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The Counter-Insurgency Operation in Chechnya

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Critically Assess a Counter-insurgency Operation: Chechnya

The word ‘Grozny’ translates from Russian to ‘terrible’ or ‘menacing’ (Oliker, 2001): an ironically appropriate name for the site of one of the world’s most devastating counter-insurgency operations. This essay will critically assess the Russian counter-insurgency operation against the Chechen separatist movement from 1994 until the present day. In order to provide a holistic assessment of the operation, it is necessary to analyse the issue from a variety of perspectives and with a focus on different areas. This essay will consider the counter-insurgency operation at different levels, by critiquing the Russian tactics of both the first and second Chechen wars, analysing the impact of the Chechen campaign on the Kremlin and wider Russian society and critiquing the different approaches made by different presidents. The key actors at each level will be focused upon, from the role of the media in influencing both public opinion and arguably the outcome of both wars, to military (dis)organisation and the reasons behind a change in Russian public opinion towards the war. The fact that there were two distinct periods of conflict, referred to as the First and Second Chechen Wars from 1994-1996 and 1999-2009 respectively, immediately suggests that the initial operation cannot have been successful for the insurgents or the Russians. Indeed, this essay will argue that the first war was a clear failure of a counter-insurgency operation from the Russian perspective, and whilst the improvements in counter-insurgency techniques in the second war were enough for some writers to consider the period as being Putin’s finest hour (Steele, 2008), the reality is that a wholly successful outcome has not been achieved: both Chechnya and wider Russia remain far from peaceful, as whilst Chechnya is now more stable, insurgency is spreading with little control throughout the North Caucasus region as a result of the initial conflicts in Chechnya (Smirnov, 2009). It must be outlined that this essay will critically assess the Russian counter-insurgency operation in Chechnya from a predominantly Western viewpoint, mainly due to the limitation of it being based on English-authored literature and academic perspectives.

In order to discuss a ‘counter-insurgency operation’, it is important to define the term. Definitions naturally differ by author, particularly by virtue of the operation with which the author is most familiar. For the purposes of this essay, the perspectives offered by the respected counter-insurgency writers of Kilcullen (2006) and Galula (1965) are considered to be the most apt, by virtue of their clear definitions and their relevance to the Chechen conflict. Kilcullen (2006, P.1) differentiates between classical and contemporary counter-insurgency, with the former describing how ‘the theory of counter-revolutionary warfare developed in response to the so-called wars of national liberation from 1944 [until approximately] 1982.’ Kilcullen sees this period as being influential for contemporary counter-insurgency operations, as ‘wisdom received’ from these conflicts is often utilised today in planning counter-insurgency operations. This essay will discuss the Russian ability to learn from its previous experiences in order to better its counter-insurgency techniques, and will also draw upon Russian shortcomings in doing this, which arguably led to a repeat of disasters in the Second Chechen War. Kilcullen posits that insurgency ‘is a struggle to control a contested political space, between a state and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers. (2006, P.2).’ He continues to explain how the nature of insurgency depends on the position of the state in the regional political arena and in the international system. Classically, insurgency has been a force contrary to a functioning though fragile state. In a more contemporary sense, relevant not only to Chechnya but also to Somalia and East Timor, insurgency is a contest for an ‘ungoverned space…scavenging at the carcass’ of a failed political system rather than a traditional insurgent challenge of the status quo (Kilcullen, 2006).

In order to critique the Russian counter-insurgent operation, one must outline what can be constituted as being successful counter-insurgency practice and outcomes. Galula's (1965) criteria drawn from his experiences in Algiers are as relevant in a Chechen context as they are in an Algerian one. Galula draws on the battle to win over 'hearts and minds' as being more important in a counter-insurgency operation than a battle over territory, but this concept was largely ignored by the Russians in their carpet-bombing and subsequent rubbleisation of Grozny, a tactic of total urban destruction honed in the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This tactic was distinct from the targeted destruction of key buildings, which is widely employed by counter-insurgents across the globe as a Scorched Earth policy (Coward, 2009, P.9). Galula also defines a successful counter-insurgency operation as being one which does not necessarily eliminate the insurgent force but rather isolates it from society, thereby ending its challenge to the status quo (as put forward by Kilcullen, 2006). Galula's highlighting of the importance of winning over hearts and minds continues as he defines a successful counter insurgency operation as being one in which the insurgents remain isolated from society due to pressure from the wider population, rather than as a result of a peacekeeping or counter-insurgent military presence. Indeed, his statement that 'in revolutionary warfare, strength must be assessed by the extent of support from the population as measured in terms of political organisation at the grass roots' (Galula, 1965, P.8) is a key reason behind why the Russian operation in Chechnya suffered failures: too little attention was paid to winning over the 'hearts and minds' of the people in order for them to accept the counter insurgency and ultimate Russian governance as the preferred option.

