

TAC NEWS

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The Nineties: CHECHNYA

Chechnya is situated on the northern flank of the Caucasus Mountains. It is bordered by Russia proper on the north, Dagestan on the east and southeast, Georgia on the southwest, and Ingushetia on the west. Chechnya is divided into three physical regions from south to north. First there is the 15,000 foot crest of the Caucasus, which forms the republic's southern boundary. The mountain slopes of the Caucasus are densely forested. This massif and the valley of the Argun River dominate the culture and economy of this part of the country. The second region consists of the broad valleys of the Terek and Sunzha rivers, which cross the republic from west to east. Third, in the north, are the level, rolling plains of the Nogay Steppe, which is largely semi-desert, with sagebrush vegetation and wide areas of sand dunes, giving way to feather-grass steppe and black-earth soil near the Terek.

The Chechen people are fiercely independent Muslims who, during the nineteenth century resisted the power of the Russian Czars for over twenty years. The Bolsheviks created a Chechen autonomous oblast (province) in November 1920. It was merged with the Ingush oblast to form the Checheno-Ingushetian Republic in 1936. When Stalin accused the Chechen and Ingush of collaboration with the Germans during World War II, they were deported to exile in Central Asia, and the republic of Checheno-Ingushetia was dissolved. The exiles were allowed to return to their homeland, and the republic was reestablished in 1957.

Secessionist sentiments emerged in 1991 as Soviet power declined. In August, Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet air force general, staged a coup against the local communist government. He was elected president of Chechnya in October, and in November, he unilaterally declared Chechnya's independence from Russia. Dudayev's aggressively nationalistic, anti-Russian, policies soon undermined Chechnya's economy. This created internal conflict, which threatened his position. In 1993 he dissolved the Chechen parliament, effectively making himself dictator.

In 1994, armed opposition groups with Russian military backing tried repeatedly to depose Dudayev without success. On December 11th, Russian troops invaded Chechnya but

failed to take Grozny (the capital), which was partly destroyed. 40,000 Russian troops managed to take Grozny in March 1995, inflicting heavy civilian casualties, but Chechen guerrilla resistance continued in other areas of the republic.

Grozny

Grozny lies along the Sunzha River at the foot of the Caucasus, and was founded in 1818 by the Russians who built a fortress there. Large-scale exploitation of local oil deposits began in 1893. Thereafter, Grozny grew rapidly as one of Russia's major oil centers. The growth of new Soviet oil fields reduced the relative importance of the area, but with new oil finds in the 1950s, it has remained a significant producer. Pipelines run from Grozny to the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and the Donets Basin. Aside from large-scale refining and gas processing, petrochemicals and machinery for the petroleum industry are manufactured here. As the capital of Chechnya, Grozny was the chief objective of the Russian invasion in 1994. Russian artillery and aerial bombardments destroyed much of the city by the time the last hold-outs were driven out in March 1995. Thousands of civilians died in the fighting.

The Struggle Continues

Also in 1995, Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev and his fighters briefly took more than a thousand hostages in southern Russia and escaped back into Chechnya. More than one hundred people died in that operation. In a January 1996 raid on the southern Russian town of Kizlyar, rebels took hundreds of hostages at a local hospital. Seventy-eight were killed in that incident. Russian forces left Chechnya in 1996 after a disastrous two-year war, but returned in 1999 after rebels raided a neighboring region and Russian authorities blamed rebels for a series of apartment bombings in Russia that killed more than three hundred people.

Suicide Bombers

In June and July of 2000, there was a relatively small but surprisingly destructive rash of suicide attacks on Russian military positions in Chechnya. On July 2nd and 3rd in particular, five attacks resulted in thirty-three killed, eighty-four wounded, and six missing. A truck bomb detonated in a Russian military compound in Urus-Martan, killing several soldiers.

Another truck bomb detonated at the police hostel in Argun in which twenty-six police from the Chelyabinsk police unit were killed. The bomb and the truck were believed to have been transported to Argun in parts and assembled there, as there is no record of the vehicle having passed through any Russian checkpoint on the city's outskirts. The commandant's office and a block-post just outside Gudermes were attacked leaving five dead. In the last attack, the headquarters of the Russian 144th Regiment outside Suvorovka was bombed. Three police were killed there.

personnel, active in Chechnya. Russian military spokesmen repeatedly claimed that the more recent fighting in Chechnya was not the same sort of “war of resistance” as the fighting in 1994–96. This time the fighting, they claimed, was more of a *jihad*, fought by no more than a few hundred foreign Islamic *Mujahideen*.

Chechen Developments After 2000

Grozny remains the spiritual center of the Chechen independence movement. It is also a hotbed of Muslim fundamentalism and training ground for various Muslim terrorist movements. Many Chechens, serving in Taliban forces, were captured in Afghanistan when the US and its allies invaded that country. Chechen exiles also form a large portion of the Al-Qaeda organization of the late Osama bin Laden and have been responsible for numerous terrorist acts over the last decade.

