who assisted the Chechen cause. But Stingers would almost certainly have resulted in higher kill rates against Russian air assets than were demonstrated. It seems more plausible that the reports of Stingers were a Chechen deception effort against Russian air operations. Novichkov et al., p. 45; "Russian Military Assesses Errors of Chechnya Campaign," *Jane's International Defense Review*, April 1, 1995; Jackson.

³⁸"Urban Warfare: Lessons from the Russian Experience in Chechnya 1994–1995."

³⁹Viktor Loshak, "Second-rate people behind the wheel of the army" (in Russian), *Moskovskie Novosti*, No. 9 (1026), Internet edition, March 7–13, 2000, <http://www.mn.ru/2000/09/71.html>.

⁴⁰Pavel Fel'gengauer, "Generals should not be berated, but rather retrained" (in Russian), *Segodnya*, December 25, 1996.

According to Russian sources, the Chechens were not concentrated entirely in the center of the city as the Russian forces had thought. Rather, they were distributed over three separate circles of defense. The inner circle was formed at a radius of 1–1.5 kilometers around the Presidential Palace. Its task was to use the buildings around the palace to mount a defense. The lower and upper floors of these buildings were modified to enable rifle and anti-tank weapon fire. Along the roads leading into the city center, positions were established to support direct artillery and tank fire. The center circle extended outward an additional kilometer in the northwest, and up to 5 kilometers to the southwest and southeast. These forces created strongpoints on bridges over the river, along relevant streets, and in the Minutka Square region. They were also prepared to blow up the chemical factory and oil industry infrastructure in the city. Finally, the outer circle followed the perimeter of the city and included populated points on its outskirts.⁴¹

It should be noted that the above description of Chechen defenses reflects a Russian perspective, and many Chechen sources underplay the degree of advance preparation, the scope of defenses, and their own numbers. They argue, somewhat incongruously, both that the Russians were in even worse shape than they appeared and that the resistance was able to overcome great numerical and technological odds not so much through planning and tactics as through ideological righteousness and tenacity. Regardless of the exact degree of Chechen defensive planning, there is no doubt that the rebels were better prepared than the Russians expected.

Reportedly, the Chechen resistance had managed to obtain the Russian attack plans, granting them a significant advantage. They also had access to Russian communications, which in the early days of conflict were transmitted in the clear, in large part because the forces operating the equipment were not familiar with the necessary procedures for secure communications. While one should view with skepticism reports of Chechen use of cellular telephones, given the absence of a cellular network in the region at the time, the rebels did possess Russian radios as well as hand-held Motorola radios, and

⁴¹Novichkov et al., p. 50; "Military lessons of the Chechen campaign: the Grozny operation."

were thus well equipped to both communicate with each other and overhear Russian transmissions. Furthermore, they were able to transmit disinformation over Russian radio channels to draw Russian forces into harm's way. Rebel gunmen also hampered Russian communications by targeting personnel carrying radios, thus successfully eliminating a large number of radio telephone operators. For their own communications, hand-held Motorola and Nokia radios were sufficient, and simply speaking in their native language was enough to keep communications secure given the dearth of Chechen-speaking Russians.⁴² The Chechens' security was also enhanced by careful control of information, which was disseminated strictly on a need-to-know basis.⁴³

Russian and Chechen sources agree that nonstandard squads were the basis of the rebel force. Such a squad might include two men with RPG-7 or *Mukha* (RPG-18) shoulder-fired anti-tank grenade launchers, two with machine guns, and possibly a sniper. Alternatively, it could comprise one man with a machine gun, one with an RPG, and possibly a sniper, backed up by one or more riflemen, automatic riflemen, ammunition bearers, and/or medics/corpsmen. Approximately three such squads, with support, made up a larger 25-man cell. The support included one or more medics/corpsmen, three ammunition/supply personnel, three litter bearers, and two SVD-armed snipers. Three 25-man groups made up a 75-man unit. Each of the latter was also allocated one mortar crew.⁴⁴

This structure contributed significantly to the effectiveness of resistance ambushes. The rebels divided the city into quadrants (the city's managers and planners had been involved in developing its defense). Within those quadrants, 75-man units deployed along parallel streets with the snipers in covering positions. One 25-man subgroup, which included the unit command, deployed in smaller, six- or seven-man formations in the lower stories of buildings along one side of a street (to avoid crossfire and to establish escape routes).