Whilst dealing with the business of definitions, it is important to note that precise choices in vocabulary have meant that Russian operations in Chechnya have never been declared a war nor a counter-insurgency, but rather a 'Counter-Terrorist operation,' initially designed to eradicate the 'illegal bandit formations' which had arisen in neighbouring Dagestan. This quickly developed into a larger agenda to bring Chechnya back under control of the Russian Federation (Main, 2000, P.20). However, this essay considers 'terrorism' as being a tactic used by insurgents and thus considers Russo-Chechen operations as being an appropriate case study in which to critically assess a counter-insurgency operation. The legality of the conflict has been important to Russia, and it is keen to highlight that in terms of its constitution, federal and international law, by branding its action in Chechnya as a 'counter-terrorist' operation, no tactic used during the conflicts has been illegal; Russia has merely been 'exercising its right to maintain constitutional order and territorial integrity' (Main, 2000, P.20). This, on paper at least, should aid the morality of the conflict, as long as the government was seen to be commanding an attempt to return security to Chechnya whilst minimising casualties on both sides. The public would ideally perceive the conflict as 'doing the right thing,' with Russia fighting a 'good war' against a separatist, terrorist, Islamist insurgency (Main, 2000). This choice of definition therefore not only assisted in garnering public support, but in the context of the Second Chechen War, the use of weapons banned by international conventions, such as thermobaric bombs, were widely accepted by the public as being in keeping with a 'Counter-terrorist operation' and minimizing the terrorist threat felt by the Russian population. This sentiment was furthered following Chechen terrorist attacks on civilian targets within Russia, namely the bombings of apartment blocks in Volgodonsk, Moscow and Buinaksk, the Dubrovka theatre siege, the bombings of the Moscow metro and the hijacking of airliners (Russell, 2007, P. 74-77). Finally, the use of the term 'Counter-terrorist operation' led to Putin being able to take advantage of the global War on Terror (Hughes, 2007), thereby seeking a degree of international justification for the level of force being used. That said, this is a comparatively minor reason for the choice of term, as the violence has more to do with unresolved conflicts from previous eras than it does with international terrorism (Russell, 2007, P.151), despite Chechen links with Osama Bin Laden and extremists in Yemen and Afghanistan (Oliker, 2001, P.40). Legal implications are also important in an international context, as, if an illegal war is being carried out, foreign intervention to end the conflict is arguably more likely. Human rights abuses committed by both sides have been widely documented (Cherkasov, 2005), thus questioning the legality of some counter-insurgent tactics, yet this has been given little attention by the international community. Therefore, it would seem that Russia has a fairly free rein to conduct its counter-insurgency how it wishes, particularly as a result of the selective information that the Kremlin now chooses to communicate with its people through the press, thereby controlling popular resistance to the war.

The roots of the Chechen problem are embedded into the region's history. A deep-seated grievance against Moscow originates from Stalin's deportation of the entire Chechen population to Central Asia in 1944 (Williams, 2000). Many subsequently returned, but this bred a feeling of 'otherness' and isolation amongst Chechens, that Moscow was keen to make it clear that Chechens should not be considered 'Russian'. This, combined with religious, cultural and

geographical differences, has long bred sentiments of separatism within Chechnya and the other republics of the North Caucasus. Following the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, Chechnya and Tartarstan were the only 2 of the 88 republics of the Russian Federation not to sign the Federative Treaty (Evangelista, 2002). However, the lack of conflict in Tartarstan's declaration of independence and in its eventual reincorporation into the Russian Federation shows that such transitions can occur without bloodshed. How, then, did Chechnya's desire for independence become a separatist insurgency, and how did Russia's attempts to control and contain it go so badly wrong?

