

North Caucasus Military District: Defending Russia's Interests in the Caucasus

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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 (NCMD), 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 within the district and in the structures of the other 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 hoped to present a picture of exactly how the NCMD prepared for its second military campaign in the Caucasus in the space of 5 years.

Reform and the North Caucasus MD (1996-1999)

Even before the first Chechen War had fully run its course, it was obvious that changes were needed, to take into account the combat experience of the troops. In May 1996, the then Russian Minister of Defence, General P Grachev, made it clear that this would be used to re-model the Army:

*"...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."*²

Grachev also pointed out that one of "the main problems" facing the Armed Forces in the war in Chechnya was that *"besieging towns and preparing to take them by storm in one's own country was very hard from the psychological point of view."* In a more detailed report at the end of May 1996, 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.³ Grachev also spoke about *"the unjustifiable losses"* due to *"insufficient attention"* being paid by the Commander to *"the experience of the war in Afghanistan."*⁴



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By July 1996, Russia had a new defence Minister, Igor Rodionov. Rodionov believed that 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, he also saw the need for a permanent Russian military presence in the region. Gone were the days when service in the MD was viewed as a relatively easy number. 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.”⁵

Curiously enough, the 205th Motor Rifle Brigade had come in for some criticism a couple of months earlier:

“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.”⁶

The confusion over command and control of the Federal grouping during the first Chechen War was symptomatic, not only of poor leadership, but also of poor cooperation (*vzaimodeystviye*, which can also mean coordination or interaction) between the various units of the power ministries, particularly between the MoD and the Interior Ministry (MVD). This is an area which has attracted a great deal of attention since 1996 and one which, despite some success, has still not been fully resolved. One Russian analyst was acutely aware of the impact of poor coordination:

*“... 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.”⁷*

In June 1997, the new Minister of Defence, Igor Sergeev,⁸ outlined what he considered to be the main structural reforms for the Russian Armed Forces:

“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."⁹

*"[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."*¹⁰

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. 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.¹¹ Both 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.

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."*¹²

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 knew the area well, having served just under 10 years in the Transcaucasus MD.¹³

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 to see for himself a training exercise on the Tarsk mountain exercise range. Despite the severe under-funding of the Armed Forces, the fact that such an exercise was being held at all was indicative of the renewed emphasis being placed by the MoD on 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."*¹⁴

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. 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."*¹⁵ That may well have been the case, but there is no mention of Interior Ministry or FPS units being used in the exercise. This was the first 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, were 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.*¹⁶

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!¹⁷

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.”*¹⁸

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.”*¹⁹

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.”*²⁰ Kazantsev’s views on the way ahead for his own MD were very definite, with great emphasis on increasing mobility and firepower. Not surprisingly, this was very much in line with Sergeyev’s own thinking.

On increased cooperation with other 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.”*²¹

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

*“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.”*²²

One aspect of the reform that was not to everyone’s liking was the reduction in the number of officers and NCOs in the MD. In late 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.”²³

Finance was to rear its ugly head again in the MD somewhat less predictably, when 6 officers were kidnapped by Chechens in September-October 1997. A ransom of \$150,000 each was demanded. Kazantsev made a direct personal appeal to President Maskhadov and managed to secure the prompt release of two of the officers.²⁴

Despite the reduction in the numbers of officers and men in the MD – by October put at 12,500, not 15,000 – the district was being “*strengthened*” through the acquisition of “*new military technology*”. Interestingly, Kazantsev 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.*”²⁵ 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.²⁶

And yet, as was revealed by 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 1998.²⁷ Troshev touched on a whole series of matters, including military training and the creation of special alpine units. He pointed out that the decision had been taken earlier to re-open the mountain training complex at Dar'yal:

“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.”

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.*” 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.

In Kazantsev's view “*to train a real professional in mountain [warfare] you need at least two years.*”²⁸ The emphasis was 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.”²⁹

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 systems. 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.”³⁰

The MD was between “80-95%” of full strength, with both intelligence and communication units being “95-100%”. Troshev admitted that there were problems with the officer corps due, in part, to the fall in the prestige of military service; irregular payment of salaries and the lure of better money elsewhere for considerably less dangerous work also meant that many young officers with families had to think about a non-service career.

Troshev was prepared to discuss other significant changes:

“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.”³¹

Three months earlier, Defence Minister Sergeyev had put the cuts in manning 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.”³²

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”.³³

“... the military units ... 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."³⁴

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.

Another exercise was held in March 1998 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:

*"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."*³⁵

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, saying that *"ways should be sought towards reconciliation, rather than taking steps towards a new confrontation."*³⁶ 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 it had *"acquired a new higher level of combat readiness."*³⁷ 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."*³⁸

A number of interesting developments took place in May/June 1998, 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 MVD Troops, Colonel-General L Shevtsov, to the recently-created post of Deputy Interior 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).³⁹ On 21st May President Yel'tsin decided 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."*⁴⁰ 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 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."*⁴¹

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."*⁴² 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."*⁴³ 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."*⁴⁴ Unfortunately, no detail was published about the composition of the new body.⁴⁵

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; or even if they functioned. And to add to what was becoming a virtual alphabet soup of organs and commissions, on 6th June, 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."*⁴⁶ As Deputy Minister with responsibility for the North Caucasus, Shevtsov was placed in charge of the new regional HQ.

