

Russia's Ulster: The Chechen War and Its Consequences

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After capturing Grozny in February 2000, Moscow claimed victory in the war against Chechnya. Generals and officials anticipated the war's end by the presidential election of 26 March 2000, and Moscow announced its "final offensive" to destroy the Chechen forces by 26 February.¹ Nevertheless, Russian armed forces in Grozny remain vulnerable to the approximately five hundred Chechens there. Because estimates of Chechen strength vary on a daily basis, Russian intelligence evidently knows neither the number nor location of the enemy forces it faces. By June 2000, Chechen terror attacks against Russians in and around Chechnya had already begun to seriously demoralize Russian troops, forcing the General Staff to admit that it had underestimated the size of Chechen forces.

Thus, Russian and foreign observers increasingly admit that no end to the war is in sight, although Russian troops will remain as long as it takes to destroy the Chechen forces.² It is equally difficult to define what would constitute a Russian victory other than Chechnya's utter devastation. In this sense Chechnya, like Northern Ireland, appears to be an internal war that will last for years. And as with "the troubles," the home government is (or was until the Blair government took power in Great Britain) pledged to win to preserve the state's unity.

Chechnya's Strategic Implications

The Chechen war's strategic implications are now appearing at home and abroad. Even local commanders have begun to grasp that only a political settlement with a recognized Chechen authority can extricate Moscow from Chechnya sooner rather than later. Because Moscow cannot sustain large numbers of regular troops in Chechnya—it has halved troop strength since February 2000—and therefore cannot win the war soon, local commanders have urged a political set-

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tlement. They did so to force the government's hand, but Moscow rejected their attempted dictation.³

Thus apart from the war's danger to Russia's political stability and territorial integrity, continued warfare could further undermine control over the military. The long-standing public infighting between the chief of staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin, and Minister of Defense General Igor Sergeyev over fundamental issues of defense policy reflects Russia's precarious control over its armed forces. Chechnya's aggravation of this weakness highlights the threats posed by this internal war—Russia's third since 1993—and confirms that “however the second Chechen war ends, it will determine not just Russia's territorial boundaries, but

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also what kind of Russia it will be.”⁴ Indeed, Russian political trends since the war began are troubling. Those negative trends have appeared in Russia's foreign, domestic, and defense policies and oblige us to ponder the consequences of either prolonged war or Russian victory.

We must also define what victory would mean. Moscow

neither knows how to conclude a political settlement to the war nor has a viable concept of what it would entail. Nor will it negotiate with any truly authoritative figure who could end the war and command internal support in Chechnya. Moscow's efforts to put Chechen clients in power and restore a political order either depend on Russian military support or have fallen apart. Therefore, this war could escape political definition or control, the framework within which Clausewitz tells us that political violence must be bounded lest it become violence and war for their own sake. Then the entire Russian Federation would become the theater or theaters of war, as internal war became its own justification. Moscow itself is already the war's center of gravity, from which all the foci of Russian power emanate. So if Russia loses, the repercussions will be felt there, not in Grozny. And they will be profound.

Yet it remains difficult, if not impossible, to define a Russian victory in terms other than Tacitus's phrase that the Romans made a desert and called it peace. Russia clearly aims to destroy Chechnya as an autonomous political community. That would not extinguish the profound political crises in the North Caucasus and beyond but would only intensify them further. Nevertheless, the numerous reports of atrocities against civilians offer grounds for fearing that the Chechen political community is not the only strategic target. Forthcoming NGO studies charge that Russian conduct in Chechnya exceeds Serbian actions in Kosovo.⁵ That finding, combined with massive depopulation and refugee flight, suggests a Kosovo-like “ethnic cleansing” as the ultimate outcome of Russian policy. Imitating tsarist and Stalinist tactics, Moscow evidently will redraw Chechnya's administrative bound-

aries, abandon Grozny, move the capital to a perhaps more defensible location, and abort any future efforts at autonomy.

Chechnya is now under direct presidential—that is, autocratic—rule from Moscow, a bad augury for its future integration with Russia on an equal basis with other provinces, or for postwar democratization. This tendency toward direct and autocratic rule from Moscow accords with the mentality of imperial restoration that dominates Russian policy. As Alexei Malashenko observes, Russia's interest in Chechnya is logical only if Russia continues to regard itself as an empire.⁶ Otherwise the war is senseless.

On the other hand, the war was launched largely to elect a pro-government Duma and Vladimir Putin as president on a platform of imperial restoration and concentration of power in his hands, not to effect a lasting political objective for Chechnya or the region. Russia must now come up with such an objective or fight an unwinnable and endless war for no truly definable political objective.⁷

Chechnya's economic prognosis is no better. Reports indicate the absence of funds for rebuilding Chechnya. Moscow will appropriate oil revenues from pipelines currently traversing Chechnya and from private firms such as Gazprom or the utility giant UES, but will not invest much in Chechnya's reconstruction. Indeed, Moscow's local plenipotentiary stated that funding for reconstructing Chechnya has already been consumed and no more is available.⁸ Furthermore, current economic plans call for bypassing Chechnya as a conduit for Caspian energy supplies. Instead the new pipeline will traverse Dagestan, effectively depriving Chechnya of revenues for reconstruction and making it wholly dependent on Moscow. Neither will Moscow soon have any resources to spare to restore the North Caucasus in general, let alone Chechnya.⁹

Hence this war betrays Clausewitz's first instruction, that it be the continuation of politics or policy and that the political objective be the controlling factor throughout the war's duration. Therefore, it threatens Russia's stability and integrity. Because Moscow had no clear goals for Chechnya or the North Caucasus other than to restore its centralized control (although it did have other domestic and foreign or national security goals in mind then), it is now reaping the whirlwind of its irresponsible national security decision-making processes and risks years of continuing domestic strife.¹⁰ The Russian administration's general cupidity does not inspire optimism about Chechnya's or the North Caucasus's future recovery. The entire North Caucasus could become a black hole threatening Russia's stability and integrity regardless of how the war ends.¹¹ But the war is already causing other, equally serious repercussions that would become worse if Moscow "wins."

