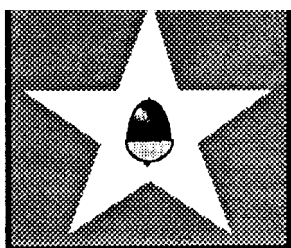


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**North Caucasus Military District:
Defending Russia's Interests
in the Caucasus (1996-August 1999)**

June 2000



A101



Source: Military News Bulletin, No 8, August 1994.

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"If Kosovo was selected to be the staging post for the launch of international terrorism in the Balkans, then Chechnya is the equivalent in the Caucasus. With [outside] assistance, enforced on the population of this Russian republic has been created an anti-people, anti-constitutional, criminal regime...a criminal-terrorist enclave.

*This has generated a qualitatively new threat ... to national and international security, stability and the general peace. Today Russia stands square on to the threat in the North Caucasus, defending not only its territorial integrity and sovereignty, the law and freedom of its citizens, but also Europe, and the whole world from the strengthening criminal-terrorist abyss."*¹

The men who are literally in the front line waging Russia's present "counter-terrorist campaign" are operating from the North Caucasus Military District (MD), Russia's main guarantor of her security interests in the south. Not enjoying the easiest of times in 1994-1996 during the first Chechen War, Russia seems to have got things more right than wrong in this second military campaign in the region. Some of the reasons for this lie in the changes which have taken place both within this "frontline" military district and in the representative structures and units of the other power ministries based there. This paper examines those changes which took place within the MD during 1996-1999 and assesses their effectiveness in the light of the Chechen campaign. It is subdivided into a number of sections, including an overview of the relevant experience of the first Chechen war; the general military reform process and its impact on the MD; the level of mutual training between the units of the power ministries based in the MD. It is hoped that the reader will gain a more comprehensive picture of exactly how the North Caucasus MD prepared for its second military campaign in the Caucasus in the space of 5 years.

The Experience of the 1994-1996 First Chechen War

In early 1998, two Russian Lieutenant-Colonels published a detailed review of recent (1986-1996) military involvement in internal conflicts in USSR/Russia. They listed a total of 16 instances (10 in the period 1986-1991 and 6 in the post-Soviet period) when the central political power in Moscow felt it necessary to introduce troops onto the streets of the country's cities and towns. Using four separate categories to gauge the effectiveness of the country's Armed Forces – "cessation of disorder"; "reduction in tension"; "regularisation" and "localisation of conflict" – as well as a points system (0 representing no success; 1 partial success and 3 total success) – the authors reasoned that only one operation – that carried out in the Kirghiz cities of Osh, Kara-Suu and Uzgen in June 1990 – could be labelled "a great success." Using their methodology, three operations were deemed to have been "a total failure": Tbilisi, April 1989; Vilnius, January 1990 and, not surprisingly, Chechnya, December 1994-August 1996.² Their assessment of the current "counter-terrorist operation" in the North Caucasus is not yet known, but one can

assume that it would be classed either as enjoying “certain limited success”, or be placed in the slightly higher category, “use of troops justified itself.” Certainly, in comparison with the first Chechen war, at least militarily, the current campaign cannot be classed as a “a total failure”, although how successful the politicians will be in securing both long-term peace and stability for the region is impossible to say at present.

Thus, the assumption must be that Russia’s senior political and military figures did learn from the first Chechen War and did put into effect a number of changes, at least at a local level, designed to ensure that the Russian Armed Forces did not repeat the mistakes of 1994-1996. There can be very little doubt that the experience accumulated as a result of the first Chechen War was collated and analysed with a view not only, for instance, to strengthening the cooperation and interaction between the various power ministries, both locally and nationally, but also a determination to restore Moscow’s writ in the republic at the earliest possible date. After all, Chechnya in 1994-1996 proved that there was a very real *internal* threat to the Russian Federation and the response of the power ministries was less than adequate, to put it mildly. Moscow is also very aware of the strategic and economic importance of the region to Russia and is determined to maintain its presence in the region, by force of arms if needs be. Nor will it brook outside “interference” in what it considers to be a region of vital national importance.

Even before the first Chechen War had fully run its course, it was obvious that changes were going to be made, especially in relation to the North Caucasus MD, in order to take into account the immediate combat experience of the troops on the ground. In May 1996, in an interview with *Interfax*, the then Russian Minister of Defence, General P Grachev, made it clear that the military experience of Chechnya would be used to re-model the Army, especially those units in the North Caucasus MD:

*“Units in the North Caucasus Military District will be restructured on the basis of the experience of military actions conducted in Chechnya...the need has emerged to form infantry units and airborne assault units capable of fighting in the mountains, and airborne assault units to be dropped from helicopters in unfamiliar localities. The special rapid deployment units will also undergo some changes.”*³

Grachev also pointed out that one of “the main problems” facing the Armed Forces in the war in Chechnya was the Army’s lack of experience in seizing towns: *“Besieging towns and preparing to take them by storm in one’s own country was very hard from the psychological point of view.”* Judging from reports concerning the latest military campaign in the Caucasus, the seizing of towns would appear to have become less of a problem for the Russian Armed Forces.

In a more detailed report, published at the end of May 1996, concerning the impact of the overall reform of the Armed Forces, as well as the war in Chechnya, Grachev spoke about *“the essentially newly-created forces of the Moscow and the North Caucasus Military Districts”*, as well as the operational training which had taken place during the winter of 1995, when *“attention was focussed on the study and tactical analysis of questions concerning the settlement of military conflicts of various sizes”*, involving not only the MoD, but also the Border Guards Service, MVD’s Interior Troops and the troops of the Ministry of Emergencies.⁴ Noting the resignation of Major-General Kondrat’yev as Commander of Operational Group of Forces (Chechnya), Grachev spoke about *“the unjustifiable losses”* due to

“insufficient attention” being paid by the Commander to “the experience of the war in Afghanistan.”⁵

A further sign of change in the MD was Grachev’s announcement in the article that all Federal forces not previously belonging to the North Caucasus MD were to be moved out of the MD by 1st August 1996, thus effectively signalling the beginning of the end of the military campaign in the region. Of course, by the time the deadline was due to be reached, Grachev was no longer Russia’s Minister of Defence, replaced by Colonel-General I Rodionov in July 1996.⁶ One of the reasons behind the downfall of Russia’s “best ever” Minister of Defence was Grachev’s handling of the war in Chechnya (indeed in an interview of the new Minister of Defence, Rodionov bluntly stated that *“military activities [in Chechnya] were initiated with bad preparation and bad planning”*). On too many occasions, Grachev had the bad habit of not living up to his boasts. Although it would be unfair to blame Grachev wholly for the low combat capability of the Russian Army, nevertheless his poor handling of the war in Chechnya – along with growing allegations of corruption and even the possibility of his role in murder⁸ – was an important reason in Yel'tsin’s decision to sack him.

Rodionov was a very different kind of man to Grachev. Formerly Commander of 40th Army in Afghanistan when, according to one source, military activity was at its highest but losses of both men and material were at their lowest, Rodionov’s most recent appointment had been Chief of the General Staff’s Military Academy.⁹ As such, he had written widely on reform of the Armed Forces and the general nature of war. In relation to developments closer to home, ie the recent experience of the Chechen War, Rodionov in a TV interview broadcast in early September 1996, made it clear that the troops from the North Caucasus MD would be a permanent fixture in Chechnya:

*“Defence Minister Igor Rodionov said today that units of the North Caucasus Military District would be permanently based in Chechnya. Only the troops that, in the minister’s words, were providing temporary military assistance there will leave the republic.”*¹⁰

In the same interview, Rodionov also revealed that, in his opinion, the fighting in Chechnya would go on *“for a very long time, perhaps for years, perhaps for a decade”* and that the Russian forces based there would have to be careful not to give in to *“revenge”* or *“provocations”*.

Thus, not only was the new Minister of Defence unconvinced about the settlement negotiated between A Maskhadov and A Lebed at Khasavyurt in the previous month, but he also saw the need for a permanent Russian military presence in the region, made up of units supplied from the North Caucasus MD. At this point, it should be noted that thanks to the war in Chechnya, the North Caucasus MD had now effectively been re-designated as one of Russia’s frontline MDs. Gone were the days when service in the MD was viewed as a relatively easy number, due to the temperance of the climate, the fact that, during the Soviet period, there was little inter-ethnic tension, its borders were stable. Now, tension in the region was high and the MD was in the forefront of protecting Russia’s geostrategic interests in the south.

The importance of the MD, as well as the continued anxiety over Russia’s position in the south, was emphasised by a leaked report of a session of Russia’s Security Council, held on 28th November 1996:

“Ivan Rybkin, secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation and Igor Rodionov, defence minister of the Russian Federation, discussed creating a reinforced North Caucasus Military District group using the 101st Brigade of Interior Troops of the Interior Ministry and 205th Brigade of the defence ministry.”¹¹

Curiously enough, the 205th Motor Rifle Brigade had come in for some criticism a couple of months earlier, in an article examining the overall failure of the Russian Army’s military campaign in Chechnya:

“Another reason for the Russian Army’s failures in Chechnya can be considered the familiar and ineradicable disorder in the troops and the lack of a precise structure, line of control and even information about the whereabouts at any given moment in time about any unit. Many officers cannot understand the previously unseen structure of the 205th Motor Rifle Brigade which is to be permanently based in Chechnya. It consists of the Separate 204th Regiment and several battalions and companies. Leaving aside the fact that there has never been such an ‘organism’ in the Army before – some personnel do not know to whom it is directly subordinate and who is its higher command. Formally, the brigade is part of 58 Army, North Caucasus MD and, obviously, should be subordinate to its leadership. On the other hand, 205th is under the command of the temporary combined forces in Chechnya, represented by deputy commander North Caucasus MD, Vladimir Tikhomirov and Konstantin Pulikovskiy, in other words, a higher command and control structure.”¹²

The confusion over issues of command and control of the Federal grouping in Chechnya during the first Chechen War was symptomatic, not only of poor leadership during the campaign itself, but also of poor cooperation (*vzaimodeystviye*) between the various units of the power ministries operating in Chechnya at that time, particularly between the MoD and the Interior Ministry (MVD). As will be detailed below, this has been an area, both nationally and within the North Caucasus MD, that has attracted a great deal of attention since 1996 and one which, despite some success, has still not been fully resolved. In an early evaluation of the role of the Russian Army in the first Chechen war, one Russian analyst was acutely aware of the impact of poor coordination between the activities of the units of the power ministries:

*“Finally, one of the most important reasons for the failure of the Federal Group of Forces in Chechnya was the lack of cooperation between units of different departments. There has already been much talk about the complicated relations between units of the MoD and the MVD. Their history began back during the New Year’s assault on Groznyy in 1994, when columns of the two departments advancing along parallel streets did not have a unified command or communications, and that is why, occasionally, shells would hit friendly troops ... Both Army units and MVD units believe that they alone were bearing the main burden of the war and that the ‘services’ of the **competitors** [my emphasis - SJM] consisted of running away from the battlefield.”¹³*

Thus not only did the MoD and MVD units not cooperate, but this could have disastrous consequences for their men on the ground. It was more than just a problem of making sure, for instance, that the units involved could actually talk to one another, quite literally through the supply of the same portable radio equipment, but that there was a culture at work which saw the units not even in healthy competition with one another, but more importantly, a competition which

denigrated the role of one unit in comparison with another, thereby leading to feelings of contempt and mistrust.

In short, by the end of 1996, a number of changes were either being put into effect, or were in the pipeline, to harbour the experience of the first Chechen War in preparation for the future. The first Chechen War proved to be the strongest indication yet of how ineffective the Russian Armed Forces had become since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The decision to permanently base units from the North Caucasus MD in Chechnya was also a sign that Russia was serious in its desire to maintain its military hold on the region, a clear signal that whilst in some respects it had “lost” the war in Chechnya, its defeat was one that was not irreversible. The reform of the North Caucasus MD, as well as of Armed Forces, would gather pace; 1997-1998 were in many respects decisive in preparing for Russia’s return to military action in August 1999.