*"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 [Government Communications Service], has been brought into being."*⁴⁷

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."*⁴⁸

In some respects, this would appear to have been a perfectly logical step. However 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."*⁴⁹

But the nature of the internal threat was changing, as was its scale. 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."⁵⁰ 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. It established a single system of military-administrative division of the territory of the Russian Federation into strategic directions within the borders of the military districts.⁵¹ The number of MDs was to be cut from 8 to 6, the new 6 being accorded the status of "operational-strategic commands." In a major article Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin discussed what he thought it would mean to the country:

*"... 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."⁵²*

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."⁵³

Sergeyev's stance 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 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."⁵⁴*

Both the 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 in order to ensure the country’s proper security – cannot be dismissed.

The Concept did little to clarify the confusion:

“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.”⁵⁵

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.”⁵⁶

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 when the operation began. 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 be surprising.

“Tactical exercises” were still being held, 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:

“The troops, for example, [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.”⁵⁷

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 ... 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.”

He also 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.”

Finally, 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 was aware 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 the units there was given “*top priority.*”⁵⁸

Cooperation & Exercises: The Keys to Success?

*“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.”*⁵⁹

*“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.”*⁶⁰

It was obvious that one of the main reasons for the poor performance of Federal forces in 1994-1996 was the lack of cooperation between the power ministry units. 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 ministries to find a common language, but also to save money.⁶¹ Similarly, a senior Border Guards officer argued for joint training for the MoD, the Border Guards and FAPSI.⁶²

From 24th-30th March 1997 a command-staff exercise was held in the North Caucasus Military District.

“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.*⁶³

The exercises were said to be *“the largest held in the last 10 years.”*⁶⁴ A local MVD chief confirmed that a *“joint headquarters”* had been established.⁶⁵ At least on a practical level, the units were beginning to learn to work and train together.

In early August 1997, Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin 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”*.⁶⁶

Taken with Defence Minister Sergeev’s remarks 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, it was a clear sign that the military were intent on regaining lost influence.

An important article by Colonel-General L S Zolotov, Commandant of the M V Frunze Military Academy, which trains the Army’s senior officers, *“Coordination of the Power Structures”*⁶⁷, 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, 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.”* 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."

He 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."⁶⁸

In the NCMD, this 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 which was maintaining the security of the administrative borders of Chechnya, North Osetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan.⁶⁹ 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."⁷⁰

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.*⁷¹

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,⁷² in all, some 15,000 troops.⁷³ 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, NCMD, Federal Security Service, Ministry of Emergency Situations and Federal Border Guards.⁷⁴ 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.”*⁷⁵ 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.”*⁷⁶

“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 NCMD had been sent ahead of him.⁷⁷ 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.”*⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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.”*⁸⁰

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.”*⁸¹ 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 1998.⁸²

A preliminary assessment of the exercise 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.*⁸³

Kazantsev later stated that:

*“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.”*⁸⁴

Given the size of the exercise, the equipment used, and the command arrangements – technically, the MVD was in overall charge, this was an exercise 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 long before the Armed Forces regained centre spot.

At a tactical level, the Joint Grouping of MoD Troops in the Republic of Dagestan, based in Kaspiysk⁸⁵, was heavily involved in coordinating its activities with the local units of the other ministries. Its Commander, Lieutenant-General V Bulgakov, spoke about how they organised 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. ... You see, there was strength here, but it worked in an uncoordinated fashion.”*⁸⁶

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.”*⁸⁷

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."⁸⁸

An interesting relationship seemed to be at work in Dagestan, if somewhat unorthodox. On a practical level, it did seem to work, however. Could this 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."*⁸⁹

A number of exercises were held 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, *"personnel from a special mechanised regiment"* and *"OMON"* (special purpose militia) units practised defending a control point. Mention was also made of the use of a 30-minute rapid reaction unit, as well as artillery and tanks in order to repulse an *"attacking band."*⁹⁰ 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."*⁹¹ 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 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."*⁹²

At least 15 major command-staff exercises were held between March 1997-July 1999.⁹³ However, despite this, the issue of operational command and control of joint forces continued 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 Grouping 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 command was restored to the MoD on 4th September.⁹⁴

The Immediate Lessons of Coordination in the “Counter-Terrorist Operation”

A number of senior Russian military figures have already publicly aired their views on the coordination of activities 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.”⁹⁵*

The first step, in the opinion of Major-General (Retired) I N Vorob'yev, should be to restore the principle of “*centralised leadership*” of the organisation of the state’s military mechanism. Russia’s new Military Doctrine (April 2000)⁹⁶ 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 ... 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.

... 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.”⁹⁷

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 a point 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. In 1999, Russia had a leader (Putin) who, rightly or wrongly, wanted to prosecute this war with the utmost vigour.