Domestic and Foreign Consequences of the War

The Chechnya war already has strongly stimulated the dominance of the military factor and so-called power structures in Russian national security and domestic policy and has fostered authoritarian trends in domestic governance. Any outcome definable as victory would grant those forces greater authority, respect, and scope for unilateral action and would further invigorate President Putin's already intensified attempt to reintegrate the CIS around Russia through the integration

of Russia's police and military apparats with those of the CIS members.¹² It could even increase pressures for "augmenting" Russia's borders. Certainly many elites advocate such "augmentation."¹³ In short, the victory of the ruling party of war would constitute a decisive triumph for forces that support authoritarian government and empire and that would prefer to dispense with the substance, if not the trappings, of democracy.

Putin and his circle's increased reliance on police powers to attack federalism, the media, dissenters, and civil rights demonstrates their ignorance of and contempt for democracy. When challenged, as they were by the *Kursk* submarine tragedy, they instinctively look for an internal enemy to blame, a traditional KGB

habit.¹⁴ Putin and his regime's flagrant support for intensified and unchecked police powers, embrace of a quasi-military form of centralized power, and toleration of corrupt figures such as Boris Berezovsky, Pavel Borodin, and Roman Abramovich illustrate the domestic results of a Russian "victory."

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These policies are enshrined in Russia's new security concept, published in January 2000, its draft defense doctrine of October 1999, and the revised defense doctrine of April 2000.¹⁵ They also appear in Putin's early policies in which he created a parallel government largely composed of generals and KGB alumni sent to the provinces to recentralize regional political power, undermine the basis for federalism and the devolution of power that restrains centralized despotism, restore the intelligence organs' supervision over the armed forces and society, arrest opponents of the regime, play the anti-Semitic card in Russian politics, create official religious and ethnic communities, impose military education on students, and intimidate his political opponents and the media. All of these actions impede democratization and strengthen Russia's abundant, proliferating, repressive police and state-chauvinist tendencies.

The war is essential to the anti-democracy campaign. Because the war links Russia's federal and military crises, both it and the campaign to reconcentrate power in Moscow manifest a determination to arrest and then reverse the largely democratic tendency to deconcentrate power in Russia. We also see the military's ongoing effort to insulate itself against any institutional civilian accountability, for example, through a smaller and more professional army. Putin has shelved defense reform along those lines as part of his bargain with the General Staff and because wartime reform creates formidable military problems. Instead, he publicly argued that Russia faces so many conventional and nuclear military threats that it needs a large army and vastly increased defense spending.¹⁶ Worse yet, he and his regime have repeatedly asserted the mendacious

and Stalinist notion that the defense industry will be the locomotive of industrial recovery.¹⁷

Although the reaction to the *Kursk* submarine tragedy and the continuing struggle between Kvashnin and Sergeyev over basic military policy may yet force a rethinking of these axioms or a breakthrough toward genuinely democratic defense policy, that can hardly be confidently predicted. The Ministry of Defense repeatedly blamed foreign ships for the *Kursk* sinking to shift blame elsewhere. Meanwhile, the government's criminal investigation of the tragedy could become another witch hunt for a domestic enemy because it will be dominated by the FSB. The vice chairman (or deputy chairman) of that commission, as in all other commissions, is a member of the FSB with wide-ranging powers to compel the handover of information.¹⁸

Although Kvashnin is widely believed to have won this round because the nuclear forces will supposedly be downsized and the expected savings will go to the conventional forces, the reality is more complicated. Neither Kvashnin nor Sergeyev has figured the enormous costs of demobilizing existing strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. Because Russia still cannot afford such demobilization, there is no reason to expect a sudden change. Nor will large-scale international investment in Russian denuclearization defray the costs. More important, military reform is impossible while the war consumes military resources. Putin's devious approach to raising defense spending, calling for higher wages but refusing to add much to the budget for 2001, offers little to military leaders. Thus, Chechnya impedes both military modernization and the democratization of national security policy.

Foreign and Defense Policy Consequences in the CIS

The war also represents a forceful attempt to oust Western influence from the Caucasus by force. Victory would consolidate anti-Western policies and an exclusive Russian sphere of influence there. Indeed, no victory in Chechnya is possible without subordinating Georgia and Azerbaijan; that is the General Staff's obvious intention and the fear of foreign governments and intelligence agencies.¹⁹ The earlier effort of 1992–94 to compel those states to submit to Russian force brought the United States and Turkey to their rescue. Therefore, those states seek NATO guarantees and memberships and are integrating as fast as possible with NATO, the United States, and other Western organizations. Meanwhile, the conflict between their attachment to independence and Russian neoimperialism could ignite a major conflict in the Caucasus or Central Asia.