Target Moscow

On October 21st, 2002 a group of Chechen rebels, made up of both men and women, stormed a Moscow theater while an audience of approximately seven hundred-fifty people watched a popular musical. In a special broadcast the following day, the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera satellite television channel broadcast a videotaped statement by one of the hostage-takers. The text was as follows:

“I swear by God we are more keen on dying than you are keen on living. Each one of us is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of God and the independence of Chechnya. Even if we are killed, thousands of brothers and sisters will come after us, ready to sacrifice themselves.”

The gunmen then shot and killed one captive, warning that thousands more of their comrades were also “keen on dying.” A blanket-shrouded body, identified only as a woman, was wheeled out of the theater later that afternoon, apparently killed in the early hours of the hostage drama. Sergei Ignachenko, a spokesman for the Russian Federal Security Service, said the woman appeared to be in her twenties and had been shot in the chest after her fingers were broken.

Al-Jazeera did not explain how it obtained the video footage, but is known for having broadcast statements by Osama bin Laden and other members of his al-Qaeda terrorist network in the past. Russian and US officials also have said some al-Qaeda fighters may be in Chechnya. The insurgents, led by Movsar Barayev, the nephew of Chechen warlord Arbi Barayev, who reportedly died last year, gave Russia seven days to begin withdrawing from Chechnya or the theater would be blown up.

President Putin canceled his scheduled trip to the APEC summit in Mexico as the secessionist war that has bedeviled Russia for a decade came terrifyingly home to the nation's capital. Meeting with security officials, Putin said “freeing the hostages with the maximum assurance of their safety,” was the main goal. He said the raid was planned “in one of the foreign terrorist centers” but did not name it. The dramatic



The Chechen foreign minister said that the attacks were made by Chechens made desperate by years of suffering and that Chechen leaders could not control the random acts of individuals. Considering the sophisticated techniques, expert timing, and large quantities of explosives used in the attacks, it is more plausible that they were part of a deliberate campaign to sow confusion among the Russians, leading to more conventional attacks later.

There are experts who point to the dominant role played by Muslim fundamentalists in Chechen forces, and that such suicide attacks bear a striking resemblance to those made by Hezbollah in Lebanon and Israel. This point of view was confirmed by intelligence sources who claimed that there were two suicide battalions, with some five hundred foreign

siege was a bitter blow for Putin, who repeatedly has said Russia has the situation in Chechnya under control. While Putin's popularity remained high, opinion polls show public support for the war dropping.

In Washington, White House spokesman Sean McCormack said, "the American government and the American people stand with the people of Russia at this difficult moment. There are no causes or national aspirations that justify the taking of innocent hostages." US Ambassador Alexander Vershbow said three Americans were among the hostages, as well as people from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Australia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Germany.

The Siege Ends

On October 26th, after five days of negotiations, Russian "Special Forces" troops stormed the theater in the early morning hours, freeing most of the hostages and killing the Chechen commander of the operation and most, but not all, of his followers. Russian Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Vasilyev said that nearly all of the estimated fifty hostage-takers had been killed, but that some apparently had managed to escape. Ninety of the seven hundred-fifty people taken hostage had been killed. In a statement to the press he said, "I would like to warn the bandits and society that we have all information about them and that if they give up, we will guarantee their lives." He added that by storming the building, government forces avoided greater casualties and the death of most of the hostages, including children.

The rescue raid was not launched until after a night of heavy explosions and repeated bursts of gunfire. "The rebels began executing captives," said Ignatchenko. The Chechens had reportedly mined the stage and aisles and placed a bomb in the center of the theater. Some were seen in television footage wearing explosive belts and said they were ready for martyrdom. President Putin, speaking on nationwide television declared, "Russia cannot be forced to its knees," but acknowledged the heavy cost to victims' families: "We could not save everyone. Forgive us."

The main weapon used to break the siege was an unidentified gas aimed primarily at the twenty Chechen women, who sat among the hostages wrapped in explosives. "Had they been able to detonated these, the toll of innocents would have been much higher," Deputy Interior Minister Vasilyev said. The incapacitating agent was apparently introduced into the theater's ventilation system. Next, soldiers from the Alpha anti-terrorist squad burst in. Television footage showed them kicking in glass doors and opening fire, the thunder of their assault rifles setting off car alarms in the theater parking lot. Soon the hostages were brought out, some in the arms of soldiers, most loaded unconscious onto city buses.

Government film of the aftermath showed dead female hostage-takers sitting in red plush theater seats, in black robes and veils, heads thrown back or bent over, indicating they may have been shot while unconscious. Precisely placed bullet holes could be seen in their heads. One had a gas mask on her face. Besides the women's explosives, the attackers had rigged other bombs throughout the hall. Because only one Alpha trooper was reported wounded, some analysts believed the gas, which officials would not identify, was odorless and had so incapacitated or disoriented the gunmen that they were incapable of defending themselves. Beside the fifty Chechens reported killed at the theater, officials said three other gunmen were captured.