Reform and the North Caucasus MD (1997-1999)

One of the more concrete aspects of military reform to hit the Caucasus region was the decision to disband the Transcaucasus Group of Forces in March 1997 and replace it with the Group of Russian Forces (Transcaucasus).¹⁴ This was more than simply a change of name: according to one report, it meant a reduction in the number of personnel by 70%, as well as the withdrawal of military hardware from a number of Russian bases in Georgia. The new group was to be subordinated to the command of the North Caucasus MD (still under the command of Colonel-General A Kvashnin) and the regional branches of a number of the intelligence directorates were moved from Tbilisi to Rostov, HQ of the North Caucasus MD.¹⁵ All in all, this was an enforced measure, as much to do with economic necessity as any significant change in strategic thinking – on paper, in 1997, Russia’s defence budget allocation was 3.83% of GNP. In fact, the MoD only received 2.71% of GNP that year, less than in 1996, 1995, 1994¹⁶.

In a keynote address to a meeting of Heroes of the Soviet Union/Russian Federation, held in June 1997, the new Minister of Defence, Colonel-General Igor Sergeyev,¹⁷ outlined what he considered to be the main structural reforms for the Russian Armed Forces in the immediate future, including what he called the “*units of the future*”:

*“We will manage to gain time and turn it from an enemy into an ally only by focussing our main efforts on the conservation of combat-ready units and formations with a well-developed infrastructure and modern weapons and combat equipment which confirm their combat capability in practice. As early as 1998, it is planned to create three or four ‘units of the future’, with one in the east of the country, one in the North Caucasus Military District and two in the Moscow Military District.”*¹⁸

In a TV interview, Sergeyev elaborated on what these “units of the future” would look like:

*“[they will be] highly mobile formations, having a modular structure, which will be equipped, or will start to be equipped, first and foremost, with modern weapons and equipment.”*¹⁹

A Kvashnin’s appointment to the post of Acting Chief of the General Staff in May 1997 left the position of Commander of the North Caucasus MD vacant, but not for long. By presidential decree, dated 29th July 1997, the MD’s First Deputy

Commander, Lieutenant-General V G Kazantsev was promoted to MD Commander, Lieutenant-General N Troshev, 58 Army Commander, being appointed to the post of First Deputy Commander of the MD on the same date.²⁰ Both men had seen service in the first Chechen War and no doubt had their own views on what went right and, more importantly, what went wrong with the conduct of operations then. It was also important that the soon to be confirmed Chief of the General Staff, Kvashnin, had been Kazantsev's immediate superior when both men served in the North Caucasus MD in 1996-1997. It is extremely unlikely that Kazantsev would have obtained such an important position without Kvashnin's approval. Certainly, in the words of one experienced military commentator, the appointment of Kazantsev was heavily linked with the whole reform process of the Armed Forces:

*"One thing is certain for sure: in reforming the District, Kazantsev has been promised the support of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Colonel-General Anatoliy Kvashnin. They served together almost 1½ years and, without Kvashnin's recommendation, Kazantsev would not have been able to occupy the vacant post in Rostov-on-Don."*²¹

The article also pointed out that Kazantsev had two main tasks to perform as MD Commander:

"[Kazantsev must] be ready to stop the sorties by the bandit formations ... whilst, at the same time, carry out a thorough re-organisation of the MD itself where, according to the plan of military reform, will be concentrated the main strike force of the Russian Army's Ground Forces."

These were two very clear and distinct aims, but by no means mutually exclusive: reform of the MD, building partly on a careful study of the first Chechen War, would mean making it more difficult for the "bandit formations" to operate within the territory of the MD. Kazantsev was appointed to the post as MD Commander not simply because he knew Kvashnin personally or because he had a reasonably "good war" in the first military campaign in Chechnya, but also because long before the first shots had been fired in the first Chechen War, he knew the area well, having served just under 10 years in the Transcaucasus MD.²²

It was not long before the recently-appointed Minister of Defence paid a "working visit" to the North Caucasus MD, on 22nd-23rd August 1997. Sergeyev flew down to Vladikavkaz, as opposed to Rostov-on-Don, in order to see for himself a training exercise on the Tarsk mountain exercise range, where the men taking part had to operate in mountain-forested terrain. Despite the severe under-funding of the Armed Forces, according to the newspaper report of Sergeyev's visit, the fact that such an exercise was being held at all was indicative of the renewed emphasis being placed by the MoD on the financing of military training for the Armed Forces: *"For the first time in a long time in 1997, about 10% of the funds allocated to the military budget are being directed to military training."*²³

This was one of the first exercises to take place after the decision to grant the control structures in the MDs the status of territorial commands, ie all the troops of the power ministries operating within the confines of each district were placed under one command, namely the MD Commander. This was designed to create "one fist", each unit to work in close coordination with every other unit. To that end, *"commanders, deputy commanders and representatives of units and formations of the Interior Troops and FPS [Federal Border Guard Service] attended the exercise."*²⁴ That may well have been the case, but there is no mention in the report of Interior Ministry or FPS units being used in the exercise, training alongside their brothers-in-arms from the Ministry of Defence. This was the first exercise of its

type held in the MD under the direct command of Kazantsev in his new role as Commander and was, in overall terms, highly praised by Sergeyev:

*"I would like to single out the well-coordinated nature of the troops in solving the most complicated problems. To no small extent, this was due to the work of the MD Commander, Lieutenant-General Viktor Germanovich Kazantsev, who had a firm grasp of every detail ... Once again, we are convinced how difficult this profession is – that of being an officer of the Ground Forces. I feel, though, that the commanders here are not novices. They are people who have been through a lot."*²⁵

So many officers and men excelled themselves that at the end of the exercise, Sergeyev wanted to award the best "commander's watches"; unfortunately, there were not enough to go round, so a number of the generals and officers accompanying Sergeyev took off their own and gave them to the Minister, so enabling him to reward all those who had stood out!²⁶

Not long after the August exercise, Kazantsev outlined his own views on how the reform process would affect his district:

*"During the reform process, the quality of the formations and units will increase sharply ... for example, let's take a motor rifle division. In the future, it will have paratroopers. Then will appear helicopters and flame throwers. As a result, the mobility of the motor rifle unit will increase."*²⁷

In this context, he also spoke about increasing the "technical capabilities" of the units, as well as improving their rear support facilities:

*"All this, it goes without saying, compels us now to think seriously about improving the quality of field training, imparting to the officers a love for method [metodika] which, at the end of the day, raises the military preparation of the units and formations to a qualitatively new level."*²⁸

This was how Kazantsev saw the immediate future for the reform of the troops under his direct command up until the year 2001. In the post-2001 period, Kazantsev saw the emphasis being placed on "changing the functions of the commands" of the air army, air defence corps, airborne units deployed on the territory of the MD, "thus, not only will the control of the troops be improved, but so will increase significantly the combat, manoeuvrable possibilities of the units and formations."²⁹

Kazantsev's views on the way ahead for his own MD were very definite, with great emphasis on increasing the mobility and firepower of the units. Not surprisingly, this was very much in line with Sergeyev's thinking on the future of the Armed Forces, with further emphasis being placed on improving their quality. Given also the renewed emphasis on training, one can see early signs that the troops of the North Caucasus MD were being steadied for what was to come. As Kazantsev noted in the interview:

*"The main task for us today is to improve the military training of the troops. And this presupposes quality training of the personnel, beginning with the command of the district and ending with the units."*³⁰

On increased cooperation with the other units of the power ministries, Kazantsev stated bluntly:

*"The President of Russia, as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, has demanded from us readiness for action in cooperation with the interior troops in emergency situations **including armed conflict on the territory of***

the district [emphasis mine – SJM]. In connection with this, we have a number of units on combat alert.”³¹

In conclusion, Kazantsev once again underlined the importance of training for the future:

*“Simply, it is obvious, everyone must understand that we cannot live according to the old ways. The leadership of the district understands this. The main thing now is to study under the new conditions how to organise combat training exercises directly amongst the units.”*³²

Kazantsev had outlined the future direction of the reform process to be adopted in the MD – greater emphasis on training and field exercises (reminding one of Suvorov’s famous dictum “teach the soldier what he needs to know to fight a war”); creation of more mobile units, with more of their own independent means of fire support; greater interaction with interior troops in particular but, by extension, all other uniformed units deployed in the MD and, finally, improving the “controllability” (*upravlyayemost*) of all sections of the MD’s apparatus, from HQ downwards.

One aspect of the reform that was not to everyone’s liking was to become fairly obvious not long after the publication of Kazantsev’s interview. This was the reduction in the number of officers and NCOs required by the MD to carry out its new responsibilities. In a press conference conducted towards the end of September 1997, Kazantsev admitted that the MD was set to lose some 15,000 officers and men by 1st November that year:

*“We are developing units that are mobile and have the latest word in military equipment, commanded by highly-skilled officers and stripped of unnecessary administrative staff and other surplus fat at headquarters ... the point of the reform is not only to save money ... in the past few years, the North Caucasus Military District has evolved into a border district with an entirely new set of duties dictated by Russia’s present-day geopolitical situation and the state of affairs in the North Caucasus. To be able to perform these new duties, the command structure is being changed and the range of equipment available is being expanded. The district’s units now have every type of modern tank artillery [sic] ... this makes it possible to form units that are radically different in structure and in combat potential – they have fewer men but incomparably greater firepower and better defence against incoming fire.”*³³

Kazantsev also spoke about cooperation with other branches of the Armed Forces, as well as with units from the other ministries:

*“Officer training now pays particular attention to interaction with all the other branches of the armed forces including army air power ... this forms the basis for all the district’s exercises, with the involvement as well of Interior Ministry troops and border guards. We already have experience of such exercises and will continue to rely on them in the future.”*³⁴

Finance was to rear its ugly head again in the MD somewhat less predictably, when ransoms were demanded for the release of 6 officers kidnapped by Chechens in September-October 1997. A ransom of \$150,000 each was demanded from the authorities. Kazantsev made a direct personal appeal to President Maskhadov and managed to secure the prompt release of two of the officers; using, in his own words, “*exactly the same method*”, he was hopeful to secure the release of the other four men.³⁵

Kazantsev also pointed out that, despite the reduction in the numbers of officers and men in the MD – here put at 12,500, not 15,000 as earlier – they were being “strengthened” through the acquisition of “new military technology”. Interestingly, he also spoke about the “need” for the Army to have an “ideology, a Russian path for the construction of modern armed forces”: “it is enough that we adopted an Americanised variant of the form. Now, we are suffering.”³⁶ As regards his own units, he singled out the “disreputable fame” of the 205th Motor Rifle Brigade, in relation to its use of contract soldiers, as being another example of the inappropriateness of the American military system.³⁷

And yet, as was to be revealed in a later interview of the MD’s First Deputy Commander, Lieutenant-General G Troshev, contract soldiers made up between 20-30% of the total number of soldiers and sergeants of the MD by the beginning of 1998.³⁸ Troshev touched on a whole series of matters concerning the future development of the troops in the MD, including military training and the creation of special alpine units. However, he began by making a number of introductory remarks concerning the recent past of the MD, as well as its contemporary status:

“The North Caucasus MD has changed from being a central MD to a border MD. Its forces protect the south-western direction. The region is complex, the position here is explosive. This was once again demonstrated by recent events in Buynaksk [Chechen terrorist outrage] – even recently, there were no such barbaric attacks. As a result of this action, once again civilians suffered.”

Troshev pointed out that the decision had been taken earlier to re-open the mountain training complex at Dar’yal, an important development given the fighting that was to come in 1999-2000:

“In 1992, during the Osetian-Ingush conflict, the centre was destroyed, the territory was mined and for five years, it lay deserted. But, in 1997, the decision was taken to restore the centre. During September-November, it was restored and, as of 1st December, training has begun there. The test range is situated 1,500 metres above sea-level. There’s a tankodrome, a firing range and a ‘mountain village’. But its most distinguishing feature is that it is natural: natural precipices, gorges, mountain rivers, waterfalls.”