*“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.*⁹⁸

The General Staff's main theoretical journal, *Voyennaya Mysl'*, continues to publish articles analysing the experience of the operation, including a "round table" discussion involving senior military officers. 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 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."*⁹⁹ It was also important, in his opinion, to ensure that the local organs were involved, especially in exchanging information on activities of the *"illegal armed formations"*; maintaining communication facilities; guarding important facilities for civilians, 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 inter-action 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 pointed out that coordination would only be resolved when everyone was taught literally in the same classroom.¹⁰⁰ He also noted poor coordination between artillery of combined arms units and their opposite numbers in the MVD.¹⁰¹

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. There is a real possibility that unless adequate steps are taken, friction could break out between the Russian Army and MVD Interior Troops in the event of such operations having to be conducted again. 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”.

The recent re-organisation of Russia into seven federal districts and the appointment of “*presidential plenipotentiaries*” to head them¹⁰² has generally been seen as an early attempt by Putin to re-establish the vertical levers of power, thereby ensuring greater Kremlin control of the regions.¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵

The Southern Federal District has the same boundaries as the NCMD and, not too surprisingly given recent events, the presidential plenipotentiary to the Federal District is none other than General V G Kazantsev.¹⁰⁶ In his first major interview since being appointed, Kazantsev stated that his main task was “*to ensure 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.*”¹⁰⁷ 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.”*¹⁰⁸

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 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. The use of military force – however well or

badly it performed – has to be viewed as stark testament to the fact that, first and foremost, the political process in the region had failed.

And yet, for a time, the relationship between the command of the North Caucasus MD and Groznyy, publicly at least, looked like it could have followed a different path from the one which led to 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, but had the attitude of the senior political leadership in the Kremlin or 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. 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.¹⁰⁹ 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 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.”*¹¹⁰

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.”*¹¹¹

In the same 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*”.¹¹² This raises 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 Groznyy and Moscow and Groznyy:

*“Let's take Chechnya, which is in the territory of the district. Recently, there have been positive moments in the dialogue between Moscow and Groznyy. 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].”*¹¹³

But by the end of July 1998, Russia held its massive command-staff exercise in the North Caucasus 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 Grozny. The chance for a more peaceful development in the relationship between Russia and Chechnya was lost and the stage set for August 1999.

ENDNOTES

¹ Colonel-General V Manilov, “Predotvrashcheniya. Sderzhivaniye. Partnerstvo”, (“Repulsion. Containment. Partnership”), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 25/4/2000.

² FBIS-SOV-96-088, “Russia: Grachev: restructuring to be based on Chechen experience”, 5/5/1996.

³ General P Grachev, “Vybran vernyy kurs dlya armii”, (“the correct course for the army has been chosen”), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 31/5/1996.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ FBIS-SOV-96-231, “Russia: Rybkin, Rodionov discuss stronger North Caucasus Military [District]”, 28/1/1996.

⁶ I Maksakov, “Federal’naya gruppirovka ushla na peremiriye”, (“the Federal grouping has gone for a truce”), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 17, 12/9/1996.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For reasons that do not concern us here, Yel'tsin sacked Rodionov as Minister of Defence, following a stormy session of the Defence Council held on 22nd May 1997, and replaced him with I Sergeyev on the same day, (“Zasedaniye Soveta oborony: strogost’ prezidentskikh otsenok”, “session of the Defence Council: severity of the president’s appraisal”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 23/5/1997).

⁹ “Rossiya vnov’ nadeyetsya na svoikh Geroyev”, (“Russia once again places its hopes on its Heroes”), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 14/6/1997.

¹⁰ BBC Monitoring, “Russian defence minister looking for new technology by 2005”, text of report by Russian Public TV (ORT), 11/6/1997.

¹¹ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 31/7/1997; for more detailed biographical information on both these men, see the relevant entries in *Military News Bulletin*, No 8, August 1997, 12-13.

¹² V Litovkin, “Prikhod Kazantseva v SKVO svyazyvayut s reformoy”, (“the arrival of Kazantsev to the North Caucasus MD is connected with the reform process”), *Izvestiya*, 5/8/1997.

¹³ *Military News Bulletin*, No 8, 1997, 13-14.

¹⁴ O Falichev, “Chasy ot ministra oborony”, (“Watches from the Minister of Defence”), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 26/8/1997.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lieutenant-General V Kazantsev, "Armiya zavtrashnego dnya", ("the army of tomorrow"), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 3/9/1997.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Russian military district to lose 15,000 men in reform drive", BBC Monitoring, 27/9/1997.

²⁴ M Bondarenko, "SKVO priobretayet klyuchevoye znachenie v regione", ("NCMD assumes a key significance in the region"), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 191, (1516), 10/10/1997.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lieutenant-General G Troshev, "Na yugo-zapadnom napravlenii", ("in the south-western direction"), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 3, 23-29/1/1998.

²⁸ Colonel-General V G Kazantsev, "Vozrozhdeniye armii nachnetsya na yuge Rossii", ("the rebirth of the army will begin in the south"), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 5-18/6/1998.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Troshev, *ibid.*

³¹ Ibid.

³² O Falichev, "Voyennaya reforma vo imya budushchego", ("Military reform in the name of the future"), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 18/3/1998.

³³ Ibid.

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