⁴²Timothy Thomas, *The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, downloaded from call.army.mil/call/fmsol/fmsopubs/issues/battle.htm (first appeared in *Parameters*, Summer 1999, pp. 87–102); Mukhin and Yavorskii; Jackson.

⁴³Jackson.

⁴⁴Ibid.

The other two 25-man teams deployed similarly in basements and lower stories at the point of entry to the ambush site. From there they could seal off the area and reinforce their compatriots, as needed. In some cases, they also mined the buildings at the point of entry. As Russian forces approached, the entry-point teams notified the rest of the unit by Motorola radio—one for each six- or seven-man formation. Then, the command gave the order to seal the street and the attack began.⁴⁵

Rather than “flanking” Russian forces in the traditional sense of the term, the guerrillas looked for weak points to attack. “Hugging” the Russian forces as they moved, the rebels were able to set up firing positions from 50 to 250 meters away and remain safe from artillery and rocket strikes.⁴⁶ Positions in the basements kept the rebels safe from Russian tank guns, the turrets of which were unable to depress their tubes sufficiently. Inexperienced Russian gunners were confused by simultaneous attacks by multiple Chechen teams. Not only did they not know where to shoot, with so many targets, but many of them were unable to target and fire while the vehicle was moving. Moreover, the rebels had reinforced the basements and subbasements from which they fought, turning them into bunkers. Vaulted and sloped add-on roofs reduced the effects of Russian RPO-A *Shmel* flamethrower and other systems.

Thus, as the Russians entered an ambush, resistance snipers and machine gunners could eliminate supporting infantry while anti-tank forces took out the armored vehicles. Chechen familiarity with Russian equipment was a key advantage as they successfully targeted the fuel cells and engines of armored vehicles, effecting kills with a minimum of rounds (an average of 3–6 lethal hits to destroy each tank). Their odds may have been improved by modifications to the RPG-7 that increased its explosive capacity and thus its ability to penetrate tank armor. Knowing to avoid the reactive armor at the front of many of the Russian tanks (which a number of the T-72s and T-80s went into battle without), the rebels focused their fire on the top, rear, and sides. They also knew how to attack vulnerable APCs such as the BMP-1. In addition to RPG rounds, gasoline and jellied

⁴⁵Kulikov; Jackson.

⁴⁶Ibid.

fuel were reportedly dropped onto the Russian vehicles and ignited. The Russians helped the matter along by remaining in tank columns, which, as already noted, could be trapped by immobilizing the first and last vehicles. Rebels in position within buildings along the street could then destroy the column methodically with their RPGs. The use of multiple teams helped overcome the problems presented by the RPG's signature backblast and the time required between shots.⁴⁷

Chechen snipers, whether operating alone or as part of an ambush group, nightly terrified Russian soldiers, who dubbed them “ghosts.” They were no less deadly in daylight.⁴⁸ A common sniper ploy was to shoot individual soldiers in the legs. When others tried to help the wounded soldiers, they too came under fire. But snipers were not alone in employing “dirty tricks” against the Russians. Resistance fighters booby-trapped the bodies of dead Russian soldiers and the entryways to buildings, the latter with strings of grenades and TNT. (It should be noted that some Chechen sources claim they made no use of booby-traps or mines within buildings because they feared the possibility of friendly casualties.) Chechen fighters sometimes disguised themselves as Red Cross workers, donning the identifying armbands. They also passed themselves off as civilians and offered to guide Russian forces through the city, instead leading them into ambushes.⁴⁹

Mobility also contributed to rebel successes. Mortar crews remained on the move almost constantly. Having fired three or four rounds, they would quickly drive away from the area to preclude effective counterbattery fire. Troops armed with anti-tank rocket launchers reportedly traveled through the city in automobiles with the roofs

⁴⁷Novichkov et al., p. 43; Lester W. Grau, *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability in Urban Combat: The Chechnya Experience*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, downloaded from call.army.mil/call/fmsof/fmsopubs/issues/rusav/rusav.htm/ (originally appeared in *Red Thrust Star*, January 1997); Jackson.

