Below is a brief narrative about each of the three historical cases. Each narrative includes some historical context, a description of the major events, the general strategy and tactics employed by both sides, and a quick summary of the dominant factors in the case. Readers already familiar with these cases may want to skip forward to Chapter Three, the cross-case analysis. A summary of the battle statistics for these three cases can be found at the end of this chapter.


The peace operations that U.S. forces conducted in Somalia from 1992 to 1993 varied from humanitarian relief and assistance activities to peace enforcement operations. Combat occurred several times during this period, usually in urban areas and in the presence of noncombatants. The focus of this study is on the climatic battle of October 3–4, 1993. Only a few brief comments on the history leading up to the firefight are necessary.

Setting the Stage

The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) was a massive international relief operation that ultimately sought to create a stable environment for the Somali people and address the underlying political and economic causes behind the famine devastating the country. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali backed a UN resolution that created UNOSOM and expanded the UN’s mission from a humanitarian relief operation to a nation-building operation that included
disarming the population. The United States contributed a force known as the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to the peace enforcement mission. Operation Restore Hope began on December 9, 1992, with an amphibious landing by U.S. Marines and some Navy SEALS on the beaches of Somalia. These were followed by additional units such as the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division.

The most powerful Somali warlord was Mohammed Aideed. In Aideed’s view, the UN’s goals amounted to a rejection of his claims to power in Somalia. His long-term strategy was to undermine and divide the coalition against him, keep the UN from reaching a negotiated settlement with other Somali clans, and force the strongest military power, the United States, to withdraw.¹

Aideed used guerrilla tactics, including low-level attacks at weak targets, to avoid direct confrontations with UNOSOM forces. The Somalis were essentially urban guerrillas. They relied on stealth, surprise, dispersion, and concealment. The guerrillas operated without heavy logistical support, moved in small groups, and made do without heavy weapons. Their favorite offensive tactic was the tactical ambush. They avoided fixed fights and preferred to attack only when they possessed the advantage.

After the ambush of 24 Pakistani soldiers in Mogadishu on June 5, 1993, a UN Security Council resolution was issued to apprehend those responsible. On June 17, the UN arrest order was issued for the chief suspect, Aideed.² Aideed went into hiding and remained at

---

large, continuing to attack UN peacekeepers with his Somali Na-
tional Alliance (SNA) militia. On August 8 the SNA ambushed a U.S.
military police convoy, killing four U.S. soldiers with a command-
detonated mine. At this point, President Clinton ordered 130 Delta commandos, a Ranger company, and elements from the Army’s special operations aviation unit to deploy to Somalia (otherwise known as Task Force Ranger). The search for Aideed was on, a search that would eventually include his lieutenants. The stage was set for what would turn out to be the most intense U.S. infantry fire-
fight since the Vietnam War.

Firefight of October 3–4

On the night of October 3, 1993, a company of U.S. Rangers and a Delta Force commando squadron fast-roped onto a gathering of Habr Gidr clan leaders in the heart of Mogadishu, Somalia. The targets were two of Aideed’s top lieutenants. The plan was to secure any hostages and transport them three miles back to base on a convoy of twelve vehicles. What was supposed to be a hostage snatch mission quickly turned into an eighteen-hour firefight when two Blackhawk helicopters crashed (see Figure 1). Eighteen Americans were killed in the fighting.

The helicopter assault force included about 75 Rangers and 40 Delta Force troops in 17 helicopters. The light infantry force on the ground was armed with small arms; the relieving convoys had nothing heavier than HMMWV-mounted .50 caliber machine guns and automatic grenade launchers. Close air support consisted of Blackhawk and Little Bird (AH-6) gunships. The Somalis were armed with assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

The Somalis knew that after the Rangers fast-roped in they would not be able to come back out on helicopters (the streets were too narrow). This meant a relief convoy would be necessary, so they immediately began setting up roadblocks all over the city.