A genuine victory in Chechnya would, however, strongly reinforce Russia's neoimperial elite consensus, despite its rivalry over methods. Elites accept the belief in Western threats, and many expect to restore the borders of the Soviet Union.²⁰ Key figures such as ex-prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, former Security Council secretary Andrei Kokoshin, and other less-prominent figures have publicly espoused a revisionist foreign policy to "augment" Russia's borders and undo the post-1989 status quo.²¹ Their statements reflect a consolidated elite opinion that refuses "to accept the Russian Federation, in its present form, as a fait

accompli.”²² Even partisans of strategic rapprochement with the West—for example, Vasily Krivokhiza, first deputy director of Russia’s Institute for Strategic Studies—argue that a stable Russia necessarily expands its borders. While suppressing Chechnya, Russia must vigorously engage foreign powers to exploit the victory and augment its borders.²³

Putin himself has similarly stated,

We shall have more chances of strengthening the CIS if Russia is stronger and so more attractive. They [the CIS countries] will then gravitate towards us of their own accord. . . . As regards strengthening the CIS, we must take Russia’s national interests as our starting point, but must not allow the drive of the people of Russia towards integration to be used to the detriment of Russia’s interests, in order to suck resources out of Russia.²⁴

Although Putin expresses the post-Soviet elite’s ambivalence about paying for empire, he clearly demands its restoration. His hegemonic designs on CIS members emerge from his statements in Moldova on its future. Whereas Moldovan president Petru Lusinchî clearly stated that “we must emancipate ourselves from those old-fashioned ideas according to which Russia has geopolitical interests in Moldova,” Putin’s threats to truncate Moldova if it does not limit its sovereignty according to Moscow’s dictates evoke Catherine the Great and Poland, Hitler and Czechoslovakia, or Stalin.²⁵ Putin stated

Russia is interested in Moldova being a territorially whole, independent state. But this cannot be achieved unless the interests of all population groups, including Transdnister population, are observed. Russia is prepared to participate in creating the conditions in which all residents will feel secure in Moldova. The political treaty must firmly ensure the rights of all those who reside on the territory of Moldova and who consider that Russia can be a guarantor of their rights.²⁶

Those remarks also betray Putin’s intentions to employ vigorously all the instruments of power, including the army, on behalf of Russians in CIS member countries and to threaten the Baltic states as well with retaliation for even imaginary “repressions” against Russians.²⁷ Thus Russia obstructs efforts to move its forces from Moldova and Georgia, as it promised at the OSCE’s 1999 Istanbul conference. Kvashnin has urged Moscow to repudiate that agreement and maintain a permanent base in Moldova. Putin’s activities certainly constituted pressure to retain the troops or even get a Balkan base there—an objective greatly desired by the Russian army.²⁸ The military forces there are clearly extremely reluctant to leave—they obstruct all efforts to get them out.²⁹ Similarly, the tough negotiations over Russian withdrawal from Georgia show Moscow’s reluctance to renounce its bases there.³⁰

Putin thus continues and intensifies Russian foreign policy’s main thrust since 1992–93: first to preserve Russia’s integrity, and then to restore Russian primacy in an exclusive sphere of influence across the CIS, with a view to ultimately altering the post-1991 status quo.³¹ This policy is deeply rooted in Russia’s domestic situation. In 1995, Yeltsin declared that one reason for making reintegration of the CIS a priority for all state ministries was to counter fissiparous trends within Russia itself.³² It is clear that Russian elites still reject the idea of a nonimperial Russian state.

Chechnya has led Moscow to intensify pressure on Georgia and Azerbaijan to accept its dictates on oil and defense policy. Recent articles accuse Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the governor of the North Caucasian province of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev, a fearless critic of the war, of harboring Chechen warriors and of being Russia's enemies. These articles are provocations and attempt to justify further military interventions in the Caucasus.³³ Simultaneously, Moscow has extended its antiterrorist campaign throughout the CIS to cloak military reintegration under its command. Although for the most part, CIS members have successfully limited this planned force's powers and command structure, Belarus exemplifies what such integration means; a common doctrine, command structure, air defense, defense industry, and joint command in operations are only a few of the elements of the burgeoning Minsk–Moscow axis.³⁴

Moscow disdains to conceal its neoimperial agenda. Although economic conditions rule out large power projection forces, the new security concept openly states the following:

The interests of ensuring Russia's national security predetermine the need, under appropriate circumstances, for Russia to have a military presence in certain strategically important regions of the world. The stationing of limited military contingents [the same term used to describe forces in Afghanistan] (military bases, naval units) there on a treaty basis must ensure Russia's readiness to fulfill its obligations and to assist in forming a stable military-strategic balance of forces in regions, and must enable the Russian Federation to react to a crisis situation in its initial stage and achieve its foreign policy goals.³⁵

Accordingly, throughout the summer and fall of 2000, Moscow repeatedly sought to advance the military integration of the CIS under its auspices by all means possible. Because Russia has no military obligations except to the CIS under the Tashkent Treaty of 1992 and other bilateral arrangements, the security concept statement is an open call to station forces in CIS countries for Russia's benefit and to restore the former Soviet military unity. The fact that Moscow takes for granted the desirability of publicly stating that it needs more security than its supposed allies do epitomizes its enduring imperial hauteur. Military success in Chechnya will thus advance the agenda of converting CIS members into Russian satellites with limited sovereignty.