⁴⁸Jackson.

⁴⁹Ibid.; Novichkov et al., pp. 43–45; Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: The Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya III. The Battle for Grozny 1–26 January 1995*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, downloaded from call.army.mil/call/fmsof/fmsopubs/issues/chechpt3.htm (first appeared in *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 50–108); Thomas, *The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat*.

and backseats removed, perhaps to provide more room for men and equipment. In addition to heavy machine guns, the Chechens had some number of portable SA-7s and SA-14s for use against Russian air assets. In mountain towns, although not in Grozny, anti-air guns such as the ZPU-2 and ZPU-4 were mounted on truck beds. This weaponry was reportedly reasonably successful at bringing down Russian helicopters despite countermeasures (chaff and flares) that decreased SA-7 effectiveness.⁵⁰

The Chechens also took steps to influence public opinion. The large number of journalists in the area had virtually unlimited access to Grozny, as Moscow made little effort to constrain their movements. The rebels were very open to press interest, granting interviews and generally making themselves available to domestic and foreign journalists. But they were also not averse to more creative approaches. For instance, the few tanks the rebels had were dug into multistory buildings in the center of the city. When the Chechens fired from these positions, Russian return fire inevitably hit civilian housing, schools, hospitals, and day care centers. When the cameras recorded and sent these images home, the Russians looked especially heartless, and the Chechens appeared even more the victims.⁵¹

LEARNING UNDER FIRE: THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN TACTICS

Because the Chechens had a trained force, better tactics, and the advantages of the defense, they were initially able to defeat the poorly trained, undermanned Russian force that sought to capture Grozny without an effective plan. But that the Russians were able to stage a comeback, albeit with much loss of life and equipment, is a testament to the ability of soldiers to learn and adapt under fire. Key to the turnaround was leadership, albeit leadership developed and identified by survival of the fittest.⁵² Shortly after the first days' debacle, Generals Nikolai Staskov and V. Petruk, commanders of the

⁵⁰Novichkov et al., pp. 43–44; Jackson.

⁵¹Novichkov et al., pp. 43–45; Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: The Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya III. The Battle for Grozny 1–26 January 1995*; Thomas, *The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat*.

⁵²Fel'gengauer.

committed airborne forces and 19th Motor Rifle Division, respectively, were relieved of their commands.⁵³ Russian forces were reorganized into three “Joint Groupings” with Generals Lev Rokhlin, Ivan Babich, and Vladimir Popov in command.⁵⁴

The new leadership had a different, more systematic approach that drew effectively on the lessons of the past. The late General Rokhlin reported that he had adapted his tactics in Grozny from World War II urban attacks, particularly in Berlin.⁵⁵ Reinforcements also helped the Russians rebound. Russian forces in Chechnya reached 30,000 by February 1995, with significant concentration near Grozny. This gave Russia a definitive numerical advantage over the rebels, although still less of one than World War II analysts believed was needed to capture a city. Furthermore, the reinforcements were, by and large, more experienced and capable than the troops who had fought the first battles. They included elite airborne and *Spetsnaz* troops as well as naval infantry who deployed as complete units—in contrast to the hastily assembled groups that had gone into battle on New Year’s Eve.⁵⁶ Thanks to their training and additional equipment, Russian forces could now carry out night rescue, reconnaissance, and attack. The MVD and FSB deployed snipers to supplement the untrained MoD sniper-designees.⁵⁷ Russian troops even used remotely piloted reconnaissance vehicles for the first time in combat.⁵⁸ Communications improved with secure voice transmitters and careful use of communications equipment to prevent targeting by enemy forces.⁵⁹ Effective tactics were emulated and improved. For instance, some of the units that had been cut off during the initial fighting managed to capture and hold the area around the

⁵³Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: The Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya III. The Battle for Grozny 1–26 January 1995*.

⁵⁴Raevsky, p. 685, footnote 42.

⁵⁵E-mail exchange with BG John Reppert (ret.), who cites personal conversations with General Rokhlin, December 10, 1999. General Reppert served as the United States Defense Attaché to Russia from 1995 to 1997 and as the Army Attaché previously.

⁵⁶“Special Report, The Chechen Conflict: No End of a Lesson?”; Raevsky, p. 685; Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

⁵⁷Litovkin.