In other words, the training here would be as close as possible to real conditions. Troshev also said that it was the MD’s intention to propose to the MoD that other units also make full use of the restored facilities on offer, “not only the North Caucasus MD should train to carry out military actions in mountains.” In terms of further specialisation of the MD’s troops, Troshev confirmed that it was training “elite” units of intelligence officers and special forces for operating in the mountains and affirmed that, in his opinion, “in every unit”, there should be a squad of men, better trained than the rest, to fight in the mountains.

Troshev also spoke about the deployment of one of the “constant readiness” units in the MD, namely the Volgograd division. In effect, this was a rapid reaction unit, designed to operate within a fairly short-time period:

“In the 1998 training period, it will begin to train according to a new programme. All units and sections will be able in the shortest possible timescale to solve any military task. This will require well-trained personnel, which means training better officers, NCOs and junior specialists. The division will also need modern combat equipment and weapons, new rifles, new computerised communications system. Given the conditions of our district, all of this will have to work effectively in a mountainous environment. Such a division will have to be mobile, in its composition will be rapid reaction units, ready in a thirty-minute

time frame to solve tasks in the same time as [the rest] of the unit is getting up."³⁹

In general, according to Troshev, in terms of manning levels, the MD was between "80-95%" of full strength, with both intelligence and communication units being virtually at full strength, "95-100%". He admitted that there were problems with the officer corps due, in part, to the fall in the prestige of military service, as well as the fact that many officers were quitting the ranks simply out of economic necessity: irregular payment of salaries and the lure of better money elsewhere for considerably less dangerous work meant that many young officers with families had to think about a non-service career.

Other significant changes in the MD which Troshev was prepared to discuss publicly included the following:

*"The airborne assault brigade has been re-organised to become a regiment, the motor rifle brigade has been transformed into a regiment and become part of 19th Motor Rifle Division. We have also created two independent training battalions [to train] officers for the motor rifle regiments, tank commanders, BMP commanders ... We are not waiting for someone else to train our cadres, we are doing it ourselves."*⁴⁰

All these changes bear testimony to the fact that the MD was steadily putting into practice lessons learnt during the first Chechen War, but was also striving to make sure that past mistakes were not repeated. A visit by Colonel-General V Isakov (Chief of Rear Services, Armed Forces Russian Federation) in February 1998 concluded that:

*"Despite objective difficulties, as a whole the Rear Services of the district enable the troops stationed in the North Caucasus to successfully resolve any tasks placed before them."*⁴¹

However, the overall reform process meant that reductions in personnel would still have to take place, even in one of Russia's frontline MDs. This was confirmed by Defence Minister Sergeyev's two-day working visit to the MD, begun on 16th March 1998.⁴² In a statement to ITAR-TASS, Sergeyev confirmed that *"the reduction of army personnel envisaged by the military reform will take effect in the North Caucasus, as well."*⁴³ However, Sergeyev stated that the principle of *"combat effectiveness, rather than the number"* would be applied.⁴⁴ In a more detailed report of his visit to the MD, the General put the cuts in manning in the North Caucasus MD in a wider context:

*"We have been forced to spend 90% of our funds on the upkeep of the troops. And there are virtually no funds left to renew equipment or do research and development ... reform is, of course, also a quest for internal reserves ... we need to get rid of everything that is superfluous and does not directly benefit combat training."*⁴⁵

This must have been music to Kazantsev's ears, in the sense that Sergeyev was making such a strong, public commitment to supporting the adequate financing of combat training. Whilst Sergeyev's role in the first Chechen War was limited – at the time, he was C-in-C of Strategic Rocket Forces, as a professional military man, he would have been well aware of the shortcomings of the Russian Armed Forces in 1994-1996 and realised the importance of more effective combat training.

Whilst in Budennovsk, Sergeyev was also asked if the Army would assist the militia and the internal troops in the defence of the civilian population against terrorists. Sergeyev answered unequivocally: *“without any shadow of a doubt”*.⁴⁶

“First of all, he [Sergeyev] told reporters that the military units in the North Caucasus Military District remain combat effective and will, as always, carry out both their army and police functions in the Caucasus in the defence of law and order and ensuring the safety of citizens, particularly in the areas bordering on Chechnya.

*The agreements reached between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence remain in force, but there are important changes being made in the North Caucasus Military District. The minister was particularly interested in two army brigades with the greatest strategic importance for security in the North Caucasus District, the 205th Motor Rifle Brigade and the 21st Special Cossack Assault Brigade, the only unit of its kind in Russia. The soldiers and officers in the latter have taken part in all the armed conflicts on the territory of Russia and the CIS.”*⁴⁷

Despite its military record, however, the Brigade was still going to be affected by the cuts: it was to change its designation from a Brigade to a Regiment, it was then to be subordinated to the 7th Novorossiysk Division but, even with the reduction in manpower, Sergeyev was keen to emphasise that its effectiveness was not going to be affected: *“It should be understood that the security of the residents of the North Caucasus republics will not suffer from the reforms.”*⁴⁸

Sergeyev’s two-day visit did not leave him particularly *“optimistic”* about the situation in Stavropol’ *kray*, however. This feeling of pessimism had less to do with the work being undertaken by the North Caucasus MD and more to do with the overall security situation in the region:

*“We consider the situation in the North Caucasus as under control, although we assess developments in individual areas as negative.”*⁴⁹

Not long after Sergeyev’s departure, another exercise was held in the MD involving a number of units, including Interior Ministry Troops, troops of the Ministry of Emergency Situations and Border Guards. Kazantsev was keen to downplay its aggressive intent in relation to Chechnya:

*“I want especially to stress that during the command and staff exercises, the power-wielding structures were not preparing either for a new escalation in the Chechen conflict or for a worsening of the criminal situation in Dagestan. What we were thoroughly working through here was operating against classical armies, not partisan detachments. The essence of the exercises is to offer moral support for efforts by diplomats, politicians and regional leaders engaged in seeking peace and accord in the Caucasus.”*⁵⁰

Whilst not wishing to cast aspersions on Kazantsev’s noble desire to assist the efforts of others to help build stability in the region, the statement that the exercise was operating on the principle of combating “classical armies” rings rather hollow. What “classical armies” had he in mind? Georgia’s? Azerbaijan’s? Some other army from the outside the region? The MD had changed in response to the changing nature of the *internal* threat to the Russian Federation. In many ways, prior to NATO enlargement in April 1999, the nature of the external threat (especially in relation to the Caucasus region) had not significantly changed. It was as it had been.

In an article commemorating the 80th anniversary of the creation of the North Caucasus MD, Kazantsev pointed out that then, as now, *“the main aim for our district, like 80 years ago, is to defend the territorial integrity of Russia in its southern borders.”*⁵¹ However, Kazantsev was much more keen to detail what was going on now and how things had changed recently:

*“In spite of the present situation in the region, we are constantly involved in a planned programme of combat training, as much as necessary, in order to ensure that the units and formations of the NCMD [North Caucasus Military District] are mobile and military capable. Today, on the Dar’yal test range, the only one of its type in the Armed Forces, not one day passes without military exercises taking place: firing, tactical exercises. Because, in my view, to train a real professional in mountain [warfare] you need at least two years.”*⁵²

The emphasis was also placed on training at least one smaller unit to be better equipped for fighting in the mountains:

*“We will strive to achieve a situation so that in every regiment there is a motor rifle battalion which has single-mindedly trained to operate in the mountains. In the future, we will instruct all regiments and brigades in the district in this.”*⁵³

Training was not just for the benefit of the units of the NCMD either, but also for the units of the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Border Guards, and so on. Kazantsev also made the interesting remark that there were fewer problems between units of the power ministries lower down the chain of command: *“the lower the level, the greater the mutual understanding.”*⁵⁴

Despite the attack on a vehicle convoy carrying a number of MD and General Staff officers in April 1998, Kazantsev, although condemning the attack as *“an insolent act planned by rebels”*, still adopted a fairly mild tone as regards possible future retaliation, saying that *“ways should be sought towards reconciliation, rather than taking steps towards a new confrontation.”*⁵⁵ In the same interview to a local ITAR-TASS correspondent, Kazantsev confirmed that the numerical strength of the MD over the past two years had been cut by 7,500 men (so much for the original planned cut of 15,000), but said that the units of the NCMD had *“acquired a new higher level of combat readiness.”*⁵⁶ He also repeated that *“the units and sub-units directly involved in carrying out training and combat tasks had been brought up to 95-100% of their strength”*, and what was fast becoming a mantra:

*“The task of the district’s troops is to protect Russia’s territorial integrity on its southern borders ... therefore, the main attention is being paid to teaching personnel the skills needed in conditions of mountain and forest terrain.”*⁵⁷

A number of interesting developments took place in May/June 1998 concerning the situation in the North Caucasus, following renewed interest in the region shown by Moscow. On 12th May, it was announced by S Stepashin – Minister of Interior – that it had been decided to appoint the former C-in-C Interior Ministry Troops, Colonel-General L Shevtsov, to the recently-created post of Deputy MVD Minister with responsibility for the North Caucasus. According to Stepashin, he had decided *“to make more expedient use”* of the General’s service career (Shevtsov’s previous appointment was commander of the Russian contingent of troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina).⁵⁸ This renewed interest was underlined by Yel’tsin’s decision (on 21st May) to create a special *“field team”* to deal with the situation in Dagestan. Headed by Stepashin, the *“team”* was to consist of the Ministers of Justice, Regional and Ethnic Policy and *“top security officials.”*⁵⁹ On 25th May, the government went one stage further, when it announced that a *“special government body to normalise the situation in the North Caucasus”* was being created, headed by the Russian Deputy

Prime Minister, V Khristenko. According to A Kokoshin, Secretary to the Security Council, the “normalisation” process would be achieved by “socio-economic means”:

*“It will be combined with a determination to use all the forces and means possessed by the state, including the federal and local authorities, in order to enforce law and order in the North Caucasus, especially in Dagestan.”*⁶⁰

Yel'tsin's press secretary, S Yastrzhembskiy, stated that, at the same meeting, the Security Council had decided “to strengthen the coordination of the power structures in the North Caucasus.”⁶¹ At a meeting between Yel'tsin and Stepashin on 26th May, coordination in the North Caucasus was again discussed. After the meeting, “Stepashin told journalists that tough coordination among the power structures is being established in the Caucasus, both from the point of view of interaction between them and the settlement of tasks which might be given to them in the future.”⁶² He also mentioned the establishment of “an emergency commission ... in Stavropol' ... in charge of issues of coordination and ensuring security in the entire North Caucasus region.”⁶³ Unfortunately, no detail was published about the actual composition of the new body.⁶⁴

So within a month, according to available evidence, we have a “special field team”, “a special government organ” and now “an emergency commission” all tackling security issues in the North Caucasus! Without more detail, it is impossible to say how they interacted with one another, if at all; who were the members; what was the representation of the MoD, MVD, FAPSI, etc, or even if they functioned at all. And to add even more to what was becoming a virtual alphabet soup of organs and commissions, on 6th June, a report carried by ITAR-TASS spoke about Stavropol' having been chosen “as the base for the Russian Interior Ministry's Operations Centre.” This was created “to co-ordinate the efforts of all power-wielding structures in the North Caucasus region in the fight against terrorism, hostage-taking, armed banditry and other types of crime.”⁶⁵ As Deputy MVD Minister with responsibility for the North Caucasus, Shevtsov was placed in charge of the new regional staff HQ. In an interview he gave to the Interior Ministry's main daily newspaper, Shevtsov spoke briefly about the general background and role of the organ:

*“In the North Caucasus, really, there are a large number of power structures. All decide equally important tasks, but separately. However, the practice of recent years has shown the necessity for a clearer and operationally co-ordinated effort of all the power ministries. With this in mind, the Operational staff, as a permanent working organ to lead the forces and means of the MVD, MoD, MChS [Ministry of Emergency Situations], FSB [Federal Security Service], FPS, FSZhV [Federal Railway Troops], FAPSI of Russia, has been brought into being.”*⁶⁶

Asked specifically why the MVD had been given the leadership (*rukovodstvo*) of the power structures in the region, Shevtsov replied: “So decided the President of the Russian Federation. Correctly. You see because we are talking here about the internal security of the country, society and the citizen.” He also mentioned that, despite the fact that the Operational staff had not existed for long, “cooperation had improved” between the power ministries in the region and that a number of small-scale operations, involving “specialists” from the Operational staff had been “successful.”⁶⁷

Throughout May-June 1998, thus, the central power in Moscow had embarked on a number of initiatives to improve the work and co-ordinate the activities of all the power ministry units operating in the North Caucasus region. The single most important organ created during this period – for the purposes of this paper – was the MVD's Operational staff. It was given the primary task of assisting the

coordination of activity of all the units in the region, including units of the MoD. In some respects, this would appear to have been a perfectly logical step; after all, the threat in the North Caucasus was of an internal nature and, as such, was the responsibility first and foremost of the MVD. However Interior Minister Stepashin stated that the existence of the Operational staff:

*“... does not signify that someone is preparing large-scale military activities. The situation in the North Caucasus urgently demands overcoming narrow departmental interests in the practical work of the force structures. The steps taken to maintain law and order and security in the region must be complex, worked out according to a plan encompassing the whole region led by the centre. We need to mobilise the intellectual, economic, ideological and law enforcement potential.”*⁶⁸

But the nature of the internal threat was changing, as was its scale. The events of August 1999-June 2000 showed that when it comes down to launching attacks against well-equipped and well-trained large “illegal armed formations”, the MVD’s response is limited, both in terms of training and equipment. This weakness had been acknowledged in the July 1998 Law on Terrorism, which gave a supporting role in countering terrorism to the MOD.