Arguably the two greatest military failures for Russia in recent times have been the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the conflicts in Chechnya. Both these have been against a difficult enemy defending its homeland, fighting in small groups in mountainous terrain (Oliker, 2001). The difficulty that the Russians found in approaching conflict with such an enemy stems from the army's Clausewitzian base: the bulk of training is founded on tactics used successfully in the Second World War ,where troops were skilled in fighting 'according to the conventional rules, against other regular army units on the plains of Europe' (Cassidy, 2005, P.40) rather than against a diverse and cunning enemy, deeply rooted in the defence of its homeland. When the core of that homeland is a heavily-industrialised urban area, such as Grozny, from a tactical perspective defence of that environment is far easier than attack (Oliker, 2001, P.13), due to the defenders' superior knowledge of the city and advantageous positioning of snipers high on buildings. Morale amongst the defence is also likely to be stronger, as it is fighting to maintain control of its homeland rather than for a governmental cause with which the attacking troops may not identify. However, the same Clausewitzian training dictated that if a city was thought to be defended, it should be avoided rather than risk difficult conflict, with the thought being that troops pushing deeper into countryside would ultimately lead to further destabilisation and therefore easier and more widespread control of the country, eventually causing the city to fall. Incredibly, this tactic *was* applied to Grozny: the assault on the city was mainly intended as a show of strength to capture key buildings as a warning to the insurgents to disband and accept Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation, a plan more in line with a Scorched Earth policy than the rubbleisation which occurred. The Kremlin had simply not conducted adequate intelligence preparation of the battlefield before the invasion into Grozny in December 1994, and was not expecting the level of resistance that was encountered. Russian troops' worries of Chechen resistance had been wiped out of the young Russian conscripted soldiers' minds by their military commanders, who had told them of untrained and disorganised Chechen rebels. This gave a young and badly coordinated army unwarranted optimism (Oliker, 2001, x). This false sense of security caused Russian troops to be both mentally and physically unprepared for battle. A similar idea of conflict being unlikely was given to Russians by Yeltsin in an August 1994 speech saying that 'armed intervention [in Chechnya] is permissible and must not be done.' The basis of this comment was different to the notion conveyed to the Russian troops: not that there is no need for combat due to the disorganisation of Chechen insurgents, but rather that were conflict to occur, 'there would be such turmoil and bloodshed that no one would ever forgive [the Kremlin]' (Evangelista, 2002, P.11). This frank admission by Yeltsin acknowledging Chechen strength, combined with the fact that attempted assaults on Grozny in August, October and November 1994 had failed, should have given Russian commanders an idea that Grozny was home to a powerful enemy (Oliker, 2001). This example of seemingly obvious demonstrations of differences in opinion amongst Russian military elites continues, as in August of 1994, defence minister Grachev's opinion was that 'to send tanks into Grozny would be both dangerous and ineffective', yet by January he had changed his tone and done just that, claiming that the assault on Grozny would be over within 3 days (Oliker, 2001, P.10). Further criticism of Grachev is drawn from the speculation that he ordered the assault on Grozny whilst drunk at celebrations for his birthday and New Year on the 31st December 1994 (Higgins, 1995). One can therefore argue that untrustworthy, erratic and irresponsible commanders were given too much power in Yeltsin's military, and that failings in the communication of opinion between elites is one reason for the unpreparedness with which Russia staged the New Year's assault on Grozny.

When the troops arrived in Grozny, they were not ready to fight, having never fought together as units and having had only a few weeks training since conscription. Furthermore, the long journey that they had undertaken in order to reach Chechnya through a bleak December in time for the New Year's Eve offensive had taken its toll, and the numerous breakdowns of vehicles along the way had not only proved the poor quality of equipment being used, but had also sparked soldiers' doubts in its capability, as well as in their own. Furthermore, the failures in intelligence gathering and communication continued, with poor networks established in Grozny which, if effective, could have assisted in giving the Russians the upper hand that they assumed they had. Furthermore, poor communication of the