⁵⁸Novichkov et al., p. 44; Raevsky, pp. 685–686.

⁵⁹Thomas, *The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat*.

train station, as well as some other key sites. The rest of the force studied and copied the actions that led to such successes, and Russian troops learned to methodically capture multistory buildings and defend them. They began to task organize forces into small mobile assault groups, made better use of snipers and heavy artillery, and made sure that units talked to each other and to air assets, so that mutual support was possible.⁶⁰

Self-propelled anti-aircraft machine guns (ZSU 23-4 *Shilka* and 2S6) were included in armored columns. These weapons could reach the Chechen hunter-killer teams lurking above or below a tank's main gun elevation and depression limits. Improved artillery planning provided concentrated artillery fire when Russian positions were attacked.⁶¹ Russian forces used searchlights and pyrotechnics to identify forces and blind enemy night-vision equipment.⁶² Although the January 2, 1995, Russian government claims that the center of the city was under federal control were premature, there had been progress.⁶³ By January 6, General Babichev's troops were moving steadily toward the center of the city, reinforced by GRU *Spetsnaz* reconnaissance specialists and supported by artillery. By January 8, the fighting was localized in the center of the city and Russian snipers and artillery had denied the enemy the use of bridges over the river. On January 19, Russian forces destroyed the Presidential Palace with high-explosive concrete-piercing bombs. If this action fell far short of ending the battle for Grozny (after all, the same thing could have been done much earlier), it did have a certain psychological impact and provided a morale boost for Russian troops.⁶⁴

In the weeks that followed, Russian and rebel forces continued to scramble for position. But the Russians had learned from past mistakes. Perhaps most important, they no longer assumed that captured buildings or territory would remain under their control. Instead, each building had to be captured and defended individually, as in World War II. Russian tactics continued to evolve. New

⁶⁰Novichkov et al., pp. 54–55.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 53, 62.

⁶²Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*.

⁶³"How it was taken."

⁶⁴Novichkov et al., pp. 54–55.

workarounds and approaches, some fairly self-evident, others less so, were tested and adopted as fighting continued. They included the increased use of smoke screens, including ones created with white phosphorus. The white phosphorus also incapacitated enemy forces. Russian troops learned to carry portable ladders and grappling hooks and use them to enter buildings. Soldiers also began to toss grenades through windows and doors prior to entry. They used mortars, heavy weapons, and RPO-A *Shmel* flamethrowers to systematically eliminate enemy snipers and defensive positions. When attacking a building, small combat teams cleared each room separately. When preparing buildings for defense, the Russians booby-trapped and mined potential enemy positions and axes of attack, including underground passageways.⁶⁵

To better protect vulnerable APCs, soldiers created barricades out of sandbags, the hulks of destroyed armored vehicles, and other debris to shield the vehicles when not in motion. They attached cages of wire mesh 25–30 centimeters from armor hulls to help defeat shaped charges fired against exposed vehicles. Seeking to turn Chechen anti-armor tactics against them, some units moved apparently undefended armored vehicles into ambush kill zones as bait for Chechen teams.⁶⁶ Anti-aircraft guns and helicopter gunships proved effective against ground targets. ATGMs proved capable against hardened targets. The verdict on the utility of helicopters was mixed. Although they are particularly useful for reaching upper stories of buildings, General-Colonel Vitaly Pavlov, the Russian army aviation commander, later argued that helicopters are generally not suited for urban combat.⁶⁷ Pavlov's thinking may have drawn on the demonstrated vulnerability of rotary-wing aircraft to rooftop snipers and ambushes. Nonetheless, the limited use of attack helicopters in

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 61; Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*.

⁶⁶Grau, *Russian-Manufactured Armored Vehicle Vulnerability in Urban Combat: The Chechnya Experience*.

⁶⁷Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*; "Urban Warfare: Lessons from the Russian Experience in Chechnya 1994–1995"; Charles Heyman (ed.), *Jane's World Armies*, Jane's Information Group, 1999.