Domestic and Internal Defense Policy

The domestic military consequences of a victory are equally dangerous. This war equally targets Russian democracy and Chechen terrorists. For the third time since 1993 Yeltsin and now Putin have unleashed Russia's armed forces against domestic opponents, risking Russia's stability and integrity because they rejected political solutions to serious domestic challenges and instead sought a quick military victory. Yeltsin also contemplated armed assaults on his opposition in 1996, 1998, and 1999.³⁶ These facts should induce great caution among those who portray Russia as a democracy. The absence of effective democratic controls over the armed forces, a hallmark of Yeltsin's and Putin's regimes, is incompatible with democracy, as is the recourse to internal or external wars to win an election. The

authorities intend this politicization of the armed forces for domestic purposes to continue, as they tried to induce a high turnout of military voters for Putin and his supporters in the 1999 Duma elections.³⁷ The resort to quasi-military forms of rule in the provinces also exemplifies this trend. Chechnya is a war against Russian democracy.

To prevent the multiple militaries from escaping controls exercised through the president and his chancellery, Putin restored the special departments of Russia's domestic intelligence service, the FSB, to spy on all the armed forces and become a political police.³⁸ He also has let loose the FSB and the FAPSI (Russia's electronic intelligence agency) on Internet users, and there are constant rumors of

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impending shakeups and amalgamations of various police and/or military forces to give him even more discretion and quash domestic opposition.³⁹ Inside the armed forces, the FSB is responsible for preventing any activity aimed at harming Russia's security. It monitors all plans involving mutiny or efforts at a violent overthrow of the existing constitu-

tional order and possesses the right to recruit confidential agents. The FSB also now integrates all counter-intelligence units with its “unified, centralized system.” Although this restores control over the many armed forces, it does so in a highly undemocratic, extralegal manner, indicating the prevailing tendencies.⁴⁰

In sum, we are dealing with a police patriot, a common Russian phenomenon in which an official trained in the political police (the KGB or the tsarist Ministry of the Interior) comes to the top intent on restoring state power and glory by centralizing control in quasi-military style and invoking discipline and crude patriotism. Indeed, socioeconomic conditions are forcing structures such as the army to employ long-standing Russian practices. Since 1998, army and navy units have begun adopting homeless children and raising them. They are receiving an official status allowing boys aged fourteen to sixteen to be enrolled in military units.⁴¹ This experiment recalls earlier Soviet and tsarist experiments in recruiting underage boys in an effort to deal with homelessness and broken families or to resocialize children of supposedly objectionable parents.

Putin's policies, his repeated invocations of Russia's religion, history, and patriotism, and his belief that Russia remains a great power evoke Nicholas I's official nationality and “romance of the police” (Herzen's term).⁴² His so-called reform plans, such as the decree restoring compulsory military education, also indicate his efforts to imbue the entire society with the notion of state patriotism and to indoctrinate the young along similar lines. The problem with all of these centralizing controls is that they are vested in persons or organs that are above the law and accountable only to Putin. They breed more despotism and more

bureaucracy. Putin has attempted to reinvigorate some of the most repressive hallmarks of traditional Russian autocracy.

Domestic Policy and the Origins of the Chechen War

Chechnya, in its domestic origins and consequences, exemplifies the policy orientation outlined above. As we now know, Moscow had planned to launch military operations in August 1999, even before the Chechens rather conveniently invaded Dagestan.⁴³ The war's origins lie both in the genuine Chechen threat to Russia's integrity and security, and in a deal made between Putin and the General Staff to prejudice the 1999–2000 Duma and presidential elections and reorient defense policies. To understand the war we must refer to domestic politics, defense policy, and the international security aspect of the North Caucasian situation. The armed forces, particularly the General Staff, aimed to shield the military from civilian democratic accountability, to reconstruct the “sovereign immunity” from such accountability that characterized the Soviet period, and to let the armed forces define much, if not all, of Russian defense policy.⁴⁴

As Mark Galeotti observes, Russia's new draft defense doctrine appeared during the struggle between Kvashnin and Sergeyev over control of defense funding and while the Chechen forces had attacked Dagestan and were being repulsed by a large Russian military operation. That operation's commanders, including Kvashnin, were eager to go to the source of the threat, eliminate the Chechens, and avenge their defeat in 1994–96. Simultaneously, then prime minister Putin desperately sought to defeat the opposition in the Duma elections. Victory by the opposition could have led to the arrest and trial of members of the government, presidential apparatus, and even Yeltsin's family for corruption. Those trials would set the stage for their victory in the presidential elections of June 2000 that could sweep the Yeltsinites aside. Moreover, it now appears that over a million “dead souls” were surreptitiously added to the presidential vote rosters between December 1999 and the presidential election in March 2000, a staggering travesty of democratic elections that produced Putin's margin of victory.⁴⁵ According to Galeotti,

The result was an unholy pact. Russian intelligence sources have confirmed for me that it went something like this: Kvashnin would give Putin a victorious little war. In return Kvashnin expected a higher profile for the general staff; funding that would more than cover the cost of the invasion; and a completely free hand to fight the war as he saw fit, free of political interference. A deal was struck on September 20 with a final proviso: If it could all be done without too many Russian casualties—never a vote winner—Putin would get a suitable victory just before the Duma elections. Thus war returned to the Caucasus.⁴⁶

The General Staff got its war, and control over defense policy, by controlling the doctrine's threat assessment and funding guidelines that flow from it. Consequently, Russia's new security concept and defense doctrine are strongly and overtly anti-Western documents that justified the 50 percent rise in defense spending in the budget in 2000. Putin got his popularity and credibility. In fact, several Russian and foreign analysts charge that the initiation of the Chechen war rep-

resents a conspiracy either to oust Sergei Stepashin as prime minister and replace him with Putin, or Putin's conspiracy to oust Yeltsin.⁴⁷ If so, that would confirm that the war was truly a coup d'état against Russian democracy.