intelligence that *was* gathered, due to a combination of a lack of training and incompatible equipment between sections of Russian forces, led to confusion and disorganisation amongst the troops (Oliker, 2001, x). The roots of the communication and coordination problems lie in the structure behind the organisation of the Russian operation: Since Chechnya was technically a domestic conflict, its management was planned and coordinated jointly between the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Federal Security Service (FSB), with support from the air and Spetsnaz special forces (Oliker, 2001, P.15). However, the bodies failed to effectively share intelligence or liaise with one another, which led to confusion on the ground, as each was in control of its own set of troops. This not only led to ground operations being a logistical nightmare for Russian commanders, but also to issues of friendly fire, as troops assumed that when a large, unknown body of men and artillery was spotted, they must have been Chechen forces, yet in reality they were more often than not a group of Russians whose whereabouts had not been communicated to their comrades (Oliker, 2001, xi). Hence, fratricide became a leading cause of death for Russian soldiers. Frustration levels continued to mount as a result of this, further hindering the Russian troops as difficulties in communications of planned assaults led to MOD forces being accused of 'lagging behind' when MVD men pushed into dangerous areas of Grozny (Oliker, 2001, P.15). The problems worsened when insecure communication mediums were infiltrated by Chechen insurgents, who were able to transmit disinformation over Russian radios, leading to further fratricide (Oliker, 2001, P.15). Moreover, intense fratricidal fire-fights between unobservant Russian troops occurred when Chechen forces would position themselves between two Russian regiments during darkness, fire in both directions and then quickly withdraw (Cassidy, 2003, P. 23), leaving their enemy to continue firing towards the attack and ultimately destroy itself.

Not only were troops hindered by poor organisation, but tactical difficulties at a variety of levels made a successful counter insurgency operation more unlikely. Firstly, on 24th December 1994, Yeltsin had imposed a law banning the bombing of Grozny, meaning that the New Year offensive had no air support, limiting its scope for success. When the ban on bombing was lifted on the 3rd of January, air attack was hampered by a further shortfall in Kremlin planning: the decision to stage the operation in Winter – aircraft were of little use in conditions of thick fog and constant low cloud. Hence further mistakes of fratricide were made; for example, the lead vehicles of the 104th Airborne division were destroyed by a Russian bomber (Oliker, 2001, P.15) when it bombed inaccurately due to poor visibility. The immobilisation of the lead and tail vehicles in a convoy makes escape impossible in an enclosed urban environment. This was a tactic favoured by insurgents in Grozny, as entire columns of Russian tanks could be paralysed in this manner by snipers based on rooftops. The enclosure of the city meant that tanks could not engage, with troops ordered to stay inside the stricken vehicles, wrongly thinking that it was safer to be inside than out, leading to numerous casualties. This causes one to question the Russian choice in counter-insurgency equipment, since the nature of artillery used was largely inappropriate for urban warfare and is further evidence of the Russian inability to successfully adapt its tactics to the conflict environment. The underestimation of the difficulty in urban attack compared to the ease of urban defence led to hundreds of Russian casualties, whilst unsuitable equipment continued to hinder the counter-insurgency operation. Infrared night vision equipment proved ineffective in the smoke, fire and steam of the city whilst they also pointed out their users' position when viewed through the Chechen passive night-vision goggles (Oliker, 2001, P.16). Furthermore, the Russians had made no effort to update cartography before the conflict, with Soviet maps proving ineffective against the Chechen networks of infrastructure and tunnels around Grozny. Much academic opinion sights one of the key elements which led to ultimate Russian failure in defeating Chechen insurgents in the First Chechen War as the Russian inability to seal the three main avenues out of the city (Oliker, 2001, P.30). This was achieved, however, by the insurgent forces of Chechen leader Basaev in their attack on Grozny in March 1996, whilst Russian and Chechen leaders were brokering a ceasefire. Russian failings in this battle were once again due to their ignorance of the seemingly obvious: despite Chechen flyers distributed throughout the city telling Russian soldiers to defect and civilians to stock up on food due to the impending attack, the Russians were caught unawares yet again (Oliker, 2001, P.30). Moreover, problems due to inexperienced soldiers continued, as the troops who had fought in the first battles 18 months before had now been replaced by fresh troops, once again poorly trained and undersupplied with knowledge and battle experience not passed on from the returned men. After a battle which lasted weeks, the Khasavyurt peace treaty was signed in August 1996 between the chairman of the Russian security council Alexander Lebed and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov (Oliker, 2001, P.31), thereby officially ending the First Chechen War.