Grozny in 1994–1996 made it difficult to draw a definitive conclusion.⁶⁸

RPO-A *Shmel* flamethrowers were the weapon of choice for the Russian troops, who referred to them as “pocket artillery.” Significantly different from flamethrowers of the past, the *Shmel* is better described as a “rocket-propelled incendiary/blast projectile launcher.” A single-shot, disposable weapon with a 600-meter range, the 11-kg *Shmel* is carried in packs of two. Its warhead is equipped with what the Russians call a “thermobaric” incendiary mixture. This is basically a fuel-air explosive, which upon detonation creates an expanding cloud. The cloud’s ignition produces heat and overpressure with an effect comparable to that of a 152mm artillery round. The *Shmel*’s effectiveness is further enhanced by “a small hollow charge which penetrates light armor or structures to allow the main warhead to detonate inside a target.” The *Shmel* had been used extensively against the tunnels and caves of Afghanistan. It proved similarly effective against the buildings and houses of Grozny.⁶⁹ There were also reports, both Chechen and Russian, that the guerrillas had acquired a handful of these weapons.⁷⁰

Taking another page from their World War II experience, the Russians tried to emulate the assault groups or “storm” detachments of that period. This proved something of a disappointment, however, largely because the hastily assembled teams were unable to work together effectively. Because members were drawn from different units, unit cohesiveness suffered in both the assault groups and the contributing units. Commanders’ complaints that the assault groups were impossible to control, however, most likely reflected a Russian military culture that had long not encouraged independent action

⁶⁸“Urban Warfare: Lessons from the Russian Experience in Chechnya 1994–1995.”

⁶⁹*Jane’s Infantry Weapons*, 22nd edition, 1996–1997, London, New York: Jane’s Yearbooks, pp. 210–211. “Urban Warfare: Lessons from the Russian Experience in Chechnya 1994–1995.” *Shmel: Light Flamethrower*, film, presumably Russian-produced. According to Thomas, *The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat*, such a weapon was advertised for sale abroad in October 1998. On the use of *Shmels* in Afghanistan, see Lester W. Grau and Ali Ahmad Jalali, *Underground Combat: Stereophonic Blasting, Tunnel Rats and the Soviet-Afghan War*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, <http://call.army.mil/call/fmsol/fmsopubs/issues/undrgrnd/undrgrnd.htm> (originally appeared in *Engineer*, November 1998).

⁷⁰Jackson.

and initiative, particularly at lower levels. Thus, while a number of “storm” detachments were employed in Grozny, in other cases existing units were simply reinforced with supporting assets for assault missions. The add-on forces helped pin down the enemy while the core of the unit conducted an assault. Another approach that proved useful was sending better-trained and more experienced forces on new axes of advance. Less-seasoned soldiers could then attack from another direction and possibly have an easier time of it. This two-sided attack was hoped to minimize casualties.⁷¹ In all cases, the basic combat element had shrunk to a manageable handful of soldiers. This was a significant improvement over the clumsy tactics of the first days of combat.

While the benefits of this restructuring far outweighed its disadvantages, there were some shortcomings. Smaller tactical units placed new strains on command, control, and coordination, especially at link-up points between units.⁷² Furthermore, several other problems were never effectively resolved. The ability of the rebels to melt into the local population continued to flummox Russian soldiers, who relied on such imperfect means of differentiating combatants from noncombatants as inspecting men’s shoulders for bruises, arms for singed hair, and clothes for the aftereffects of firing rounds.⁷³ Despite the few well-trained special troops, such as professional snipers, the force as a whole remained untrained and inexperienced. Chechens reported that one of the principal failings of Russian snipers was that they were employed as a component of the assaulting infantry, rather than out in front in a specialized and supporting, but separate, role.⁷⁴

Overall, however, the changes in tactics and approach proved successful. Although fighting continued for some time, Russian casualty counts never again reached the levels of the first bloody days of the attack. By early March, the Russian Ministry of Defense felt suffi-

⁷¹Novichkov et al., p. 61; Grau, *Changing Russian Urban Tactics: The Aftermath of the Battle for Grozny*.

⁷²Novichkov et al., p. 61.

⁷³Thomas, *The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: The Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya III. The Battle for Grozny 1–26 January 1995*.