This role was further reinforced towards the end of July 1998, when Yel'tsin signed “The Fundamentals (Concept) of State policy of the Russian Federation for Military Development in the Period up to the Year 2005.”⁶⁹ It represented the next formal step in reform of the nation’s Armed Forces and introduced a number of changes to the MD system in Russia.

*“The President of Russia, Boris Yel'tsin, has established a single system of military-administrative division of the territory of the Russian Federation into strategic directions: North-Western (within the borders of the Leningrad MD); Western (within the borders of Moscow MD); South-Western (within the borders of the North Caucasus MD); Central-Asian (within the borders of the Volga-Urals MD); Siberian (within the borders of the Siberian MD) and Far Eastern (within the borders of the Far Eastern MD).”*⁷⁰

The number of MDs was to be cut from 8 to 6, the new 6 being accorded the status of “operational-strategic commands.” What did this mean? In a major article published in the same month as Yel'tsin signed the Concept into law, Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin discussed what he thought the upgrade in the status of the MDs would mean to the country:

*“One important area of reform is the transition to the territorial principle of leadership of all troops and forces of the Russian Federation, with military districts being given the status of operational-strategic commands ... the system of military administrative division of Russia’s territory is itself based on the territorial principle of subordination and control and **its full implementation should make it possible to combine all branches of operational command and control of the power structures under a single figure** [emphasis mine – SJM] ... the substantial widening of the powers of the military district commander in peacetime pursues the following goals: improving the quality of planning of the use of the Armed Forces and other troops, military formations and organs of the Russian Federation in the interests of defence, as well as the organisation of collaboration, command and control and all-round support for them ... improve the quality of operational and combat training measures for all troops.”*⁷¹

This could be interpreted as a bid by the General Staff to exert control over the other men in uniform, operating within these newly-created operational-strategic commands. However, Kvashnin was alert to this possible interpretation and was quick to state that this was not the case:

“At the same time, giving the military district the status of an operational-strategic command does not mean that it will be made responsible for tasks currently carried out by other troops, military formations and organs of the Russian Federation.”⁷²

Sergeyev’s stance on all this would have done little to convince many of the other power ministers that the MOD was not making a bid to exert greater control over their units. In September 1997, Sergeyev had published a major article setting out the course of reform for the Armed Forces over the next eight years. On the reform of the MD system, he stated that:

*“In 1997-1998, [it is proposed] to give military districts the status of **operational-strategic commands** [emphasis as in original – SJM] on the strategic directions, placing on them the function of operational leadership ... of units, formations and sub-units of all the services of the Armed Forces and all other troops on questions of defence of the country.”⁷³*

An article published at the time of Concept being passed into law, examining a recent large-scale exercise held in the North Caucasus, revealed the confusion surrounding the whole question of who was in charge of what in relation to the security of the North Caucasus:

“Even now it is not clear who has the main organising role for maintaining security and defence in the North Caucasus – the General Staff or the Main Staff of the MVD.”⁷⁴

One commentator; however, did try to make sense of both the new Concept and its implications for the relationship between MoD and MVD units in any future conflict:

“The leading role of each of the departments in resolving specific tasks has been defined. Thus, the Defence Ministry is responsible for the country’s defence on land and at sea ... the Interior Ministry stops and neutralises internal armed conflicts ... When tackling each of these problems all the power departments will be obliged to obey the one that bears responsibility for it. For example, if interventionists encroach upon Russian territory, all troops will be directed by the Defence Ministry; the Ministry of the Interior will assume command in the event of an armed revolt in a component part of the federation ... the General Staff will co-ordinate operational-strategic planning.”⁷⁵

Judging by the outline of the Concept contained in the above statement, the actions by Chechen forces and their allies in Dagestan in August 1999 could have been interpreted quite legitimately either as an armed intervention on Russian soil (MoD) or an armed revolt (MVD), thereby leading to a period of confusion and indecision as to who was in charge of what when the operation began. What appears to have happened was that, initially at least, Internal Troops Commander in Chief Ovchinnikov’s men were placed in charge of the operation to drive the “militants” out of Dagestan but, as the situation deteriorated and it became obvious that the MVD was out of its depth, the operation was re-defined and the MoD, in the form of the North Caucasus MD, was put in charge of the operation. Given the plethora of government commissions and special organs designed to tackle the security issues of the North Caucasus alone, the fact that there was organisational confusion during the “counter-terrorist operation” should not now be surprising. Whether in the immediate aftermath of the “counter-terrorist operation”, all those concerned

were working according to the July 1998 Concept, or simply reacting to the developing situation, is difficult to say.

In re-defining the status of the MDs, both the country's Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff were of one mind that, if nothing else, the reform should mean that operational leadership of all the men in uniform be transferred, when the occasion so required, to the MD Commander. In short, the military were attempting to regain the upper hand over the Interior Ministry.

This would have been fuelled partly by the experience of Chechnya in 1994-1996, when units representing different power ministries rarely co-ordinated their activities effectively, but there would also have been an economic imperative (too many power structures chasing too little money to meet the security needs of the country and the military always seeming to lose out in the race). There was also the feeling that the Armed Forces had lost too much influence and power to the other ministries, especially the MVD. Of course, the argument at its surface level – the need to co-ordinate better the activities of all the relevant organs in order to ensure the country's proper security – cannot be dismissed and was probably one of the main arguments deployed in order to convince Yel'tsin to sign the measure. Interestingly, in Kazantsev's next major interview to *Krasnaya Zvezda*, he did not even mention the phrase, "operational-strategic command".⁷⁶ Had it already become a dead duck? Had the opposition of the other power ministries become so great that it had been allowed to slip quietly off the agenda or, much more speculatively, was it a casualty of the August 1998 crash? After all, given the fragile nature of the centre-periphery relationship throughout the latter half of 1998, any measures which looked to be granting more power, more control, especially over military affairs, to a regional leadership may have been viewed as a little too risky a course of action to pursue.

However, this interview did detail the training undertaken in the MD, as well as steps taken to hold more joint exercises with units of the other ministries. In general, the training carried out was intensive:

*"During this year, we carried out all planned command-staff exercises and sessions involving commands from platoon to large troop formation, during which were tested various elements in conducting military activity both in the plains and in mountain-forest terrain."*⁷⁷

Kazantsev also pointed out that at the end of such training, "tactical exercises" were held, involving firing or rocket launches, designed to check "the commander's ability to command his subordinates." Asked specifically about the experience of the last Chechen War, Kazantsev replied that "correctives" had been introduced in the training schedule:

"In practice training sessions of the troops, for example, the latter [are trained] to carry out a special control exercise from a tank whilst, at the same time, carrying out the tasks of a motor rifle section ... Other new ideas have appeared. For example, one of these is the use of bilateral platoon and company tactical exercises. The experience of military operations in mountain-forest terrain showed that the main burden is on the shoulders of small combat groups, mostly motorised and reconnaissance platoons and companies. They are better suited for operating in the mountains and defending road blocks. That is why special attention is paid to this kind of training ... For the first 9 months of this year, the district held more than 86% of fire practice sessions of the units and more fire practice sessions at platoon-level than for the whole of 1997."

Of course, Kazantsev could not but mention the complex at Dar'yal:

"The Dar'yal training range is our main training centre, where the troops learn the techniques to fight in the mountains ... special training courses are held here to teach the troops how to use their weapons and equipment in mountain-forest terrain ... we continue to train units...to accompany military convoys on winding, mountain roads. The experience and methods learned at the test range and in practice are summed up and analysed at commander sessions, attended by officers from all levels, including senior personnel from the MD."

In terms of the broader theme of cooperation with the other power ministry units, Kazantsev noted that:

"Today, the North Caucasus Military District in reality is the linking factor in the organisation of joint training of all the troops deployed in the region. We practise the conduct of joint command-staff exercises of the district's troops with the control organs ... of the other power ministries of the RF [Russian Federation] on the territory of the region. During the course of such exercises, we work out ways of stabilising the situation on the territory of the North Caucasus and localising armed conflicts."

He had no doubt that such joint exercises had demonstrated their success:

"It was clearly shown [in a joint command staff exercise held in July 1998] that the fundamental basis of its success lay in the close cooperation of the control organs and units of all the power structures."

Despite these positive statements Kazantsev ended his interview on a somewhat pessimistic note, when he reminded his readership of *"the difficult conditions"* of the troops deployed to Dagestan, hence the recent decision by the Military Council of the MD to make sure that financing of the units there was given *"top priority."*⁷⁸

Cooperation & Exercises: The Keys to Success? The Inter-Action of the Power Ministries in the North Caucasus MD, 1996-1999

*"Our state is becoming more and more an object for all types of expansion. Foreign intelligence services, organised, including international, crime, separatist tendencies in the border zones have all significantly increased. In such a situation, to maintain national security exclusively by the Armed Forces, without minimising in any way their role and significance, is no longer possible. The best confirmation of this is the attempt to solve the Chechen crisis by force."*⁷⁹

*"One of the most serious reasons for failures of the Federal Grouping in Chechnya is the lack of coordination of the actions of units from different departments. There has long been talk about the difficult relations between units of the Ministry of Defence and the MVD. Their history began back during the New Year's assault on Groznyy in 1994, when columns of the two departments advancing along parallel streets did not have unified command or communications, and that is why their shells sometimes hit friendly troops."*⁸⁰

*"Studying the experience of military activity in Chechnya [1994-1996], we have come to the conclusion that coordination of the military efforts of combined arms units and units of the Interior Ministry and Border Guards were the 'Achilles heel' of the actions of the Federal forces."*⁸¹

It was obvious that one of the main reasons for the poor performance of the Federal Grouping of Forces in Chechnya in 1994-1996 was the lack of cooperation (*vzaimodeystviye* can mean cooperation, coordination or interaction) between the power ministry units on the ground. Thus, cooperation became one of the *leitmotifs* in the subsequent analysis of the debacle.