The signing of Khasaviurt, a ceasefire agreement that promised the Russian demilitarisation of Grozny and the

granting of de facto Chechen independence, which was to be finalised in 2001, shows that Russia's first attempt at counter insurgency was ultimately a failure for Moscow: the goal of firmly reincorporating Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation was not achieved and the Chechen separatist insurgents were not defeated, nor were they isolated from Chechen society. The decision to make a ceasefire agreement rather than to continue fighting shows the Kremlin's acknowledgement that they were fighting a losing battle, both on the ground and across wider Russia, with public opinion of the government being at an all-time low, largely as a result of the war. Pressure from the powerful Committee of Soldiers' mothers for the troops to return was a key reason behind Yeltsin's 3% public approval ratings (Oliker, 2001, P.34). It had not been the 'short victorious war' to boost his approval ratings which Yeltsin had intended (Russell, 2007; Evangelista, 2002, P. 37). It can be argued that Khasaviurt was as much a ceasefire as a change in approach to counter-insurgency strategy: both an attempt to 'stabilise [Russia's] southern underbelly' and contain the insurgency inside Chechen borders (Baev, 2004), whilst focusing the insurgents' interests in a more state building, constructive, and Chechen-centric rather than anti-Moscow manner. This, in theory, would create a safer Russia. However, the opposite occurred in the long run. Whilst Putin claimed that Khasaviurt 'signalled a genuine Russian attempt to allow Chechnya to build an independent state, the result was a power vacuum' and the spread of radical Islam throughout the region (Hughes, 2007). Chechnya descended into lawlessness, with opposing mafia-like gangs continuing widespread violence across the region. If violence was concentrated within Chechen borders, Moscow did not consider it to be a threat and adopted a blinkered approach towards Chechen disturbances (Baev, 2004). However, the augmentation in violence led to it spilling into Russian sovereign territory with the Chechen invasion of Dagestan in August and September 1999, led by Shamil Basayev and his jihadist allies (Sherlock, 2007, P. 339). This played a part in instigating a second major attempt by Moscow to counter the insurgency in the region (Oliker, 2001, P.38). Furthermore, the invasion into Russian territory gave Moscow increased justification to militarily contain Chechen expansionism, both in terms of international law and public opinion.

On the ground, the tactics of the counter-insurgents were much improved from the first war, arranged under a single hierarchy under the control of the Ministry of Defence, leading to a more synchronised air and land operation. Armour was used more effectively and a mass of firepower rather than manpower was drawn upon, thereby lessening the quantity of military casualties but resulting in the increased demolition of infrastructure and loss of civilian life (Oliker, 2001, xi). The city was better sealed, intelligence was of a higher quality and communication between troops was much improved. However, Oliker argues that whilst lessons were learned from the first attempt at a counter-insurgency in Chechnya, the 'key mistake was taking the wrong lesson from urban combat, not only that it *should* be avoided but that it *could* be avoided under all circumstances.' The Russian decision to focus their aggression in the urban combat context of Grozny once again was perhaps why the Second Chechen War did not result in the runaway success in two-weeks that Putin had promised (Ross, 2004). Training remained largely Clausewitzian, leaving troops unprepared for urban combat, and equipment remained dated and often ineffective, particularly at night (Oliker, 2001, xi). Furthermore, discipline amongst the troops continued to be an issue, with many falling to alcohol and drug abuse, which rendered them unable to 'isolate even the most extremist Chechen leaders' (Russell, 2007, P.149). It was clear to Moscow that developing tactics on the ground was not enough in itself to achieve the riddance of the Chechen insurgents, due to the lack of a wholly professional, well equipped and motivated counter-insurgent force. Therefore, in order to defeat the insurgents and create a stable and united Russia, the change had to come from further afield. Moscow set about adapting its attitude towards the Chechen problem, manufacturing a positive image of the war and garnering public support in doing so. The spread of Chechen terrorism to targeting Russian civilians came at a fortunate time for Moscow in achieving this turnaround of the Chechen campaign's image. Indeed, Russell (2007) hints that the apartment bombings happened a little too neatly in time with the Kremlin's public relations campaign to generate a pro-war public, particularly as the bombings were merely blamed on the Chechens without anyone taking responsibility for them, as the insurgents did with future attacks. This viewpoint gives a sense of the public's doubt in the Russian security services in 1999 – it seems conceivable that the KGB may bomb Russian civilian apartment blocks as part of an elaborate public relations campaign. Moscow needed to erase this idea fast, and through the control of the media and subsequent attacks that were certainly orchestrated by the Chechens, they did just that. The notion of the Kremlin's admission that military force was not the most auspicious way to counter the Chechen insurgency is also seen in Putin's Chechenisation policy, the political 'solution' which forms the basis for the situation in the North Caucasus region today.