⁷⁴Jackson.

ciently confident in its control of the city to hand it over to MVD troops for administration, leaving just a few units in the suburbs. The main part of the MoD force moved south to fight the war in the mountains.⁷⁵

AFTER GROZNY: THE WAR CONTINUES

The capture of Grozny did not mark the end of Russian urban combat in Chechnya. Towns and villages throughout Chechnya continued to present a wide range of challenges and difficulties for the Russian forces. But it was a rebel attack on the Russian town of Budennovsk (in Russia's Stavropol region near the Chechen border) that marked the beginning of the end for Russia's Chechen campaign. On June 14, 1995, rebel commander Shamil Basaev entered the town with about 200 militia members. They first tried, and failed, to seize a police station. They were more successful in capturing two bank buildings and the city administrative center. Basaev's forces positioned machine guns on the roofs of the captured buildings and then seized the local hospital. There, they took hostages and booby-trapped the area. The rebels promised that the hostages would be released if the Russians agreed to cease hostilities in Chechnya and withdraw their forces from the region. If the Russians refused or made any attempt to resolve the situation by force, the hostages would die.

On June 17, as negotiations continued, Russian MVD and *Spetsnaz* forces attempted to recapture the hospital. *Spetsnaz* troops fired at the front windows of the hospital to create a diversion while elite Alpha group forces advanced unseen from another direction. While the Russians succeeded in temporarily capturing part of the first floor, freeing some hostages and eliminating some enemy snipers and machine gun crews, the rest of the hospital remained under Basaev's control. Two hours later they tried again, with similar results. After this second failure, Russian negotiators stated that the Russian troops were acting independently of central government control. This ended efforts to recapture the hospital and negotiations concluded on June 19. Basaev's forces may not have gotten what

⁷⁵Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

they initially demanded, but they were able to return to Chechnya unimpeded, leaving behind 150 dead civilians.⁷⁶

Budennovsk is significant for two reasons. First, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's willingness to "appease" the hostage-takers, and to negotiate with them, significantly weakened the government's hand. Second, the government's disavowal of the efforts to recapture the hospital was guaranteed to breed resentment in the military ranks.

Russian forces faced another crisis at the end of 1995, when Salman Raduyev's Chechen fighters attacked Gudermes, Chechnya's second-largest city, believed to be firmly under Russian control. In their initial assault, Raduyev's men quickly sealed off the railroad building and the Russians' local command point. The Russians fought back with *Grad* rocket-launcher salvos and mortar attacks (they also made some use of armor). After two weeks, the fighting was at a stalemate. Rather than suffer the continuing attrition, the Russians agreed to grant Raduyev and his soldiers safe passage out of the city.⁷⁷

In the meantime, Grozny remained fairly calm under MVD control. Early on March 6, 1996, this peace was shattered when the man responsible for Budennovsk, Shamil Basaev, and his force (estimates of his group's size vary from 150 to 1,000 men) rode directly into the Grozny central train station on a captured train. Disembarking, they fanned out toward MVD positions in northern, western, and southern Grozny. As they did, Chechen leader Djohar Dudayev broadcast a short television announcement calling for calm. The Russian forces initially responded with panic and confusion, but by the afternoon, reinforcements enabled them to contain most of Basaev's force. Even so, brutal fighting lasted five days and cost the Russians some 200 lives. In the end, Basaev's troops (accompanied by hostages they had seized) left the city in Russian hands.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Mukhin, "Military lessons of the Chechen campaign, part 6: Results of the seizure of Budennovsk by terrorists led by Shamil Basaev" (in Russian), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No. 243, December 26, 1996; Mukhin and Yavorskiy.

⁷⁷Vladimir Trushkovsiy, "Terrible dispatch" [alternatively, "Dispatch from Grozny"—the Russian word "Grozny" translates as "menacing" or "terrible," as in "Ivan Grozny," known to English speakers as "Ivan the Terrible"] (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*, August 15, 1996.