The mission went well at first. Twenty-four Somali prisoners were quickly seized at the target house. Plans to haul them back to the airport base changed dramatically when a Blackhawk helicopter (Super 6-1) was shot down four blocks east of the target house. Soon a second Blackhawk, Super 6-4, was shot down about a mile away.
An airmobile search and rescue force was sent to the Super 6-1 crash site and a light infantry force fast-roped down to secure the wounded crew. Task Force Ranger was also ordered to move to Super 6-1’s crash site and extract the wounded crew. No rescue force was available to secure the second site, which was eventually overrun.4

The convoy holding the 24 Somali hostages was ordered to secure the second crash site but never made it. It wandered around the city suffering ambush after ambush until it eventually aborted the rescue attempt and returned to base. At one point, after about 45 minutes of meandering, this convoy ended up right back where it started. A second convoy of HMMWVs and three five-ton flatbed trucks was dispatched from the airport base to attempt a rescue at pilot Michael Durant’s downed Super 6-4 Blackhawk, but those vehicles were also forced to turn back under heavy fire. At every intersection Somalis would open fire on any vehicle that came across.5 Eventually a quick-reaction force of four Pakistani tanks, 28 Malaysian APCs, and elements of the 10th Mountain Division battled through barricades and ambushes to rescue Task Force Ranger at 1:55 A.M. on October 4.6

For the most part, U.S. commandos followed standard doctrine for city fighting. Using fire and maneuver, teams and squads leapfrogged each other. At times, infantry moved out on foot to cover the convoy from both sides of the street. The main problem was that the convoys kept halting, exposing vehicles located in the middle of street intersections to concentrated enemy fire.

There was a Somali battle plan of sorts. Aideed’s SNA militia (between 1,000 and 12,000 men) was organized to defend 18 military sectors throughout Mogadishu. Each sector had a duty officer on

4According to Mark Bowden in Blackhawk Down, one of the flaws in the mission planning was this lack of a second rescue force. Nobody had taken seriously the prospect of two helicopters going down.

5Fortunately for the Americans, the ambushes were poorly executed. The correct way to ambush is to let the lead vehicle pass and suck in the whole column, then open fire on the unarmored flatbed trucks in the middle. The Somalis usually opened up on the lead vehicle. They also cared little for fratricide. Because Somalis fired from both sides of the street, they certainly sustained friendly fire casualties.

alert, connected through a crude radio network. By the time the U.S. assault team had landed, the Somalis were burning tires to summon all militia groups.

The most likely tactical commander of the Somalis during the October 3–4 fight was Colonel Sharif Hassen Guimale, who was familiar with guerrilla insurgency tactics. Guimale’s strategy was to fight the Americans by using barrage RPG fire against the support helicopters, ambushes to isolate pockets of Americans, and large numbers of SNA militiamen to swarm the defenders with sheer numbers.

Somali tactics were to swarm toward the helicopter crashes or the sound of firefights. Out in the streets, militiamen with megaphones shouted, "Kasoobaxa guryaha oo iska celsa cadowga!" (Come out and defend your homes!). Neighborhood militia units, organized to stop looters or fight against other enemy clans, were united in their hatred of the Americans. When the first helicopter crashed, militia units from the surrounding area converged on the crash sites along with a mob of civilians and looters. Autonomous militia squads blended in with the masses, concealing their weapons while they converged on the Americans.

Most of the Somalis were not experienced fighters. Their tactics were primitive. Generally, gunmen ducked behind cars and buildings and jumped out to spray bullets toward the Rangers. Whenever Americans moved, the Somalis opened up from everywhere. Gunmen popped up in windows, in doorways, and around corners, spraying bursts of automatic fire.

From a military viewpoint, the October battle in Mogadishu was a tactical defeat for the Somalis—the Ranger and Delta commandos were able to complete their mission and extract the hostages. In terms of relative casualties, the mission was also an American military success—only eighteen American soldiers were killed and 73 wounded while more than 500 Somalis died and at least a thousand were put in the hospital. But from a U.S. strategic or political view-
point, the battle not was a success because the end result was an American withdrawal from Somalia. On November 19, 1993, President Clinton announced the immediate withdrawal of Task Force Ranger, and he pledged to have all U.S. troops out of Somalia by March 31, 1994. The casualties incurred were simply too high a cost for the U.S. national interests at stake in Somalia.