Yeltsin's undesirable outcome of the war became a deep grievance in Russian society. The Russian public did not see the reasons behind a war with incredible human cost being fought in a forgotten corner of the Federation, particularly as during the first war, there had been little Chechen aggression directed against wider Russia. The military blamed a lack of public support for the premature end to the first war (Oliker, 2001, P.34), but this essay argues that this was largely the military's own failing in its inability to control the negative media coverage of the conflict. The resurgence of the Chechen counter-terrorist operation from 1999 until 2009 enjoyed far greater public support. This was due to a number of reasons, some created by the Russians and some by the Chechens. The Chechen incursion into Dagestan had little effect on the wider Russian public's opinion towards a second containment attempt of Chechen separatism and insurgency. This is because occurrences in Dagestan were also regarded as being of little interest to Russia as a whole, due to its location in the perceived marginal area of the North Caucasus, despite it being part of the Federation. Indeed, this perspective was one shared across Europe, as then Liberal-Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown used Neville Chamberlain's sentiment of the German attacks on Czechoslovakia to describe the European opinion of the Chechnya issue as 'a quarrel in a faraway country between peoples of whom we know nothing' (Russell, 2007, P.151). However, the Chechen-blamed bombing of apartment blocks in Volgodonsk, Moscow and Buinaksk in September 1999 brought the conflict into the hearts of everyday Russians as well as into global media. Yeltsin had convinced voters that the first Chechen war could not be lost, and its termination in a ceasefire combined with his ailing health and alcoholism lost a great deal of public support for the Kremlin. In 1999, the Prime Minister and little known, soon-to-be President Putin was active, foulmouthed and immediately created a powerful image for himself, instigating his personality cult that continues to dominate Russia today (Hearst, 2012). His tough stance against the Chechen insurgency was cemented in Russians' minds in his speech where he promised to hunt down terrorists wherever they may hide, “Wasting them, even in the shithouse” (Russell, 2007, P.69). The Russian public seemed to have an 'exhaustible thirst for Putin, the action man' (Hearst, 2012) and trusted him to rid Russia of threat of Chechen insurgency. The government seemed to have learned from the first Chechen war on several levels. During the first conflict, the media's free access to the majority of Chechnya led to daily stories being carried of 'a bedraggled army' losing a pointless war (Oliker, 2001, P.34). However, a professional public relations campaign combined with limited press access and release of information from the front line led to the largely pro-war public stance increasing. Russian pro-war public opinion reached an all-time high of 70% in February 2000, and the limited media prioritisation of the conflict led to overwhelming public indifference over the excesses committed by Russian troops against Chechens (Russell, 2007, P.79). When journalists did attempt to closely cover the Chechen conflict, they were contained and disposed of in a violent fashion, with the murders of only a few such as Andrei Babitsky and Anna Politkovskaya making the headlines. Politkovskaya tried to tell the truth from Chechnya on numerous occasions, and was the subject of several assassination attempts before she was shot dead outside her Moscow apartment in October 2006.

According to Reporters without Borders (2011), out of 179 states analysed, Russian press freedom is ranked at 142nd. From an international perspective, many find this deeply troubling. Moscow continues to exercise an iron grip over the broadcast media through 'arbitrary use of anti-extremism law [and] impunity for acts of violence against journalists, particularly in the North Caucasus.' 26 journalists have been killed in Russia since 2000, with investigations into their murders usually taken with little urgency or importance (Reporters Without Borders, 2011). Current Chechen President and Putin-loyalist Kadyrov continues to 'behave like a tyrant' against journalists in Chechnya today, using force against the media to continue the notion of maintaining positive public opinion towards both the state of security in Chechnya and the success of the counter-insurgency operations. In so far as a counter-insurgency tactic is concerned, the stance seems to be working, as the majority of Russians believe that the Chechen conflict 'is over and Putin won' (Steele, 2008). Furthermore, the Russian public seems largely apathetic and accepting towards the state control of media and use of propaganda across Russian society. In an assessment of control of the media in terms of it being a counter-insurgent technique, it seems that Russia has been successful in its use, with Putin continuing to enjoy almost 70% approval ratings (Adomanis, 2012) despite Moscow's significant failings in achieving stability in the Caucasus region.