⁷⁸Maria Eismont, "Chechen rebels enter Grozny" (in Russian), *Segodnya*, March 7, 1996, p. 1; Dmitri Kamishev, "Situation in Chechnya" (in Russian), *Kommersant-Daily*,

If the March events proved little more than a reconnaissance by battle, Grozny's relative quiet was again shattered on August 6, 1996, by what was to be the last major action of the 1994–1996 war. It involved simultaneous Chechen attempts to recapture Grozny, Argun, and Gudermes while Russian and Chechen officials negotiated to end the conflict. In Grozny, rebel troops began infiltrating the city a few days in advance. On the morning of August 6, two 50- to 60-man units captured the railroad station and other facilities and began moving toward the center of town. Estimates of the Basaev-led force were on the order of 600 guerrillas. With reinforcements, it would eventually grow to some 4,000. The rebels succeeded in doing what the Russians had failed to do a year and a half before: they sealed off the three main avenues of approach into Grozny, restricting Russia's ability to reinforce.⁷⁹ Despite the fact that the rebels announced their intention to attack with flyers that urged Russian troops to defect and civilians to stock up on food and water and take up residence in the basements of their homes, MVD forces were apparently caught entirely unprepared. They suffered numerous casualties in the first days of fighting. The Chechens admit to a loss of 47 men in the initial attack.⁸⁰

Ministry of Defense troops, stationed nearby in the suburb of Khankala, were not sent in to support the embattled MVD units until the second day of the battle. MoD officials, with newly appointed Defense Minister Igor' Rodionov at the helm, had been indecisive about the role of their troops in this conflict and the extent of their responsibility to support MVD forces. They were right to have been concerned: the units that finally advanced into the city from Khankala were doomed to repeat many of the events of December 1994. Many of the men who had fought the first battle of Grozny had served their terms and gone home. Those now stationed on its outskirts knew as little about urban warfare as their predecessors had two years before. Once again, maps were inadequate and troops

March 7, 1996; Oleg Georgiev, "Dudayev's militants attacked Grozny and acted like hardcore bandits" (in Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, March 11, 1996, p. 1; Maria Eismont, "Fighting in Grozny and Sernovodsk come to an end" (in Russian), *Segodnya*, March 12, 1996, p. 1; Dmitry Zaks, "1996 Chronicle" (in Russian), *The Moscow Times*, December 31, 1996; "How it was taken."

⁷⁹Jackson.

⁸⁰Jackson.

unprepared. Several vehicles, including one tank, were destroyed as they drove down the narrow streets. Helicopters were ineffective and, in fact, responsible for an accidental missile strike on the local MVD headquarters. A stubborn defense of the FSB building succeeded, but at a cost of 70 soldiers' lives. On August 11, Russian armor reached the city center and, supported by artillery firing from the Khankala suburb, began the slow fight to recapture the city. By this time, however, the enemy controlled most of Grozny and was difficult to weed out. Fighting continued for nearly two more weeks. Total Russian casualties for the battle included 500 dead and 1,400 missing and wounded. When the battle finally ended, it was not with a military victory, but a cease-fire agreement finalized by negotiators Aleksandr Lebed' and Aslan Maskhadov on August 22. Their negotiations ended the war.⁸¹

The Russians left Chechnya having shown a surprising military weakness and lack of preparation of their forces. Moreover, many of these difficulties seemed endemic, rather than a result of a few years' decline. In the urban combat realm, the first Chechnya war demonstrated that the Russians were able to take lessons from the first days of fighting and apply them in that same battle, but seemed incapable of transmitting that knowledge beyond the soldiers and commanders responsible for developing it in the first place. Both MVD and MoD troops that fought in Grozny and other Chechen towns after February 1995 were hampered by the same problems that their compatriots had faced in December and January. While the command took some steps to improve the situation, they were insufficient. For instance, after initial losses demonstrated that predeployment training was insufficient, the Russians established training facilities for their troops in Chechnya. But a few days or weeks of drills was still inadequate training for full-fledged urban warfare. Furthermore, the Ministry of Defense's desire to rid itself of a thankless and nearly impossible mission resulted in a premature transfer of control of urban areas to MVD troops. This was a key error, as the latter forces are trained and prepared for crowd control—not positional street fighting. The MoD attitude, reflected in numerous statements at that time and since, is that domestic missions, urban and otherwise,

⁸¹Trushkovsiy; Sergei Arbutov, "Chechnya and the army" (in Russian), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 23, 1996; Mukhin and Yavorskiy; "How it was taken."

rightly belong to someone else. Thus, the MoD was eager to leave the cities and loath to return to them, as evidenced in Grozny in August 1996.