In August and September 1996, articles appeared in the Russian military press calling for much greater coordination between the power ministries in maintaining Russia's security, external and internal. Lieutenant-General G Radionov, then Chief of the MoD's Main Educational Directorate, even called for the power structures to begin training their officer cadres together, thereby not only assisting the power ministries to find a common language, but also to save the state money, as resources could be pooled and unnecessary duplication of effort avoided.⁸² Similarly, a senior Border Guards officer argued for joint training for the MoD, the Border Guards and FAPSI.⁸³

On 21st March 1997, the following MoD press announcement appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda*:

*"In accordance with the training plan for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, during the period 24th-30th March this year, under the leadership of Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the First Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, General of the Army Viktor Samsonov, will be held a planned command-staff exercise in the North Caucasus Military District. One of the main tasks of the exercise will be to work out problems in relation to the staff HQ and control organs [organy upravleniya] in charge of the troops."*⁸⁴

A slightly fuller version of the announcement appeared a few days later, which mentioned that *"during the course of the command-staff exercise, questions concerning the cooperation of the NCMD's troops with the territorially based units of the Interior Ministry and the staff HQs of Civil Defence and Emergency Situations in solving joint tasks will be worked on."*⁸⁵ It also provided some more detail on the aim of the exercise:

*"The aim of the exercise is to work out the tasks of mobilisational readiness and control of the troops under present conditions. This will include questions of cooperation between the control organs and the commands of the troops of the MoD, MVD, Border Guards, Military Railway Troops in the North Caucasus region ... In essence, we are talking about checking...on the ways and possibilities of co-ordinating the training of the various power departments. In fact, the co-ordinating role of the General Staff is being worked on."*⁸⁶

The exercise had been planned as far back as November 1996 and thus is the first command-staff exercise to be held in the North Caucasus MD after the war in Chechnya, and was planned not long after the Khasavyurt Agreement had been signed in August 1996.⁸⁷ Needless to say, so soon after the end of the First Chechen War, the Chechens were far from happy that such an intensive and very public display of Russian military strength was taking place so close to the Chechen border and accused the Russians of launching a *"provocation"* in the region, as well as warning that such an exercise would only help *"to destabilise the situation"* in the area.⁸⁸

A TV report, broadcast by NTV on 28th March, confirmed the active involvement of the other ministries:

*“Many people are saying that the Redut-97 command and staff exercises in the North Caucasus Military District are the largest held in the last 10 years. Representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Border Service and the other power-wielding departments are involved in carrying out the tasks set, as well as the staff of all the groups, formations and units which are stationed on the district’s territory.”*⁸⁹

In his initial public assessment of the exercise, Samsonov did confirm that the exercise was *“the main event of the year”* for the Russian Armed Forces, but did not say anything directly about the precise role of the other ministries involved.⁹⁰ However, in a TV broadcast a week after the exercise had been completed, Samsonov stated that:

*“We always need to learn to work in close coordination with the other departments...we have been practising territorial defence actions here and these are closely connected with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Border Troops, as well as other forces.”*⁹¹

The TV correspondent also noted that the General Staff brought in units from the MVD, Border Guards, and FAPSI, and a local MVD chief confirmed that a *“joint headquarters”* had also been established.⁹² This shows that at least on a practical level, the units were beginning to learn to work and train together. Given the paucity of information on this particular exercise, it is difficult to say much more about it, other than that it was the first in the NCMD to begin tackling the problems associated with the poor coordination of the activities of the power ministries in the earlier military campaign.

Kazantsev’s interview to *Krasnaya Zvezda* in September 1997, when he talked about *“inter-action with Interior Ministry Troops”* was interesting for a number of reasons, on top of those previously examined.⁹³ In singling out the Interior Ministry Troops – the Army’s greatest rival for the little resources that were available to meet the country’s security needs – and their future co-ordinating role with the MoD, Kazantsev was making a number of points:

- 1) the very obvious one that as well-armed units in the MD, both sides would have to work and train together to avoid repeating past mistakes;
- 2) the Army was not sufficiently strong to secure Russia’s interests in the region alone and, finally,
- 3) the Army would now assume a greater internal role and, therefore, would have to seek greater coordination and cooperation with the MVD on a local level.

In early August 1997, Kvashnin – now officially confirmed as Chief of the General Staff – addressed a conference of Defence Ministry officials and urged the creation of a unified, territorially-based, control system for all defence and law-enforcement organs. Specifically:

“The North Caucasus Military District must not comprise three Interior Troop districts or two border districts”, arguing that *“each district should be run by a collective regional agency”* with the General Staff being given the status of a *“co-ordinating body.”*⁹⁴

In short, this was a preamble to the decision to elevate the MDs to “operational-strategic commands.” The statement by Kvashnin helps to reinforce the view that the military apparatus was getting ready to claw back some of its power and influence lost to the other power structures, under the guise of meeting Russia’s internal and external security threats, as well as economic pressure. Defence Minister Sergeyev’s remarks made at this time that the creation of the “operational-

strategic commands” should allow the MDs to have “*operational leadership*” of the other power ministry units in the MD, at the appropriate time, was a clear sign that the military were intent on regaining lost influence.

The elevation of the MDs to their new status, towards the end of July 1998, was preceded by the appearance of an important and interesting article in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, written by Colonel-General L S Zolotov, then Commandant of the M V Frunze Military Academy, the Academy for training the Army’s senior officers. The article was simply entitled “*Coordination of the Power Structures*” and, ostensibly, was a review of a work to be published by the Academy, concerning the inter-action of the various power ministries, based on the experience of the First Chechen War. However, given the article’s appearance just before the adoption of the July 1998 Concept, the position of the author and the content of the work, it was more than simply a book review.

It began with the sentence, quoted at the beginning of this section, to the effect that “*coordination ... of the Interior Ministry and Border Guards was the ‘Achilles heel’ in the activities of the Federal forces.*”⁹⁵ Zolotov pointed out that the experience gained in WW2 had been “*lost*” and that “*troop commanders and staffs did not have the necessary theoretical concepts, or practical recommendations: how to co-ordinate, in such unusual conditions, a battle in a population centre, at night time, in the mountains, how to organise the defence of installations, anti-diversionary activities.*”

He admitted that the Academy was at fault in not preparing the necessary textbooks for the Armed Forces, or for any of the other power ministries for that matter, despite having a range of specialists on the staff, including men from the Interior Ministry and the Border Guards. However, the Academy’s attitude to such matters had changed and

“the coordination of the combined arms troops, the border guards and Interior Troops commanders is now one of the priority areas in our work.”

Experience has convinced us that co-ordinating the activities of troops from the various power ministries must be undertaken by the control organ [organ upravleniya] which, before the appearance of a conflict, has in its hands all the links for controlling their [the troops] preparation, securing [their supplies]. In particular, this could be the administration of the military district.”

In order to sweeten the pill for the other ministries, he then argued that “*the delegation of units*” to a “*combined group of troops*” could be “*for a defined period of time – either until the successful completion of the operation, or for the conduct of a special operation.*”

He was obviously trying to assuage any potential criticism that he was showing a bias towards recommending his “own”. He expanded further on this point. Whilst freely admitting that all the structures were already involved in the defence of the state, operating independently they were not equal to the task:

“Let us take, for example, the Interior Ministry Troops. On them has been placed the main burden in the fight against illegal armed formations. But the units and sub-units of the Interior Ministry Troops are territorial units, their entire system of material, military-technical supply is based on local, stationary supply organs. They do not have heavy weapons. In conducting reconnaissance, radio-electronic warfare, defence, fire and engineering support, they are completely dependent on combined arms units.”

Similarly, in relation to the Border Guards:

“Their function is to secure the state border. But when there is a threat of large-scale military provocation on the border, the combined arms formations rush to their assistance. An example of this is Tajikistan. In conducting special operations against illegal armed formations, the border guards play an important role in the isolation of the conflict zone, preventing the movement of mercenaries, weapons, explosives, material resources, into the area. They play an active role in the fight against diversionary-reconnaissance groups and illegal armed formations.”

However, Zolotov was also ready to admit that it was not all one-way traffic:

“In their turn, motor rifle, airborne and tank troops need the assistance of Interior Ministry Troops in securing their rear, protecting it from diversionary and terrorist attacks, helping to disarm the militants. ... But, in order to operate successfully together, shoulder to shoulder, you must know one another’s tactics and military capabilities.”

Hence the Academy’s latest “fundamental” work, *“Coordination of Ground Forces, Interior Troop and Border Guard Units and Sub-Units in an Armed Conflict”*⁹⁶. It had already been sent to the printers and was due to see the light of day at the end of 1998. The book contained sections on *“the theoretical basis for the combat use of units and sub-units of Ground Forces, Interior Ministry Troops and Border Guards against illegal armed formations”*; analysing the principles of coordination through the method of rendering *“mutual assistance”* to one another, rather than relying on a formal chain of command; methods of work of all the units involved in taking part in a special operation, using a hypothetical case study of an inner-state armed conflict, etc.

Zolotov concluded that:

*“Experience shows that to the interests of coordination must be subordinated the entire system of control of the operational group of forces created, as a rule, on the basis of the military district, within whose responsibility the conflict has arisen. To control the operational group of forces must be created: a single reconnaissance/intelligence centre; a group for general operational planning; an information group; an operational air force group; a centre for planning target destruction. In creating such a control organ, it is important to avoid the mistakes which occurred during the conduct of military operations in Chechnya, that improvised ‘groups’, ‘centres’, ‘administrative organs’ quickly appeared which, in their composition, included different departmental structures. Thus, it required a long time to arrive at carefully thought out joint decisions. As much as possible, it will be necessary to retain the system of administration which already exists in the military district, in the army.”*⁹⁷

Thus, in order to avoid one of the mistakes in the last military campaign in Chechnya, Zolotov argued for the creation of an operational group of forces, containing a number of departments, copying what was already there at MD level but making sure that the departments themselves did not sectionalise to represent their own narrow interests: if this was avoided, then time would be saved and lead to an overall increase in the success of joint missions and avoid instances of troops being killed in “friendly fire.” The basis for the creation of the (temporary) operational group of forces (OGV in Russian), would be the MD itself, with Interior Ministry Troops and Border Guards being allocated specific roles to perform in support of the overall military effort.

This was an important article, not only in its subject matter, but also in its timing, just weeks before the new Concept for the further reform of the Armed Forces was passed on 29th July 1998. The article stated that, having studied the experience of the war in Chechnya, one of the main problems was the inter-departmental rivalry which had led to uncoordinated attacks by the Federal forces and the unnecessary loss of life through soldiers and troops not knowing who was who. The experience of WW2, bought at a high price, had either been forgotten or simply ignored. If Russia was to stand successfully against the threat posed by “illegal armed formations”, then independently none of the power ministries was up to the job, but collectively they could. The collective knowledge of the staff of the Academy, no doubt many of whom had served in Afghanistan and Chechnya, and its hypothetical case study, as well as its choice of terminology, would appear to indicate that come 1999-2000, it played a role in ensuring that not all of the mistakes of 1994-1996 were repeated.