After all, this war, although to some degree justifiable given previous Chechen depredations on Russia, is in many respects a provocation. Russian and foreign observers have remarked that while the Chechen attacks against Dagestan were being planned and executed, many Chechen leaders were either on the payroll of, or in close commercial partnership with, Kremlin bagmen and power brokers such as Boris Berezovsky. Some even publicly speculated that the war might have been in some respects a provocation launched by Moscow.⁴⁸ Certainly Moscow is quite capable of organizing what Dmitri Simes calls a "cynical political intrigue."⁴⁹

While Yeltsin and Putin got their victory in parliamentary elections; the General Staff got control over the process of defining threats to Russia and the means of answering them. Threat assessment has always been a key issue in the struggle to produce an authoritative doctrine and security concept that govern future defense policy. Traditionally, threat assessment helped to define the nature of future war and set parameters for defense policy, including the military-economic policy of providing the armed forces with the means to meet those threats. Threat assessment and the discussion of future war lie at the heart of the Kvashnin-Putin deal and these documents. Indeed, the anti-Western tone of the official assessments plus the depiction of rising military threats inside and outside Russia represent an effort to gain more money and standing for the military whether or not Russia can afford that burden.⁵⁰

But the struggle to define threats to Russia and appropriate responses also goes to the heart of the issue of civilian supremacy in defense policy. Precisely because of the absence of military reform and accountability since 1991, Russia's generals have been allowed to avoid demilitarizing threat assessments and civilian participation in defense policymaking. Moreover, Yeltsin expanded Gorbachev's policy of converting the main mission of Russia's multiple militaries into domestic counterinsurgency and suppression of political dissent.⁵¹

Meanwhile, the army's leaders have been unable and unwilling to accept the status quo and continually demand a large army and unaffordable defense spending. They demand money beyond Putin's promises despite the fact that the war's actual costs cannot be counted. Chechnya's costs have already consumed reform, training, and procurement funds that were earmarked for the armed forces.⁵² Because this new defense doctrine was the sixth attempt since 1997 to compose an authoritative guide to defense policy, it represented continuing clashes over threat assessments and other issues, probably control over the armed forces and economic spending requirements.⁵³ In the latter two respects the doctrine differs significantly from the draft doctrine.⁵⁴ Although the eruption of public infighting between Kvashnin and Sergeyev in July 2000 suggests that the doctrine's precepts are unrealizable, and some foreign observers thought it little more than empty rhetoric, the doctrine reflected an elite compromise and consensus.⁵⁵ Although the policy or policies the defense doctrine outlined may well be inval-

idated, the retrogressive mentality behind the doctrine and the preceding security concept remains.

The General Staff's aims in the defense doctrine were transparent, namely to control the shaping, direction, and formulation of defense policy. Thus the draft doctrine published in October 1999, Russia's descent into Pristina against NATO's Kosovo campaign in June 1999, and the Chechen war are all elements of what may be called its "preemptive strike" to seize control of defense policy.

This unusual sequence, in which a published draft preceded discussion of the final version, and also preceded the national security concept that was originally published in November and officially revised in January 2000, is most revealing. According to the October 1999 draft, the doctrine should concretize the threat published in the national security concept. But that did not appear until three months later and essentially replicated and even augmented the October document to the degree that its authors postulated for the first time since 1993 rising threats to Russia's integrity and security and explicitly assumed the rising possibility of Western threats of invasion of Russia.⁵⁶ Therefore, the sequence of these documents' publication and their content overturned the classical Russian/Soviet view of the armed forces' relation to the state, namely that the armed forces are merely an instrument of state policy, not its formulator and maker.⁵⁷

Yet its unprecedented efforts to dominate the debate cast the General Staff as policymaker rather than policy executor. Deputy Chief of Staff General Valery Manilov inadvertently revealed this when stating that in Chechnya the army and the government were jointly formulating and executing the strategy of the war.⁵⁸ Thus the doctrine defined and to some degree preempted the subsequent national security concept, imposing a primarily military orientation on all subsequent discussions of Russian national security and policy. Hence it is not surprising that the security concept closely followed the draft doctrine's threat assessment. Nor is it surprising that the threat raised by Chechnya features prominently in those assessments.

Content and Implications of Doctrine and Security Concept

The draft doctrine, the final doctrine, and the security concept's threat assessments and policy recommendations regress to the pre-Gorbachevian situation in which the military exclusively dominated threat assessment, military strategy, and formulation of much of military policy. Consequently, acceptance of the documents as guidelines for policy of such Soviet-like postures has ominous implications even as the manner of their presentation repudiates norms of democratic civilian control of the military. Whereas the 1997 security concept stressed that the main threat was internal and largely economic and political, the new draft doctrine and security concept utterly reversed that perspective. They postulated political threats from Washington's and NATO's efforts at unipolar hegemony.⁵⁹ This reflected the military's effort to interfere in foreign policy and place a political concept as the main threat to justify its political role. Putin successfully limited that thrust because the April 2000 official doctrine postulated the main threat as the nature of the operation NATO waged in Kosovo, that is, a purely operational

and military threat. But those other political threats remained in the April document, and the Foreign Ministry and the General Staff apparently agree on restricting relationships with NATO despite Putin's remarks about a renewed dialogue.⁶⁰

These political threat assessments invoke NATO and the United States as authors of growing threats and define the international situation in terms of the threat U.S. unipolarity poses to Russia's cherished multipolar world. The various doctrinal documents also expand parameters for first-strike use of nuclear weapons and urge vastly increased defense spending; the draft doctrine calculates that spending, as in Soviet times, on the basis of what the military claims to need rather than what Russia can afford.⁶¹

“Moscow strongly warned the West that it would intervene in Kosovo along with Serbia against NATO military operations and that it would use force in Chechnya.”