The strategic ramifications of this battle persist. The U.S. decision to withdraw from Somalia after losing relatively few soldiers has had unintended consequences—many adversaries now question American resolve and its obsession with casualties. In a May 28, 1998, ABC news interview, the terrorist Osama bin Laden echoed this sentiment:

We have seen in the last decade the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier who is ready to wage cold wars and unprepared to fight long wars. This was proven in Beirut when the Marines fled after two explosions. It also proves they can run in less than 24 hours, and this was also repeated in Somalia.9

Some people believe that the low casualties of the Persian Gulf War have lulled the American public into unrealistic expectations about the price of modern combat. Others argue that the U.S. public has never been willing to tolerate casualties when national interests are not at stake.10 Regardless of which argument is correct, the important point to realize is that if the enemies of the United States believe the American people do not have the “stomach” to take casualties, they will act in accordance with this belief.

10One study found that the unwillingness of the public to tolerate very high casualties in Lebanon and Somalia had to do with the fact that majorities—and their leaders—did not perceive the national interests at stake important enough to justify much loss of life. In addition, the absence of foreign policy consensus among leaders will make the public more sensitive. See Eric Larson, Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-726-RC, 1996, p. xvi.
**Dominant Factors**

Aideed’s victory was due to several factors. The nature of the urban terrain had an inhibiting effect on U.S. situational awareness and firepower. The support of the indigenous population for their militia helped to conceal insurgents and hinder the use of airpower. Somali RPGs changed the whole course of the mission when two U.S. Blackhawks were downed. The absence of heavier U.S. armor and lack of combined arms were sorely felt, especially when roadblocks needed to be cleared. Finally, the Somalis were willing to take casualties and could afford to follow their costly swarm tactics.

**PRECISION MOUT: Operation Just Cause, Panama (1989)**

During Operation Just Cause (OJC) American joint forces attacked the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) using strict ROE. Combat actions included airfield seizures and deliberate attacks on fortified positions. Urban targets were positioned among the cities, airports, military bases, and rural areas.

**Setting the Stage**

The United States has a long history of intervention in Panama, from the first Marine landing in 1903 to the permanent stationing of U.S. troops to protect the Panama canal. In the 1980s, Manuel Antonio Noriega rose to power and became a useful asset to the United States for his contributions to intelligence and counternarcotics operations. Later allegations that Noriega had rigged the 1984 election eventually led to the suspension of U.S. military and economic aid. After the Iran-Contra scandal broke, Noriega’s usefulness continued to decline, especially when he continued to curtail constitutional rights in Panama. Tensions escalated as he stepped up harassment of U.S. military personnel and tried to stoke anti-American sentiment among his own people. In February 1988, two Florida grand juries indicted Noriega on separate charges related to his drug cartel connections. The Reagan administration applied financial pressure on Panama, invoking formal sanctions in April 1988. As a war of words continued between Noriega and the Bush administration, the PDF continued its hostile behavior toward U.S. servicemen.
The trigger event for Operation Just Cause (OJC) was the killing of a U.S. officer on December 16, 1989. U.S. forces were ordered to overthrow the Noriega dictatorship, create a safe environment for U.S. citizens living in Panama, secure the Panama Canal, and reinstate a democratically elected government.

The Assaults on Panama and the Aftermath

On December 19, 1989, units from the Army, Navy, and Air Force assaulted 27 critical objectives throughout Panama, the largest airborne operation since World War II. Initial targets included PDF concentrations, garrisons, and airports, as well as media, transportation, and command and control nodes. Joint Task Force South conducted the attack with the 13,000 U.S. troops already garrisoned in Panama and another 13,000 deployed troops from the United States.\(^\text{11}\) Most of the fighting and many of the most crucial assignments went to special operations forces.\(^\text{12}\) The opposing force, the PDF, contained about 15,000 men with an effective combat strength of about 6,000.\(^\text{13}\) The heaviest PDF threat was 28 armored cars.