In some respects, especially in relation to the North Caucasus MD, the practical aspect of Zolotov’s work was already being put into effect, but then Kazantsev had his own experience of the First Chechen War to draw on. Thus, his troops were already cooperating with MVD units in the temporary operational grouping (MVD) which was maintaining the security of the administrative borders of Chechnya, North Osetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan.⁹⁸ Asked specifically about coordination of activities of the ministries in the MD, he stated that:

“It is not a secret that friction has arisen between the departments. But what particularly is odd about this, and this is strange, is that it is happening ‘from the top’. The lower you go, the more mutual understanding [you find] ... We are ready to defend the southern borders of Russia and all the power ministries must tackle this main task together, by joint efforts.”⁹⁹

In terms of how this could be achieved, Kazantsev pointed out that:

“Part of Interior Troops, in principle, could take part in front operations, whilst other units could take part in territorial defence. This is [normally] one of our tasks during war time. In the case of the outbreak of a local conflict, we would jointly operate with the Ministry of Emergency Situations, MVD, properly worked out in joint command-staff exercises and training.”¹⁰⁰

Indeed, practical coordination was examined in more detail during a very large exercise in the North Caucasus from 27th-31st July 1998. The exercise was unprecedented in the range of organs represented: as one newspaper commented at the time, “*in a word, anyone who wears epaulettes*” was involved,¹⁰¹ in all, some 15,000 troops.¹⁰² It was a real test for the Operational staff HQ of the MVD with responsibility for the North Caucasus, headed by Colonel-General L Shevtsov, which was nominally in command, and involved MVD Russia, North Caucasus MD, Federal Security Service, Ministry of Emergency Situations and Federal Border Guards.¹⁰³ In the run up to the exercise, at one of the planning sessions, held in Stavropol’ on 3rd July, Interior Minister Stepashin noted that “*the developing situation in the North Caucasus urgently demands unified leadership of all the forces and means concerned with the maintenance of law and order and security in the region. Practically all conflicts here are inter-connected.*”¹⁰⁴

For his part, Shevtsov stated that one of the main aims of the exercise was “*to work out the necessary steps which may be employed to oppose the activities, on the scale of a sizeable conflict, which have already been unleashed by illegal armed formations of an extremist-separatist nature.*”¹⁰⁵

“Several days” before Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin arrived to take control of the military side of the exercise, a working group of senior officers from the General Staff’s Main Operations Directorate and the North Caucasus MD had been sent ahead of him.¹⁰⁶ According to one “well-known” general attached to the exercise, “the main aim is to work out the decision-making system in case of a real aggravation of the situation in the region and a break out of local bandit formations from Chechnya to neighbouring territory. Localise them and then liquidate them.”¹⁰⁷ Officially, the aims of the exercise ranged from maintaining law and order in the North Caucasus region to practising evacuating the population after a large-scale fire.¹⁰⁸

It was being run in parallel with a series of “real planned military exercises” involving troops, pilotless planes, helicopters and tanks. According to an official MOD press release:

“The main aim of the exercise is to work out matters arising from the control of forces and means of the temporary operational grouping of the North Caucasus region [responsible] for maintaining law and order, public security, rendering aid to the local population, liquidating the consequences of large-scale fires, evacuating the population from sanitation-epidemic areas of the region, conducting quarantine measures, preventing looting, possible street disorders, terrorist acts, etc.”¹⁰⁹

From the military’s point of view, its purpose was to work out the decision-making process in the event of a re-run of the First Chechen War, the role of the power ministries “to localise” the conflict and then “eliminate” the bandit formations.¹¹⁰ Certainly, the Chechen authorities were less than convinced about its “peaceful” nature: on 28th July, the Chechen Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the exercise, stating that it was “an open demonstration of force which may destabilise the military and political situation in the entire Caucasus region.”¹¹¹ One other brief report confirmed that one of the exercises involving the power ministries was “disarming a group of terrorists who had seized an administrative building”, an exercise which was partly based on the events in Budennovsk in 1995 and in Makhachkala in June 1998.¹¹²

Judging by reports of the exercise, the MoD, in cooperation with units of the other power ministries, conducted joint operations to free hostages, stop the activities of “terrorists”, people dealing with illicit goods, drug traffickers, etc. Thus apart from the more obvious military component, there were a number of areas where the main focus of attention was on anti-terrorist operations. This being the case, it was obvious that the input of the military would be important in evaluating future courses of action.

In a statement issued at the end of the exercise by ITAR-TASS, a preliminary assessment was positive:

“At a meeting with journalists, he [Stepashin] noted the good cooperation between sub-units from different departments. He said the barrier created by poor liaison had been broken down for good ... in Dagestan, for instance, the senior operational commander was the [local] Minister of Internal Affairs. This did not cause any jealousy amongst the military, the Minister said.

The commander of the North Caucasus Military District, Col-Gen V Kazantsev, considers this to be right, since internal affairs bear prime responsibility for public security. The army will always be ready to support them with the manpower and resources at its disposal.”¹¹³

Kazantsev later stated that:

“We practise holding joint command-staff exercises of the troops of the district with the control organs and formations of the other power structures of the RF on the territory of the region. During the course of such measures, we work on the problems arising from stabilising the situation in the territory of the North Caucasus and localising armed conflicts. Conducting joint work has produced positive results. Confirmation of this was the joint command-staff exercise carried out in July of this year. It was clearly demonstrated that the base of success was the close coordination of the control organs and the units of all the power structures.”¹¹⁴

Given the size of the exercise, the equipment used, and the command and control arrangements – technically, the MVD was in overall charge, but with the presence of both the Chief of the General Staff and the MD Commander, as well as the prior involvement of senior officers from the General Staff, this was an exercise which was designed to test more than coordination. There was a bigger game being played here than simply working out how best to cope with a natural or man-made disaster. The involvement of the Chief of the General Staff was clear proof that despite Stepashin’s earlier comment that the Operational staff was in charge of “leading” the coordination of activities of power ministries, what was taking place was a quiet acknowledgement of the increasing internalisation of the role of the Army, at the expense of the MVD. Stepashin, as MVD Minister, was successful for a while in putting the MVD back into the centre of the security picture of the North Caucasus region, but it was not to be too long before the Armed Forces regained centre spot.

In strategic terms, the exercise had a larger purpose. It was designed to show all and sundry that:

- 1) Russia had not only learnt from its first debacle in Chechnya, but was putting those lessons into effect;
- 2) It would use all means at its disposal to maintain its presence in the region and, regardless of the terrorist attacks of the past, present or future, or the increasing lawlessness in the region, it would not be bullied or harassed out of it;
- 3) As reassurance to the Russian population of the region: Russia was still a military force to be reckoned with and would defend its position there with brute force, if necessary. It would not permit a “Balkanisation” of the region.

In connection with the presidential decree *“On organisational measures to maintain law and order and public security in the North Caucasus region”* issued at the end of May 1998, it had been decided to create as part of the MD’s structure the Joint Grouping of MoD Troops in the Republic of Dagestan, based in Kaspiysk.¹¹⁵ It too was heavily involved in coordinating its activities with the local units of the other ministries and the Grouping’s Commander, Lieutenant-General V Bulgakov, spoke about how the relevant units organised their co-ordinated activities:

“We regularly hold joint exercises with units of the Interior Troops, organs of public security. And not only, by the way, on maps. Not to hide a sin, the reason for many of our previous mistakes has been inter-departmental disconnections. We did not have a unified ‘fighting team’ in Budennovsk, where the militants of Shamil Basayev were able to stroll along the streets without being punished, nor in Kizlyar, nor in Pervomayskoye, where the band of Salman Raduyev held hostages. And, on the whole, war in Chechnya showed the unpreparedness of joint activities of all the power structures, beginning at

the tactical level. You see, there was strength here, but it worked in an uncoordinated fashion."¹¹⁶

Asked what concrete steps he had taken to resolve this problem, Bulgakov stated that:

*"Twice a week, we hold joint field exercises: shooting and tactics ... such exercises have a double benefit. On the one hand, the officers of the militia and the commanders of our units get to know one another, find a common language, and on the other hand – begin to more deeply understand those problems which can be solved jointly."*¹¹⁷

Moving on from the relationship with the local militia, Bulgakov also described the Grouping's relationship with the MVD units based in Dagestan:

*"In relation to the units of the Interior Ministry Troops, they now have their own heavy calibre weapons and equipment. But they do not have trained specialists ... from the newcomers we are helping them to train real specialists, both in terms of being able to drive the equipment properly and use its firepower. And the information which comes to us, as they say, from reliable sources, helps us to timeously prevent even the smallest provocative actions on the part of the militants."*¹¹⁸

An interesting relationship seemed to be at work in Dagestan, if somewhat unorthodox. On a practical level, it did seem to work, however: joint field training with the local militia units would help to hone their skills and improve combat effectiveness, whilst at the same time allow those involved a better chance of knowing one another and knowing the other's problems and capabilities. Could this practical relationship between the security and law-enforcement organs in Dagestan have been one of the reasons for the distinct lack of success enjoyed by the Chechens and their allies in August 1999? Bulgakov, however, was under no illusion about the difficult position his men were in:

*"In comparison with the terrorists, the units of our grouping are in a less favourable position. We know that the extremists are near, constantly studying us, manoeuvring, choosing the moment to strike. We are static. That is why a whole complex of measures is needed, so that our officers are constantly alert, on exercise, on military training, teaching their men ... how to survive the strike."*¹¹⁹

On 19th May 1999, a further decree was issued concerning the security situation in the North Caucasus. Entitled *"On additional measures to combat terrorism in the North Caucasus region of the RF"*, it was issued after a working meeting involving Yel'tsin and Putin, in his dual role as Secretary to the Security Council and Director General of the Federal Security Service. According to Putin, who was described as the "initiator" of the new decree, its essence was *"to improve the coordination of all the forces and means at the disposal of the federal authorities."*¹²⁰ Prior to the issue of the decree, the two men discussed three basic questions: *"FSB operations, Security Council operations and the political situation in the country against the background of the replacement of the government and elections in Karachayevo-Cherkessiya."*¹²¹

Leaving aside speculation concerning the alleged infighting between the MVD and the FSB on the "carve-up" of counter-intelligence work in the region, the decree outlined measures *"to increase the financial and technical-material aid to Interior Ministry Troops in the North Caucasus."* Putin described the situation in the North Caucasus as *"bad"* and, in examining the wider ramifications of the instability in

the region stated that “*certain forces for instability outside Russia are trying to solve their geostrategic problems through the North Caucasus region.*”¹²² In response, one Russian commentator remarked: “*In other words, the FSB is returning to one of its long-term favourite themes: someone is stirring up the peoples of the Caucasus.*”¹²³

Whilst there can be little denying the fact that the situation in the North Caucasus – despite all the measures being adopted nationally and locally – was continuing to deteriorate, little was to be gained by looking at “outside” forces as being the main instigator of Russia’s problems in the North Caucasus.¹²⁴ Whilst it is outside the remit of this paper, Russia does not have far to look when apportioning blame for the present situation in the region – whilst it would be wrong to solely blame Russia for the mess in the Caucasus, it has to accept a fair share of the blame for what has happened and is happening there. Testament to its failure to adequately comprehend the problems of the region is its necessity of having to intervene militarily twice since 1994: will there be a third time?

A number of exercises were still to take place in the North Caucasus MD in the run up to the events of August 1999. One of the most interesting took place at the beginning of June 1999 and involved militia units, MVD and MoD troops operating in the Kursk region of Stavropol’, not far from the border with Chechnya. A combination of militia, what was described as “*personnel from a special mechanised regiment*” and “*OMON*” (special purpose militia) units practised defending a control point. In the description of the exercise, mention was also made of the use of a 30-minute rapid reaction unit, as well as the use of artillery and tanks in order to repulse an “*attacking band.*”¹²⁵ In his evaluation of the role of the MoD units, First Deputy Commander Internal Troops, North Caucasus Interior Troops District, Lieutenant-General Ye Abrashin stated that: “*Without the units of the MoD, we would not have been able to carry out the tasks placed before us.*”¹²⁶

The report also mentioned joint patrols involving militia and airborne troops operating in the region of Terekli-Mektel in Dagestan. Again, a number of units took part in a variety of exercises including freeing hostages, repulsing an attack on a motor brigade’s headquarters; and disarming “bandits” aboard a bus. In his estimation of the year’s exercises to date, the Deputy C-in-C of Internal Troops for Emergency Situations, Major-General V Dadonov, concluded that: “*All the power ministries are now dedicated to one single aim: to maintain stability in the North Caucasus.*” For his part Kazantsev, summarising the latest round of exercises and evaluating the work of all the exercises in the past year stated: “*In comparison with such command-staff exercises of a year ago, the level of coordination between the staffs of all the power ministries has increased by a whole magnitude.*”¹²⁷

Thus, on the eve of a new military campaign opening up in the North Caucasus, the level of coordination of the military activities of the power ministries had increased significantly. Having realised that one of the major reasons for the debacle in 1994-1996 was the lack of coordination between the different power ministry units operating in Chechnya, the senior military leadership, especially in the North Caucasus MD, set about trying to rectify the problem through a renewed emphasis on combat training, joint command staff exercises and greater inter-action between MoD, MVD, MChS, FSB, etc, culminating in the large-scale exercise held in July 1999. Men from different units with different responsibilities trained together and became much more aware of one another’s capabilities and weaknesses. This author is aware of 15 major command-staff exercises between March 1997-July 1999; see Appendix 1. The admission that no one power ministry, including the MoD, could maintain Russia’s security solely by its own efforts meant that all the

power ministry units had to operate together in the face of the growing internal threat to the stability of the Russian Federation.