Russian military officials and analysts also told me in June 1999 that NATO's Kosovo campaign led doctrine writers to include provisions for deploying tactical nuclear weapons in unspecified conventional threat scenarios.⁶² In December 1999, Moscow confirmed this when the commander in chief of the Strategic Nuclear Forces, General

Vladimir Yakovlev, admitted that Moscow had to lower the threshold of conflict wherein it might launch a first-strike nuclear attack because it could not otherwise defend against local wars and conflicts, a category that could be stretched to include Chechnya.⁶³ The security concept reiterated his statements, overtly expressing Russia's strategy of deterrence and nuclear warfighting for limited and unlimited nuclear war.⁶⁴ Other authoritative statements by Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Mikhailov confirm the trend toward nuclear warfighting for limited and unlimited nuclear war scenarios and announce Moscow's belief that it can control such situations despite forty years of Soviet argument that no such control was feasible.⁶⁵ Indeed, the national security concept openly advocated limited nuclear war.⁶⁶

Russia's nuclear provisions stated that a vital task of the armed forces is to deter nuclear or any other aggression against Russia and its allies, thereby extending deterrence to those allies, presumably CIS members. Likewise, “Nuclear weapons should be capable of inflicting the desired extent of damage against any aggressor state or coalition of states in any conditions and circumstances.”⁶⁷ The concept also stated that nuclear weapons use would become possible “in the event or need to repulse armed aggression, if all other measures of resolving the crisis situation have been exhausted and proven ineffective.”⁶⁸ The security concept tailored nuclear use to the particular threat at hand, as implied by its phrases “aggression on any scale, nuclear or otherwise” and “to the desired extent of damage.”⁶⁹ Other key officials, such as Mikhailov, confirm this interpretation of the conditions for nuclear use, acknowledging limited nuclear war

as Russia's officially acknowledged strategy in response to many different kinds of contingencies.⁷⁰

Clearly this embrace of nuclear warfighting originates in the inadequacies of Russia's conventional forces, which allegedly now face rising domestic and foreign threats. Although the Kvashnin–Sergeyev rivalry's public explosion in July 2000 will likely significantly alter nuclear and other strategic policies, the existing documents still remain at least the formal guides to official thinking and depict the paramount threat as another Kosovo, a unification of the internal and external threats. Indeed, for Russia's military, since 1998 the most feared contingency is a replay of the Kosovo campaign within or adjoining Russia (for example, in Chechnya) with active NATO military support.

A central element of the 1998–99 Russian threat perception is that NATO harbors designs of enlargement and unilateral out-of-area operations in the Balkans, the Baltic region, and the Caucasus, areas that evidently the General Staff and government regard as equally vital areas of Russian national interest. The General Staff's view emerges from pre-Kosovo threat assessments that appeared in November 1998. An article written as the Kosovo crisis was nearing its zenith blasted NATO for desiring to act unilaterally out-of-area and impose a new world order by bypassing the UN and OSCE. It accused NATO and specifically the United States of trying to go beyond the Washington Treaty and convert the alliance into an offensive military bloc that was expanding its "zone of responsibility" by punitive, military means.⁷¹ The authors charged that NATO could use or organize Kosovo-like crises in other areas, specifically citing Chechnya, Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh, to create pretexts for military intervention.⁷²

The authors of the article went beyond hinting at future war in Chechnya to forewarn NATO about Russia's likely reaction to an operation against Serbia. Rather than accept a NATO-dictated isolation from European security agendas and the negating of the UN and OSCE, Russia would act because the crisis offered NATO an opportunity to project military force not only against Serbia but also against Russia itself. The main objective of NATO enlargement, the article contended, was to weaken Russia's influence in Europe and globally. Therefore, the following was possible: "Once our country has coped with its difficulties, there will be a firm NATO ring around it, which will enable the West to apply effective economic, political, and possibly even military pressure on Moscow."⁷³ Specifically, the authors compared the crises in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo to Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya. Once NATO had cloaked occupation of the Balkans under peacekeeping, it would use the same model against Russia in the CIS, bypassing the UN to wrest the Caucasus from Russia (a telling sign of the General Staff's imperialism, since the Transcaucasian states are sovereign states) and consolidate NATO's lasting military presence there.⁷⁴ To rebuff this threat they argued:

It is obvious that, in order to ensure that the Caucasus does not become an arena for NATO Allied Armed Forces' military intervention, the Russian Government must implement a well defined tough policy in the Balkans, guided by the UN charter and at the same time defending its national interests in the region by identifying and providing the appropriate support for this policy's allies.⁷⁵

Moscow here strongly warned the West that it would intervene in Kosovo along with Serbia against NATO military operations and that it would use force in Chechnya not only against secession and terrorists, but also to forcefully oust NATO from the Caucasus. NATO's intervention in Kosovo, disregarding such warnings, confirmed the General Staff's view of the threat or threats to Russia and the unilateral measures it had to take, such as landing in Pristina and attacking Chechnya, to reorient defense policy and force structure. It was essential for the General Staff that it do so to reorient threat assessments and subsequent defense policy in the direction that these documents then took. Thus it is not surprising that the new threat assessment also directly replied to U.S. policies in Kosovo.⁷⁶ Beyond rebuffing the Chechen threat and restricting Russian democracy, the war in Chechnya also aimed to deter NATO from further penetration of the Caucasus.