The U.S. commander, Lt. General Carl Stiner, hoped to paralyze the PDF by hitting every vital node with overwhelming force.\(^\text{14}\) The simultaneous assault on dozens of targets in the middle of the night proved effective against the highly centralized PDF. The major targets were the locations of PDF reinforcements, two airfields, a few

---

1\(^\text{11}\)The several units already stationed in Panama included a battalion of the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Davis; the Jungle Operations Training Center at Fort Sherman, which could field a battalion of troops; and USARSO-controlled troops from the 7th Infantry Division (Light) and 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized).

2\(^\text{12}\)Although the elite forces totaled only 4,150 troops compared to the remaining 23,000 regular American troops, they took the brunt of the losses.


4\(^\text{14}\)Stiner was also commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps. His boss was General Maxwell Thurman, Commander in Chief, U.S. Southern Command (CINCSO). Joint Task Force South (JTFSO) was set up to execute the Blue Spoon operations order, the plan for the entire operation.
bridges, a naval base, and the main PDF stronghold in Panama City, *La Comandancia*. U.S. special forces also attempted to snatch Noriega himself.

The most difficult PDF urban operations target proved to be *La Comandancia* in Panama City, a compound of fifteen buildings surrounded by a ten-foot wall right in the middle of the city. It was the command and control center of Noriega’s forces as well as an armory and motor pool. U.S. mechanized infantry paved the way for light infantry movement toward the PDF strongholds in the heart of the city. APCs and dismounted infantry gradually contracted a circle around the compound, seizing key intersections overlooking the stronghold and clearing snipers from the vicinity. Under the cover of supporting air strikes and Sheridan tank fire from supporting positions on a nearby hill, dismounted troops were eventually able to blast a hole through the wall of *La Comandancia* with demolitions.

The PDF did a poor job utilizing their stockpile of RPGs. The urban terrain around the compound offered numerous opportunities for ambushing the relatively light American vehicles that were covering the approaches, yet the PDF only managed to take out one M113 armored personnel carrier and temporarily halt two columns at roadblocks.

The Ranger assault on the Rio Hato military base was one of the biggest firefights of OJC. Two battalions of Rangers parachuted into the Panamanian military base, located about 75 miles west of Panama City. The Ranger light infantry was supported by a pair of new Apaches, a Spectre gunship, AH-6 “Little Bird” helicopters, and Stealth F-117As. The fighting in the barracks area was classic MOUT—building to building, room to room. The PDF fought stubbornly, retreating out the rear of buildings to ambush the pursuing

---

15The PDF was primarily a ground force organized into thirteen military zones totaling two battalions, ten additional infantry companies, and a special forces command. The heaviest equipment it possessed was armored cars (V-300). Some paramilitary forces were available also. PDF naval forces consisted of 13 vessels, including fast patrol boats, and the PDF air force had 38 fixed-wing aircraft, 17 helicopters, and some air defense guns. See Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama*, New York: Lexington Books, 1991, p. 75.

16They tried more than 40 times, failing every time. See Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, *Operation Just Cause*, p. 105.
Rangers from gullies and other cover. In this action, the Rangers lost 4 dead and 18 wounded (another 23 had been injured in the jump), but they killed 34 PDF soldiers, captured 362, and detained 43 civilians.\textsuperscript{17}

OJC could easily have turned into a nightmare for U.S. planners. Noncombatant casualties, especially American civilians, were a major concern. Many Americans lived, worked, or went to school right next to Panamanians. One of the task forces involved in the operation, Task Force Atlantic, was solely responsible for the safety of a thousand Americans living on joint U.S.-Panamanian military installations or in civilian housing.\textsuperscript{18}

For Operation Just Cause as a whole, 23 American soldiers and 3 American civilians were killed, and 324 were wounded. At least 314 PDF soldiers were killed in the fighting, and between 200 and 300 Panamanian civilians perished.\textsuperscript{19}

\section*{Dominant Factors}

OJC was a decisive American victory for many reasons. The fact that U.S. forces were already stationed in Panama and had been training there for years granted enormous advantage. The U.S. operation used operational maneuver, mainly through airlift, to finish the fight throughout Panama in just a few days. The forces were able to do this because no surface-to-air missile (SAM) threat was present.