The precision and effectiveness of the operation belied often-repeated Kremlin claims that the nationalist rebels in Muslim Chechnya were on the verge of final defeat. A Federal Security Service official said the well-armed theater raider had foreign links and contacts with unspecified embassies inside Moscow, with ITAR-Tass news raising the prospect of insurgents backed by international terrorists plotting further attacks. "We can't have any euphoria," Vladimir Lukin, deputy Parliament Speaker said after the raid. "I don't think we have broken their will after all."

TACTICAL NOTES

The Russian war in Chechnya is very different from the Soviet war in Afghanistan. For one thing, most of the heaviest fighting has taken place in an urban environment, with Russian and Chechen artillery being used in a direct-fire mode against troops holed up in ruined buildings, brutal hide-and seek combat patrols, and constant sniping.

The Soviet technical advantage so prominent in Afghanistan is largely gone, and the tactics used by both sides have devolved into small infantry actions with some (but not much) armored support and a few (badly directed) air strikes. Almost any combination of Russian weapons may be found in the Chechen forces, and there are few leaders with much experience of command above the company level. Therefore, scenarios will perform be limited to infantry

attacks by Chechens on Russian military outposts and police barracks, ambushes by both sides, and Russian assaults on Chechen strongholds.

Not a lot of tactical finesse will be required. Each player must simply try and out-fight his opponent. Troop quality will weigh much more heavily in the scale of victory than weapons technology. Of course, this kind of scenario, fought on a much more "human" scale, can be just as tense and exciting as the more mobile high-tech variety. For historical flavor, keep the objectives clear and unambiguous and give each player no more firepower than necessary to the job. This will force them to work with what they have and strive to get the most out of limited resources.

— John Fernandes, 2004

**TABLES OF ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT
CHECHEN INSURGENTS: 1994+**

Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 05, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 35%

Infantry Company:	2-3 x TL3 Infantry (B)
Assault Company:	2-3 x TL3 Infantry (A)
Mujahideen/ Commando Company:	1-3 x TL3 Infantry (S)
Mortar Battery:	1 x 82mm M43 (2)/Truck or 1 x 120mm M1970 (2)/Truck
Infantry Battalion:	1 x TL3 Infantry (B) HQ, 1-3 x Infantry Company, 0-2 x TL3 Infantry Support, 0-1 x Mortar Battery
Assault Battalion:	1 x TL3 Infantry (A) HQ, 1-3 x Assault Company, 0-2 x TL3 Infantry Support, 0-1 x Mortar Battery

Available Support Units:

One or more of the units below, or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.

Tank Company:	3 x T-55 or T-72 or T-80
Anti-Aircraft Battery:	1 x ZSU-23/4 or ZU-23/2 (Truck).280
SAM Battery:	1 x SA-13
Multiple Rocket Battery:	1 x 122mm BM-21(12)
Artillery Battery:	122mm 2S1(3) or 152mm 2S3(3)
Transport Company:	3 x MTLB

Notes:

1. Forces may include Ukrainian "Nationalist" units.
2. Captured Russian weapons include BRDM-2s, BTR-70s, and 30mm AGS-17s.
3. Chechen vehicles are in short supply and difficult to maintain. They may be used, but at double normal point cost.
4. "Assault" units account for approximately 30% of total Chechen Forces.
5. Mujahideen Commandos are rare. They account for perhaps 10% of total Chechen forces.

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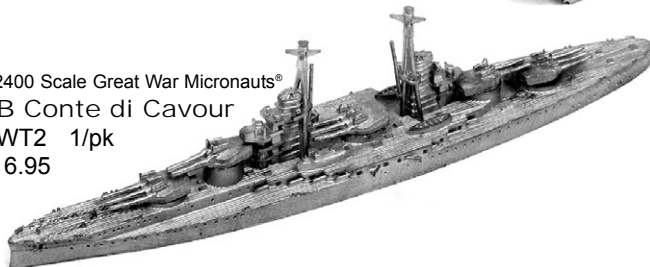


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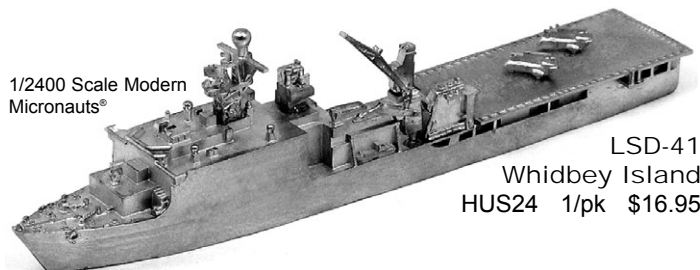


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