It was not just control of the media that shifted Russian public opinion in favour of the Second Chechen counter-insurgency operation. One of the key differences between the First and Second Chechen Wars is the relevance of the Second to everyday Russians, a multidimensional conflict based upon an Islamist incursion into Russian territory with terrorism being directed against public targets across the country, as opposed to a conflict in a forgotten corner

of the territory with its purpose largely being for Yeltin's political advantage. In the run up to the conflict in the summer of 1999, Putin made use of advantages that had not been available to Yeltsin in the prelude to the first war. During the three years of Chechen *de facto* independence, both Russians and foreigners had been kidnapped and gruesomely murdered in public executions under Sharia law, thereby alienating the West and creating the notion of a wild, lawless and bloodthirsty anti-Western republic on Russia's Southern border. The apartment bombings in 1999, the subsequent hostage taking at Moscow's Dubrovka theatre in October 2002, the suicide bombings of the Moscow Metro, the Beslan school siege in 2004, combined with attacks on Domodedovo airport in 2011, as well as several airline hijackings throughout the period, led to a terrified Russian population. In 2007, 74% of the public felt that they or someone they knew would likely be the subject of a future terrorist attack on Russia (Russell, 2007, P.151). 'The presence of Islamic militants on Russian soil represented the same threat to Moscow as Bin Laden did to New York.' (Russell, 2007, P.74) The reaction in Russia to Putin's dealing with the crisis was much the same as in the post 9/11 United States, where Bush enjoyed increased popularity due to his declaration of a War on Terror. Putin's continued promises to adopt a hard line against the terrorists was welcomed by a scared Russian public, with his approval ratings soaring to 80%, an average which had been maintained until the last 2 years (Adomanis, 2012). Therefore, Putin and his government used their counter-insurgency in Chechnya as a means through which to win over the population and maintain their power. This essay argues that the successes due to public support were, to a large extent, propagandarised. Nonetheless, the Chechen counter-insurgency operation has been an invaluable tool for Putin in maintaining power in Russia, and it continues to shape Russian politics.

The current situation of insecurity in the North Caucasus can largely be attributed to Putin's policy of Chechenisation. The goal of this was to devolve responsibility and control of the counter insurgency to a pro-Moscow Chechen government, which would be installed in Grozny. As far as the Kremlin could see, there was little alternative to this, the only political solution on the table at the time. The plan had its sceptics, yet even they had to admit that the imposition of Kremlin-backed President Alkhanov through a rigged election in 2004 was more likely to serve as a stabilising factor than anything attempted before (Russell, 2007, P.82). Chechen leader Maskhadov was assassinated by the KGB in 2005 and the Kremlin-controlled Chechen government started to take shape, with the rebels now under the leadership of Sadulayev, a preacher rather than a president. The fact that the Chechen insurgency was now being led by a weaker non-politician caused Moscow to assume that through the centralised control from Grozny, Chechnya would gradually stabilise itself. The fact that, in the assassination of Maskhadov, Russia had eliminated the last remaining moderate Chechen president and potential peace partner, only for him to be replaced with a religious extremist leader, is yet another example of the blinkered approach with which the Kremlin operated during the counter insurgency (Hughes, 2007). 'The shifting of violence from Russian on Chechen to Chechen on Chechen' was a key feature of Putin's Chechenisation policy (Russell, 2007, P.82). Through this, Moscow sought to contain the conflict whilst simultaneously operating policies of institutional development and reconstruction (Hughes, 2007, P.202). Current Chechen president Kadyrov, a Putin-loyalist rather than simply a Russian-loyalist, finally seems to be addressing the issue of winning over Chechen hearts and minds through the reconstruction and development programmes in place (The Economist, 2007). From an external or Moscow-centric perspective, one can argue as Steele (2008) does, that as a result of Chechenisation, Russia has won against the Chechen insurgents. Moscow has devolved responsibility of Chechen security to Grozny, Chechnya is reinstated as a federal subject of the Russian federation, and the security situation in Chechnya continues to improve (Smirnov, 2009).