The PDF was generally of poor quality, with most of its soldiers quite unwilling to fight to the death. PDF troops usually began to desert once the fighting began, as they did at Cimmarron. The PDF was also caught by surprise.

Finally, the indigenous population was not united behind Noriega’s oppressive dictatorship but was split in its loyalty. As one soldier put it: “There [were] people out partying and waving U.S. flags and cheering for us. And then we would turn a corner and start heading

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 349.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 237.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 390.
down another way, and all of a sudden we’d start getting shot at.”
This unpredictability complicated MOUT for both sides. The PDF’s only real chance to win was to somehow protract the conflict and inflict unacceptable casualties on the United States, forcing a domestic political response that would end the fighting. Without the support of the population, that was impossible.


The Chechen War (1994–1996) ran the gamut of urban operations—from the surgical strikes of Budyonnovsk and Kizlyar-Pervomaiskoye to high-intensity MOUT within the city of Grozny. Chechnya is also the most recent example of how an insurgent force defeated a conventional military power by means of a superior political-military strategy. The irony in this case is that a relatively small force of insurgents defeated an army that arguably has the most MOUT experience of any force in the world.

Setting the Stage

Chechnya has been fighting Russian domination for over 250 years. Tsarist, Bolshevik, and Soviet forces have all put down Chechen revolts. From the Stalinist purges of the 1920s and 1930s to the mass deportation of the Chechen people to Siberia in 1944, the Chechens have accumulated many reasons for hating Russians. In 1991, after the August coup in the former Soviet Union, nationalist leaders in the Republic of Chechnya saw an opportunity to press demands for Chechen independence. Soon after, President Dzhokar Dudayev formally declared Chechen independence.

Chechnya was geostrategically important to Russia for many reasons. Conflict raged across the region (between the Azerbaijans and Armenians, between the Ingush and the North Ossetians, and between Georgia government forces and an Abkhazian separatist movement). Major Russian oil pipelines ran from the Caspian basin through

---

20Quote from Sergeant Joseph Ruzic in Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, Operation Just Cause, p. 313.

21Not even counting World War II experience, the Russians conducted MOUT in Berlin (1953), Budapest (1956), Prague (1968), and Kabul (1979).
Chechnya and the Transcaucasus to the Black Sea. The Russians were also concerned that if the Republic of Chechnya were allowed to break free of the Russian federation, other minority republics in the North Caucasus might seize upon the precedent to demand their own independence.  

After President Dudayev dissolved the Chechen parliament in 1993, an opposition group developed and small-scale violence erupted between contending parties. Dudayev refused to negotiate a return to the Russian federation, and after a covert Russian attempt to support Dudayev’s political opposition was thwarted and exposed, Boris Yeltsin decided to send a peacemaking force into Chechnya on December 11, 1994.

A Russian force of about 23,800 men, 80 tanks, 208 APC/IFVs, and 182 artillery pieces invaded Chechnya. The Russians advanced into Chechnya along three axes of advance—one each from the north, east, and west—in order to isolate and attack the capital city of Grozny (see Figure 2). Before Grozny was encircled or blockaded, however, the western force of 6,000 Russian soldiers mounted a mechanized attack on New Year’s Eve 1994.

The Chechens started the war with about 35 tanks, 40 armored infantry vehicles, 109 artillery pieces, multiple rocket launchers, mortars, and air defense weapons.  


\[23\]Later, the Russian force grew to 38,000 men, 230 tanks, 454 APC/IFVs, and 388 artillery pieces. Lieven believes that about 40,000 Russian troops entered Chechnya, but because many Russian units were seriously understrength, the number may have been as low as 20,000. See Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 280.

RPGs.\textsuperscript{25} Dudayev’s forces in Grozny probably numbered about 15,000 men.\textsuperscript{26}


The Russian plan was to seize important Chechen nodes such as the presidential palace, railroad station, government, and radio and television buildings. The main attack focused on the railway station, several blocks southeast of the palace.