Moreover, the draft doctrine linked external threats such as NATO's alleged buildup and military expansion to internal ones. Manilov charged,

Actually, today the internal threat, that is associated with terrorism that is covered by Islamic phraseology, has become extremely exacerbated. That threat does not have anything in common either with Islam or with national-ethnic problems. Its roots and primary sources are outside Russia. The pragmatic conclusion is as follows: we cannot weaken external security, while placing the emphasis on internal security. Or vice versa.⁷⁷

Elsewhere he cited new threats not found in the 1993 doctrine:

Attempts to ignore and all the more so infringe upon Russia's interests in the resolution of international security problems and to oppose its consolidation as one of the influential centers of the modern world. As you know, that is what happened when the United States and NATO made the decision to bomb the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Or [another threat is] the creation, equipping, support, and training of formations and groups on the territory of other states with the goal of their transfer for operations on the territory of Russia and its allies. Specifically, that is what happened with the manning, equipping, training, and financing of the Chechen terrorist formations that committed aggression against Russia in the North Caucasus.⁷⁸

Sergeyev has repeatedly stated that Islamic movements in the North Caucasus and Central Asia are a unified terrorist movement led and organized by the same people, although he offered no evidence for such claims.⁷⁹ The real purpose seems to be to justify another of the military's pet ideas, unifying with the CIS to strike at Afghanistan and the Taliban. Although the Taliban supports terrorism and drug running into Central Asia, attacking them makes as much sense as attacking Afghanistan in 1979, suggesting the leadership's limited capacity for learning from past military debacles.⁸⁰

Putin, too, invariably links external and internal threats, even invoking the old domino theory. He has frequently argued that a Chechen victory would lead inevitably to the loss of the North Caucasus, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan and the dismemberment of Russia.⁸¹ All the documents considered here conflate foreign and domestic threats and military and political threats.⁸² The tendency to conflate the threats and seek an answer by mainly military means reflects the General

Staff's determination to guide Russia's overall national security policies and the political leadership's ill-advised willingness to use military measures to overcome political problems or extend Russian influence in the CIS. Operations in Pristina and Chechnya forcefully aimed to deter the U.S./NATO threat by the open use of general-purpose forces. And behind them lies the threat of a preemptive or first-strike nuclear response should threats continue to escalate.

Finally, these wars highlight Russia's democratic deficit, which transcends the fact that the armed forces went to war because of secret machinations in the executive branch.

The use of the army in this internal war is also rooted in military politics. The war allows the General Staff to continue its campaign, together with Duma members, to unseat Sergeyev, and force an enormous upsurge in defense spending while other vital sectors stagnate. Despite Putin's admissions of insufficient funds to support vital sectors—minority nationalities, science, health, and education—these generals nevertheless insist on retaining a bloated military establishment to defend against threats on all sides, not only the Chechens. They know that Russia cannot pay for this war and simultaneously maintain economic growth and conduct military reform, which are vital to its future security. But they disregard the facts in their pursuit of sectoral and quasi-imperial objectives. Personal and sectoral interests outweigh the national interest.

“If Moscow cannot win quickly in Chechnya, as most analysts predict, the results will be catastrophic for Chechnya and its neighbors.”

Accordingly, the absence of effective, civilian, democratic control of the armed forces and their very limited accountability to the Duma remain profound threats to Russian and to international security. These defects breed a constant temptation to use guns to solve major problems in Russian politics without thinking through the consequences. Therefore, if Moscow cannot win quickly in Chechnya, as most analysts predict, the results will be catastrophic for Chechnya and its neighbors. Earlier Russian plans stated that after a successful offensive by the time of the elections, police operation, led by the Ministry of Interior's Internal Troops (VVMVD) would replace the army's mission.⁸³ But the VVMVD have repeatedly proved unable to deal with the Chechens, compelling Moscow to shelve this strategy and garrison thousands of regular army forces in Chechnya, another unforeseen expense to an already overstressed budget.

The fiscal costs of maintaining the regular army in Chechnya already preclude either conventional force modernization or the development of a professional army that can deal with high-tech weapons and modern war beyond the guerrilla level. Prolongation of the war can only aggravate the situation further. As it is, Putin had only 90,000 troops available to go into Chechnya out of an estimated

1.2 million men in the army. Further fighting means that neither training nor re-equipping the men is possible, nor is the development of other reliable cadres. Other possible economic-political solutions will be foreclosed for reasons of cost and inappropriateness to a wartime contingency.

As noted earlier, prolonged war risks defeat and the specter of genuine threats to Russia's integrity, and not only in the North Caucasus. Although "victory" will add tremendous impetus to the centralizing, neoimperial policies of Putin and retard democratization and military reform, defeat certainly means major crisis. In wars such as this one, especially once they become protracted, not winning is tantamount to defeat. As in earlier periods of Russian history, defeat may bring about internal pressure for true reform; or it might lead to attempted coups as in 1991; or it could lead to disaster. Unfortunately, the consequences of victory, renewed imperialism, and authoritarianism are no better.