However, despite this very real need, the issue of operational command and control of joint forces was to be a problem, as evidenced by the initial conduct of the "counter-terrorist operation" in August 1999. On 17th August, operational command of the Federal Groupings of Forces was transferred from the MVD to the MoD, the former simply not being able to retaliate with sufficient venom to the cross border incursion. However, 10 days later, operational command was transferred back to the MVD, for operations against the "rebels" in Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar. Again, though, this was deemed a failure and, finally, operational commander was restored to the MoD on 4th September.¹²⁸

The Immediate Lessons of Coordination in the “Counter-Terrorist Operation” (1999-2000)

A number of senior Russian military figures have already publicly aired their views on the experience of the coordination of activities in the “counter-terrorist operation” in Chechnya and, to date, the reaction has been far from wild praise for what has been achieved. Indeed, according to the Commandant of the Combined Forces Academy, Colonel-General L S Zolotov,

*“In the **organisation of coordination** of combined arms units with the armed formations of other troops, as in the first Chechen campaign, there were many defects.”¹²⁹*

Thus despite all the training and exercises and positive assessment of the level of coordination between the power ministry units in the North Caucasus MD, the operation would appear to have revealed that there is still much room for improvement. It will be interesting to see what further steps are taken by Russia’s military and political leadership.

Major-General (Retired) I N Vorob’yev, opened his generic analysis by stating that:

“Among the problems which arose during the course of armed conflicts on the territory of Russia recently, one of the biggest has been the organisation of coordination between troops from the various power structures in the conduct of special operations against illegal armed formations. There are many objective and subjective reasons for this but, arguably, the most important has been that, since the collapse of the USSR, the unified military organisation of the state, which went through the testing time of the Great Patriotic War, was divided into separate parts; its own Armed forces separate from the military formations of the other ministries and departments (MVD, FPS, ZhDV, FSB MChS, FAPSI and others).”¹³⁰

The first step, in his opinion, is to restore the principle of “centralised leadership” of the organisation of the state’s military mechanism. Russia’s new Military Doctrine (April 2000)¹³¹ made a number of references to the “centralisation of leadership” as being a “basic principle” of the development of the state’s military organisation. It also refers to “improving strategic planning on the principle of unity of the use of the Russian Federation armed forces and other troops”.

Vorob’yev lists a more specific series of problems which manifested themselves during the current military campaign in the North Caucasus:

“Events in Chechnya and Dagestan show that the basic reasons which made the co-ordinated activities of the various departmental force structures taking part in the armed conflict difficult were: the incompatibility of the legal base to the aims and principles of their joint use; the lack of a unified control system, [the lack of a] comprehensive supply system as well as forecasting and observing the military-political, strategic and operational situation in potentially explosive regions; uncoordinated departmental programme-regulation documents for the training of troops (forces) and organs for joint activities in the event of a crisis situation developing; the disunity in the infrastructure of the state’s military organisation.”¹³²

Vorob’yev examined the wider dimension behind solving an internal armed conflict, including the humanitarian and political factors involved, as well as who should be the prime mover in co-ordinating the roles of the force structures. In what he terms “*special operations*” which seem to cover Russia’s present “counter-terrorist operation”, Vorob’yev stated that:

“The main aim of special operations is not to allow the destabilisation of the situation in the country, the violation of the constitutional order, but to create the necessary conditions for the elimination of the contradictions by political means.

In resolving an internal armed conflict, such an operation will be carried out on the territory of one’s state and this fact will reflect on its content. The force structures will operate in a way to avoid losses amongst the civilian population and amongst the soldiers.”

Vorob’yev also attached “*the primary role*” to working out “*the aims and tasks of the special operation*” to the political factor, which will be decisive in choosing the means, forms, scale and length of military operations. This was an interesting point to make and one worth emphasising. One of the fundamental differences between the two military campaigns in Chechnya in the 1990s has been, for want of a better phrase, the political will. This was different in 1999 in many ways from the previous war of 1994-1996 not least because this time round Russia had a leader (Putin) who, rightly or wrongly, wanted to prosecute this war with the utmost vigour. The political leadership in the Kremlin did not interfere in the plans of the military, nor in matters relating to how best to organise the conduct of operations. In short, the military, both at the centre and in Chechnya, were never in any doubt what the Kremlin thought about this war and set about their task accordingly.

*“Then the question arises: who in the final analysis is the **organiser of coordination**? It is difficult to give a categorical answer. If one speaks from the principle side of things, then one has to rely on the fundamental documents of the state. In the National Security Concept of the RF, the priority in solving problems in repulsing...internal threats to national security belongs to the Ministry of the Interior ... the representative of Internal Troops MVD and it must organise coordination. However, if an internal armed conflict becomes large-scale and to solve it requires a large mass of troops, then the main co-ordinator of the combat effort of the unified operational grouping of different forces is the combined arms commander, as was the case in repulsing the invasions by the bandit formations in Dagestan, when the leadership of operations was placed on the Commander of the North Caucasus MD. In other circumstances, the head of the operational grouping of forces could be the Commander of Interior Troops MVD district.”¹³³*

In short, in deciding who has primacy in running an operation, someone has to decide carefully what criteria to adopt, in order to evaluate when and under what circumstances an internal threat to the country can be properly handled by the MVD, with back-up when necessary being provided by the other power ministry units, or when the MoD should be the lead player. Given the growing internalisation of the role of the Armed Forces, this remains a very difficult problem for the country's senior political, legal and military figures. Definition of the terms used to describe the operation will have important consequences for the command structure and level of force applied.

The General Staff's main theoretical journal, *Voyennaya Mysl'*, continues to publish articles analysing the experience of the "counter-terrorist operation" in the North Caucasus. It printed a number of reports from a "round table" discussion involving senior military officers, giving a preliminary evaluation of the pluses and minuses of the operation so far. In examining coordination, the two main contributions were made by Colonel-General Yu D Bukreyev, Head of the Main Directorate, Ground Forces, and Colonel-General L S Zolotov, Commandant of the Combined Forces Academy.

In his contribution, Bukreyev noted that "*questions concerning the organisation of coordination of various power structures deserved particular attention.*"¹³⁴ He noted that what now had to occur was a detailed analysis of a range of issues associated with coordination: "*the ways [of reaching] joint decisions; the composition of the troops taking part in combat actions; the time and sequence of carrying out planned tasks; [detailed working out and agreement on] regions, borders, installations for action; conditions, means and time in the joint use of means of attack, as well as limitations on their use in population centres; questions concerning the organisation of control and communications, all-round supplies, notification and identification, etc.*" It was also important, in his opinion, to ensure that in organising cooperation in the "counter-terrorist operation", the local organs were involved, especially in exchanging information on activities of the "illegal armed formations"; maintaining communication facilities; guarding important facilities for civilian population, etc. Bukreyev listed the following main conclusions:

One. *Units and sub-units of Ground and Airborne Troops played a decisive role in fulfilling the tasks of counter-terrorist operation...*

Two. *The experience of the combat use of units and sub-units of Internal Troops MVD RF showed that in the specifics of fulfilling their service-combat missions, they were inadequately effective during the conduct of the first stage of the counter-terrorist operations (the elimination of illegal armed formations)...*

Three. *Military-capable, well-coordinated units and sub-units with their own supply organs and the corresponding necessary material-technical reserves must be the basis of the created group of forces for activities in the zone of armed conflict...*

Four. *In the Ground Forces, it is necessary to have in constant readiness a packet of combat, special, rear and technical supply units.*

Five. *The control system, created in peace time, should adequately ensure the solution of issues of control during an armed conflict without changing it. The leadership of the Unified Grouping of Troops (Forces) must be carried out by the Commander whose troops, at that stage of the conflict, are carrying out the main task.*

Six. *Of great significance in armed conflicts are problems involving the interaction of command personnel and troops with the local population. Knowledge and respect for national customs and values, close contact with representatives of local organs of self-administration, will help the soldiers successfully carry*

out their tasks, will cut down on the losses amongst soldiers and peaceful citizens.”

For his part, Zolotov also pointed out that the issue of coordination between the power ministries was still a big problem which, in his opinion, would only be resolved when everyone was taught literally in the same classroom:

“As in the first Chechen campaign, there were many inadequacies in the organisation of coordination of combined arms units with armed formations of other troops. The main reason...for this is that we still have not overcome the ministerial disunity in the training of our command cadres. You see only with joint teaching in military higher educational establishments of officers of Ground Forces, Internal Troops MVD, Border Guard troops FPS, will we then have the possibility of unifying views on the basics of the military art, studying the organisation of interaction. Then it will be easier for them to find a common language in a combat situation and jointly decide on combat tasks.”¹³⁵

Zolotov pointed out that there was poor coordination between units of Army Aviation, combined arms units and MVD Troops during the “counter-terrorist operation”, as well as, again, poor coordination between artillery of combined arms units and their opposite numbers in the MVD.¹³⁶ In conclusion, he reminded readers that his Academy was preparing to publish a “solid” work, examining in great detail all the issues raised.

There are clearly still a significant number of problems in the area of coordinating combat activities, both at the theoretical and, more importantly, at the practical level. On a theoretical level, there is still not a strong legal foundation, detailing which ministry does what and under what circumstances (when is it appropriate for the MoD to get involved in such operations and at what level? Once involved, what should then be the respective roles of the MVD, the Border Guards, FSB, etc?) Turf wars were a problem in the First Chechen War and would appear to have still been an issue in the second. There is a real possibility that unless adequate steps are taken, friction could easily break out between the Russian Army and MVD Interior Troops in the future in the event of such operations having to be conducted again. Although mistakes on a practical level were not fully ironed out, it would appear that fewer mistakes were made, and of a different type, hence the greater success enjoyed the second time round (although as evidenced by Appendix 2 the power of superior numbers of men and firepower must have played its part). The experience of the current operation, no doubt, will be examined and analysed and more changes introduced, both in terms of defining the legal obligations of each of the power ministries in resolving such conflicts, as well as on a practical level. These will probably include further emphasis on training more men from all units to be able to fight in the mountains and forests of the Caucasus; beginning a proper programme for training cadres for all the main power ministries together in the same establishments; putting into practical effect the elevated status of the MDs to “operational-strategic commands,” by re-defining the role of the local MD Commander as the man in operational charge of all men in uniform in his district, when appropriate circumstances arise. These are just a few of the issues which the government under Putin will have to resolve quickly. How it does so will have a significant impact on how successfully it wages the next “counter-terrorist operation” and, have no doubt about it, there will be another one.

An interesting development which has taken place recently has been the re-organisation of Russia into seven federal districts and the appointment of “*presidential plenipotentiaries*” to head them.¹³⁷ This has generally been seen as an

early attempt by the new Russian president to re-establish the vertical levers of power, thereby ensuring greater Kremlin control of what is actually going on in the regions.¹³⁸ Given the fact that the new federal district boundaries are almost coterminous with the MDs and that the overwhelming majority of the new federal plenipotentiaries have been senior members of the power ministries, there has been speculation that it will not be long before further organisational change at this level takes place, thereby leading to a further concentration of both military and civilian powers in the hands of these newly created presidential plenipotentiaries.¹³⁹ Given the earlier decision, taken in July 1998, to elevate the MDs to “operational-strategic commands”, there are grounds for speculation that in the medium-to-long-term this may happen. In effect, in attempting to further enhance the leadership of the president in the regions, Putin may re-create the old system of governor-generals, introduced in Russia in the mid-19th century when Russia was initially divided into a series of MDs, whose commanders had authority over civilian as well as military affairs in the district.¹⁴⁰

The North Caucasus Federal District has the same boundaries as the North Caucasus MD and, not too surprisingly given recent events, the presidential plenipotentiary to the Federal District is none other than General V G Kazantsev.¹⁴¹ In his first major interview since being appointed, Kazantsev stated that his main task was “to ensure that that there is no serious work for the military to do in the south of the country” by tackling the three evils of “banditry, terrorism and corruption.”¹⁴² At the end of the interview, Kazantsev referred to an idea which, in a slightly different format, he had expressed on a number of occasions in the past:

*“I do indeed believe that the rebirth of the army will begin with the North Caucasus Military District and that the revival of the country will begin with the south. All the prerequisites for this exist in our highly abundant, highly fertile region. The south is Russia’s ‘solar plexus’. If we organise normal life [there], we will flourish.”*¹⁴³

Only time will tell how successful both this attempt at re-creating the vertical structure of power in general, and Kazantsev’s efforts as Putin’s personal representative to the North Caucasus Federal District in particular, will be in solving the nation’s myriad of problems.