The reality, however, is somewhat more complex. Whilst the security situation on the streets of Grozny may be improving and Kadyrov remains the strongman in power, he is regarded as the 'embodiment of evil' by the majority of the Chechen public, by virtue of his loyalty to Putin, the age-old enemy as President of Russia (Russell, 2007, P.82.) Elections are clearly rigged so that Kadyrov remains in power. If this were the whole case, then one might argue that the counter insurgency operation has been a success for Russia. However, attacks such as Beslan and recent bombings, kidnappings and assassinations of Russian targets by hard-line Islamic Chechen insurgents in Dagestan and North Ossetia 'demonstrate that the containment policy has failed as jihad is spreading in the North Caucasus' (Hughes, 2007, P.202). Hughes (2007) also argues that the disproportionate use of force by Russia in its rubbleisation of Grozny 'suggest that Russian policy has been genocidal in its consequences if not in intent.' The memory of this, combined with little attention given to winning over hearts and minds, bar a small amount of reconstruction and institution building of late, means that much of the Chechen population continues to identify with

the anti-Russian insurgents. Therefore, according to the definition given by Galula (1965, p.8) the Russian counter insurgency has ultimately been unsuccessful from the Russian perspective, as the insurgents are neither demolished as a force nor are they docile due to them being isolated by society. Militant separatism is still existent in the region, with Chechnya providing battle-hardened fighters and tactical expertise to the separatist insurgencies and mafia gangs of North Ossetia and Dagestan. Indeed, Chechen rebel leader Sadulaev was quoted in 2009 as considering the Russian set up of the 'National Anti-Terrorist Committee' as being an obvious admission by Moscow that it had failed to eliminate terrorism in the region, as, had this been the case, there would have been no need for such a committee (Smirnov, 2009). Chechnya may now be more stable, but mafia-like gangs and Islamic resistance movements based inside its borders are considered as being some of the key coordinators of the regional insecurity of the North Caucasus region. Indeed, resistance leaders have proclaimed the region as a Caucasus Emirate, 'a virtual state entity based on the resistance movement,' and it is this body which claimed responsibility for the 2011 attack on Moscow's Domodedovo airport as part of its 'global jihad' (Górecki, 2011).

In conclusion therefore, though Putin has achieved what Yeltsin longed to do – to use elements of the counter insurgency to his own political advantage – a great deal of criticism may be levelled against Russian tactics and policies across both conflicts. The First Chechen War resulted in a failure for the Kremlin, with an ill-equipped, undertrained and unmotivated largely conscripted army fighting a war against an insurgency that had been of little threat to the everyday Russian. Commanders seemed ill-appointed and irresponsible, and logistics were poorly managed due to poor communications. A key shortcoming of Moscow was the media's unlimited access to the conflict, which led to stories of the bedraggled army being splashed out on front pages across the country (Oliker, 2001, P.34). This caused the public to lose what little faith they had left in Yeltsin. Khasaviurt may have made the most of what was realistically possible at the time (Fuller, 2006), yet it led to a resurgence in Chechen violence due to Moscow ignoring developments in Grozny during the interwar period. With Putin in power, the Second Chechen War was far more effective. On the ground, troops were largely as useless as before, yet Putin's ability to focus the drivers behind the conflict from elsewhere gave some positive outcomes for Moscow. A combination of the Chechen terrorist attacks against Russian targets across the country intimidated the Russian population, allowing Putin to reassure them with his strong-man image. His personality cult, combined with little media space given to any failings in Russia's operations in Chechnya, helped bring the re-election of his United Russia party on three occasions, and was a key way in which Putin made effective use and control of the conflict. Furthermore, Putin has achieved the goal of his Chechenisation policy, shifting the violence from 'Russian on Chechen to Chechen on Chechen' (Russell, 2007, P.82). Whilst critics cite the immorality of the instatement of a largely unpopular and therefore ineffective president in Chechnya through a rigged election, Moscow now has limited direct responsibility for Chechen issues due to the devolution of power to its regional government. However, the remaining violence and its spread throughout the North Caucasus and to the heart of Russia at Domodedovo airport can only draw criticism for Russia's claims of its counter insurgency success. Therefore, whilst the separatist movements may have been contained, and Chechnya remains a federal subject of Russia, the continuing existence of Islamist insurgencies in Chechnya creates an unstable and vulnerable North Caucasus and wider Russia. Indeed, Grozny continues to live up to its melancholy namesake.

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Date written: December 2012