Chechnya and European Security

Geostrategically, Chechnya is an aspect of the new great game and a test of European security because the Caucasus has become an important subject in Europe's security agenda.⁸⁴ The OSCE's Istanbul conference was almost exclusively about Europe's concern over Caucasian security. Although Russia champions the OSCE as the institution that should be the umbrella organization for European security, it refuses to use the OSCE to build security in the CIS or Russia because that would compromise Russia's aspiration to an exclusive sphere of influence. Such exclusivity is intolerable to Europe and the West. More pointedly, "The main reason why the West cannot remain complacent about Russia's actions is the fact that Russia's 'near abroad' is, in many cases, also democratic Europe's near abroad."⁸⁵

These considerations also explain Azeri and Georgian interest in NATO. The OSCE's notable failure to enhance security in the CIS long ago reduced small European states' belief in its utility as a security provider. As veteran Finnish diplomat and commentator Max Jakobson observed, the first Chechen war triggered all the old feelings of Russian brutality and insecurity. He also noted that despite all the Western excuses for Russia's brutal conduct in the first Chechen war, for Russia's neighbors it was a warning of the continuing reach of Russian power and the dangers of Western indifference to their security.⁸⁶ This was not an isolated case. Russian diplomats in the Baltic states confidently tell their opposite numbers in Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn that they are returning. This explains why Russia's neighbors fear Western passivity about this war and its possible consequences for Europe if the militarization of Russian policy continues unabated.⁸⁷

Ironically, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev stated that no state could simply repudiate the international community and claim unfettered rights to do as it pleases at home. Yet now Russia makes that claim and seeks to limit the sovereignty of CIS members. However, not only will a new Brezhnev doctrine not work here, but Russia's unilateralism and imperial pretensions and its relapse into excessive militarization provide a greater threat to its own and its neighbors' security than does anything the Chechens could conceive. Nor is the issue Russia's undeniable right of self-defense against terrorism. Russia had achieved that

by September 1999 and then forsook any hope for a political solution by invading Chechnya.

Russia's Chechen war also undermines chances for the new CFE treaty, which is favorable to Russia, to take effect. If Russia wins, it will maintain at least a division of troops in Chechnya. But if the war continues, obviously many more forces will be committed there, heightening suspicion of Russian goals. And either victory or protracted war almost certainly ensures Moscow's noncompliance with the new treaty's provisions concerning the North Caucasian Military District. That noncompliance precludes U.S. ratification of the treaty and its entry into force. Thus the war threatens the institutions on which Moscow allegedly bases its European security policy, the OSCE and the CFE treaty, and heightens a general insecurity on Russia's periphery.

Conclusion

Much evidence suggests a provocation and a war that were invited and exploited to provide an opportunity for domestic militarization, suppression of democratic controls over the government and armed forces, and employ domestic terror. Evidently, a full-scale crisis in civil-military relations is at hand. On 24 June 2000, Kvashnin admitted that the military had yet to gain a secure grip on Chechnya. The next day, General Gennady Troshev, the regional military commander, told the Council of Europe that the war was over and that there would be no more air and artillery attacks. Yet on 26 June bombings and artillery attacks continued.⁸⁸ Evidently, the military understands that it has provoked an endless war because no political solution or acceptable mediator is in sight. Knowing what that could entail, they strongly hint to Putin that he should make his best deal now or force a decisive victory immediately.⁸⁹ Although the first option undermines the basis of Putin's platform and signifies Russia's inability to retain its integrity, the second alternative is probably impossible and merely prolongs the war. Yet Troshev apparently has enormous military support, and it may be beyond Putin's ability or control to fire him. In November 1999, when politicians hinted at solutions that were unpalatable to the armed forces, they threatened a civil war and prevailed. Just as this war originated in the crisis of Russian civilian control over the armed forces, it has now come full circle.⁹⁰ A Russia that cannot control its armed forces remains a constant threat to itself, its neighbors, and all of its partners.

A Europe that is ready to punish Austria for merely admitting neo-Nazis, who won many votes in a democratic election, cannot long remain silent about Russia's actions if it and Russia are to achieve lasting security. Although Yeltsin told foreign governments that "you have no right to criticize Russia," this statement is both false and mendacious. Nor should Europeans and Americans take refuge in the ahistorical remark of German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that one cannot compel a nuclear power to do something against its will. After all, that was what the Cold War was about, and Moscow often had to retreat before Western political pressure. The West has every right, even duty, to criticize Moscow and this war, for it is hardly accidental that Russia has thrice resorted to war against its own citizens since 1993.

As long as conditions remain that permit such wars to occur with regularity, nobody can have confidence or faith in Russia's readiness to rejoin Europe or accept European standards of conduct in world politics. But Russia, too, will have no security. That does not mean that we should intervene militarily. But if we take our own claims about international security seriously, we must continue to criticize Russia until it awakes from its self-induced nightmare.

NOTES

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10. *Ibid.*, passim.; Maura Reynolds, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (electronic version), 14 January 2000, *FBIS SOV*, 18 January 2000; Michael R. Gordon, "A Look at How the Kremlin Slid into the Chechen War," *New York Times*, 1 February 2000. In general, the strategic decision-making process here does not seem much improved over that which led to the first Chechen war in 1994.

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