CODA

The need for Russia to intervene militarily a second time in Chechnya in such a comparatively short space of time has to be viewed as a comprehensive failure of Russian policy in the North Caucasus region as a whole. The use of military forces – however well or badly they performed – has to be viewed as stark testament to the fact that, first and foremost, the political process in the region had failed. August 1999, however, had much less to do with “revenge” politics, for want of a better phrase, than most commentators in the West give credit for. After all, it is quietly forgotten now but the Chechen “militants” and their allies did launch an armed incursion into Dagestan and Russia saw this as a direct challenge to its authority in the region, an authority which had been severely dented, not just by the First Chechen War, but also by the terrorist outrages in the south of Russia since 1995; the challenge to federal rule posed by the presidential elections in Karachayevo-Cherkessiya; the growing levels of lawlessness in the region – personified by, but not solely restricted to Chechnya; and the growth of religious extremism in the region. As far as Moscow was concerned, something had to be done and done quickly.

And yet, for a time, the relationship between the command of the North Caucasus MD and Grozny, publicly at least, looked like it could have followed a different path from the one which led to eventual military confrontation in August 1999. This should not be taken to mean that the Russian military command, at the local level, was not preparing for combat action in the area, but had the attitude of the senior political leadership in the Kremlin of Chechnya been different, the MD's military command could have reacted accordingly.

In May 1998, the MD's Commander - Kazantsev - and First Deputy Commander - Troshev - made a number of public announcements which hint at the possibility that relations could have improved, had events not taken the turn they did, or Moscow had shown a more positive attitude. During that month, Kazantsev formally invited a number of regional political leaders - including A Maskhadov - to attend the 80th anniversary celebrations of the creation of the North Caucasus MD. Troshev confirmed that the MD command did receive a "*positive response*" from the Chechen authorities.¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, due to the recent kidnapping of Yel'tsin's most senior political representative to the region, V Vlasov, the invitation was not followed up.

Troshev also made the point that the Chechen leadership itself needed stability in the region:

*"Maskhadov is anxious that everything in the republic should be stable. It is important even for their own purposes. Even in order to secede, they want peace...they want to put an end to disorder, to get rid of weapons, to create a situation where only those who are authorised...can carry guns."*¹⁴⁵

In response to a question concerning the desire of the military to aggravate the situation in the region:

*"There are roadblocks all along the Russian-Chechen border. The police, the Interior Troops, as well as our troops ... are on duty around the clock and today we are pressing for the withdrawal of all these troops. Why? To begin with, these roadblocks separate Chechnya from us, we alienate Chechnya from us, which is not right."*¹⁴⁶

In the same TV broadcast, Kazantsev mentioned that a request had been sent by Maskhadov "*during our last meeting*" to the MD's command for "*assistance in clearing mines*".¹⁴⁷ This raises a number of interesting points: how many meetings did they have? What was discussed at these meetings? How often did they take place? In a newspaper interview, Kazantsev elaborated on this further, as well as the nature of the relationship both between Rostov and Grozny and Moscow and Grozny:

*"Let's take Chechnya, which is in the territory of the district. Recently, there have been positive moments in the dialogue between Moscow and Grozny. The Minister of the Interior, A Stepashin, has held talks on joint activities of the law-enforcement organs on the administrative border with Chechnya. The president of Chechnya recently approached us with a request to help clear mines. People have to work, feed their children, but not to fight. Not that long ago, we sent humanitarian assistance to Chechnya ... **we cannot always be in permanent confrontation with Chechnya. We must find variants for normalisation, although the solution to these matters is, of course, in the province of the politicians, not the military** [emphasis mine - SJM]."*¹⁴⁸

But by the end of July 1998, Russia held its massive command-staff exercise in the North Caucasus MD and everything was thrown backwards, not forwards. Mutual

hostility and suspicion rose to the surface and no new “positive moments” were to be heard publicly in the subsequent dialogue between Moscow, Rostov and Groznyy. The chance for a more peaceful development in the relationship between Russia and Chechnya was lost and the stage set for August 1999.

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APPENDIX ONE

Exercises known to have taken place in the North Caucasus Military District, (March 1997-July 1999)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Published aim</u>	<u>Units, (forces)</u>
1) 24-30/3/97	“Polish interaction between NCMD, MVD Civil Defence staffs” – “Redut-97”	MoD, MVD, FPS ZhDV, FAPSI

Leader: General V Samsonov

July 31st 1997 Lieutenant-General V G Kazantsev takes command

2) 18-24/8/97	“To work out methods of organising military training, under conditions of limited material and motorised resources”; “58A actions against conventional enemy – criminal groupings and subversive groups.”	58 Army, MVD Troops, militia, air force
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Leader: Lieutenant-General V Kazantsev

3) 17-23/3/98	Front line CPX: “to practise operational and tactical tasks in... mountain conditions.”	MoD, MVD, FSB, FPS, MChS, Black Sea Fleet, Caspian Flotilla, Air Army, PVO
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Leader: Lieutenant-General V Kazantsev

4) 8-12/7/98	“Territorial defence, emergency measures aimed at protecting administrative and military installations.”	MoD, Caspian Flotilla, FPS, MVD Troops, MChS (Dagestan)
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Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev

5) 27-31/7/1998	“Polish interaction between all forces in the composition of the ‘temporary operational grouping, North Caucasus region.’”	MoD, MVD Troops, MChS, FAPSI, “other law-enforcement organs”, FSB, airborne forces.
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Leader: Colonel-General L Shevtsov

A101

6) 28/8/98 (start) “Improve practical methods
command and staff
planning and organisation
of combat training.” Guards motor-rifle in
formation, FPS,
and other law-
enforcement
organs

Leader: Lieutenant-General G Troshev

7) 19/9/98 (end) “Repulse incursion
from across the
border.” MoD, MVD
Troops

Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev

8) 25-30/1/99 “Drilled cooperation”
with other power
ministries. FAPSI and
others

Leader: Colonel-General V Sherstyuk

9) 25/2/99 (end) “Polish interaction.” MoD, MVD
Troops, FPS,
FAPSI

Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev

10) 18/3/99 (end) “Improve practical skills
of commanders in analysing
and organising comprehensive
provisions for the troops.” MoD, Air Force
PVO, Caspian
Flotilla, MVD
Troops, FPS,
58 Army

Leader: ?

11) 22/4/99 (start) “Rehearse control of forces
and resources for the ‘temp.
operational grouping of
troops.’” MoD, MVD
Troops, FPS

Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev
(S Stepashin, Interior Minister, in overall charge)

12) 5/5/99 (ongoing) “Polish matters concerning
training and preparing control
personnel”; “interaction to
maintain security and stability
of Russia’s southern borders.”
Two-stage exercise. MoD, MVD
Troops

Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev
(S Stepashin in overall charge)

13) End of May 1999	“Polish matters of interactions of all power ministries to maintain Russia's security and stability in the south.”	MoD, MVD Troops, OMON, Caspian Flotilla, FPS
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Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev

14) 13-16/7/99	“Decision-making process for commanders and staff HQs”; “interaction in the conduct of a defensive operation.”	MoD, Black Sea Fleet, airborne forces, “other power structures”
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Leader: Colonel-General V Kazantsev

19th July – MVD Troops put on “increased alert”. 58 Army not ordered to move

15) 21/7/99	“To check the combat and mobilisational readiness, coordination of staff HQs, their ability of command to control subordinate units.”	58 Army
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Leader: Lieutenant-General A Sidyakin

Abbreviations: MoD – Ministry of Defence;
MVD – Ministry of Interior;
FPS – Federal Border Guard Service;
ZhDV-Railway Troops;
FAPSI – Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information;
FSB – Federal Security Service;
MChS – Ministry of Emergency Situations;
PVO – Anti-Aircraft Defence Troops;
OMON – special police units.

Sources: *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21/3/1997; FBIS-SOV-97-080, 21/3/1997; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 26/3/1997; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 29/3/1997; FBIS-SOV-97-091, 1/4/1997; BBC Monitoring, 6/4/1997; BBC Monitoring, 31/7/1997; BBC Monitoring, 8/8/1997; BBC Monitoring, 20/8/1997; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), SU/3003 S1/2, 21/8/1997; BBC Monitoring, 21/8/1997; BBC Monitoring, 24/8/1997; SWB SU/3006 S1/2, 25/8/1997; BBC Monitoring, 17/3/1998; FBIS-UMA-98-081, 22/3/1998; BBC Monitoring, 23/3/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 24/3/1998; BBC Monitoring, 2/7/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25/7/1998; Interfax,

27/7/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28/7/1998; Interfax, 28/7/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 31/7/1998; BBC Monitoring, 31/7/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 6/8/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28/8/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 19/9/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25/9/1998; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2/2/1999; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 25/2/1999; *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 27, 24-30/7/1999; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 18/3/1999; SWB SU/3518 S1/2, 26/4/1999; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5/5/1999; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2/6/1999; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 10/7/1999; ITAR-TASS, 19/7/1999; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21/7/1999.

APPENDIX TWO

“THE RETALIATORY STRIKE”

The strength of the Russian Armed Forces located in and around the North Caucasus, (as of early July 1999):

- 1) the 136th Mountain Infantry Brigade of the Russian Ministry of Defence (Buynaksk);
- 2) the 102nd operations Brigade of the Ministry of Interior Troops (Makhachkala);
- 3) the 205th Brigade of the Russian Ministry of Defence (Budennovsk);
- 4) the 21st Airborne Brigade of the Russian Ministry of Defence (Stavropol’);
- 5) Independent Regiment of Interior Ministry Troops (Kursk region);
- 6) 19th Motor-Rifle Brigade of 58 Army Russian Ministry of Defence (Vladikavkaz);
- 7) Independent Operations Division of Interior Ministry Troops (Vladikavkaz);
- 8) Military airfield and staff base of 58 Army of the Russian Ministry of Defence (Mozdok);
- 9) 7th Airborne Division (Novorossiysk);
- 10) the 20th Motor-Rifle Division (Volgograd);
- 11) Special unit of the Federal Security Service (Krasnodar);
- 12) Special Brigade of Main Intelligence Department (GRU), General Staff of the Russian Defence Ministry (Rostov);
- 13) two helicopter regiments (Kizlyar and Mozdok);
- 14) two attack air force squadrons (Krasnodar and Volgograd)

As well as reinforced and mobilised police units from Dagestan, Stavropol *kray* and North Osetia.

Source: Izvestiya, 8/7/1999.

The respective military strengths of the Federal and Chechen forces in 1994-1996 and 1999 are given overleaf.

Equipment and personnel numbers of the Federal forces* and the illegal armed formations

<u>Date</u>	<u>Personnel</u>	<u>Tanks and Vehicles</u>	<u>Artillery**</u>
Federal forces (1994-1996)			
11.12.94	6,000	500	270
1.1.95	8,000	520	340
1.2.95	40,000	1,500	397
1.9.96	38,000	1,350	350
Militants (1994-1996)			
11.12.94	20,000	134	200
1.1.95	40,000	126	190
1.2.95	5-7,000	34	28
1.9.95	40,000	48	54
Federal forces (1999)			
1.12.99	100,000	1,650	480
Militants (1999)			
1.12.99	20,000	14	23

* The equipment and personnel figures do not take into account Ministry of Interior Troops, militia or OMON units.

** Artillery systems with a calibre exceeding 100mm, as well as ground force rocket systems.

Source: A Korbut, "Ucheba v boyu", ("learning in battle"), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 50 (173), 24/12/1999-13/1/2000.

Disclaimer

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