Disregarding proper combined arms tactics, Russian armored vehicles drove into Grozny without deploying dismounted infantry support, allowing Chechen infantry to ambush the tanks in the spearhead. In the 131st Motorized Brigade, only 18 out of 120 vehicles escaped destruction.\textsuperscript{27} Without infantry, Russian tanks were easy pickings for the waiting Chechens armed with RPGs:

> The Russians stayed in their armor, so we just stood on the balconies and dropped grenades on to their vehicles as they drove by underneath. The Russians are cowards. They can’t bear to come out of shelter and fight us man-to-man. They know they are no match for us. That is why we beat them and will always beat them.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25}Chechen anti-tank weapons included Molotov cocktails, RPG-7s (including -7B, -7B1, -7D variants), RPG-18s, and long-range systems such as the Fagot (24 systems), Metis (51 systems), and 9M113 Konkurs antitank (2 systems). They also had the PG-7VR system for reactive armor targets. See “Russian Military Assesses Errors of Chechnya Campaign,” *International Defense Review*, Vol. 28, Issue 4, April 1, 1995; and Aleksandr Kostyuchenko, “Grozny’s Lessons,” *Armeyiskiy Sbornik*, translated in FBIS FTS1995110100633, November 1, 1995.


\textsuperscript{27}Basyev’s claim that 216 Russian vehicles were destroyed is probably exaggerated. General Pulikovskiy says only 16 were hit. See Mikhail Serdyukov, “General Pulikovskiy: Fed Up!” *Sobesednik*, translated in FBIS, September 1996.

\textsuperscript{28}See Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, p. 109.
After the devastating losses of January 1–3, the Russians adjusted their tactics. They learned the hard way that tanks should be well protected by screening infantry and should be used for fire support just outside of RPG range. They pulled back from the center and pounded the city with artillery and airpower. ROE were discarded.

---

Figure 2—Russian Axes of Advance into Chechnya (1994)

After the devastating losses of January 1–3, the Russians adjusted their tactics. They learned the hard way that tanks should be well protected by screening infantry and should be used for fire support just outside of RPG range. They pulled back from the center and pounded the city with artillery and airpower. ROE were discarded.

---

29 Ninety percent of Russian losses in the assault on Grozny occurred in the first few days between December 31, 1994, and January 2, 1995.
Special shock troops, paratroopers, motorized infantry units, and marines systematically pushed the Chechens back building by building. This initial battle for Grozny lasted several weeks.

Combat operations broke down into small unit firefights because of the nonlinear nature of urban terrain. Commanders sometimes could not exercise command and control over adjacent units because of a lack of common corridors or entrances. If a Russian unit advanced too far (or adjacent units fell back), it was cut off, surrounded, and attacked by Chechens, like “wasps on a ripe pear.”

By January 10 the Russians had managed to make two corridors into the city to resupply and evacuate the wounded. Dudayev’s forces fought back fiercely, especially in the center of the city. A cease-fire began on the 10th, was violated by both sides, and officially ended on the 12th. Using fresh reinforcements, the Russians renewed the offensive, pounding Chechen positions in the city center with artillery. As the Russian assault continued on the 13th and 14th, MVD forces blocked the main departure routes out of Grozny, effectively sealing it off by the 15th. After two Russian bombs penetrated to the basement of the palace, the Chechen on-scene commander, Maskhadov, retreated to the southeastern part of Grozny to prepare for a general evacuation to the mountains. The Russians gained the palace on the 19th. Somewhat demoralized by the symbolic loss of the palace, many Chechen rebels began leaving the city, moving in southerly and southeastern directions.

Through most of January, the Russians failed to encircle Grozny and the Chechens continued to resupply their forces. Spurred to fight for their homes and families, Chechen volunteers flowed into the city from the countryside. Small groups of Chechens continued to seek

---


32Ibid., p. 76.

33Although the Chechen “high command” did not exercise control over much of the Chechen resistance, it did issue calls for volunteers to stream into the cities like Grozny on their own and jump into the fight.
and ambush small Russian units in the porous urban terrain. A pattern set in: the Chechens would hide in basements during the daylight barrages, then emerge for hit and run attacks at night.

It was not until the 21st that Russian task forces Group West and Group East fought their way to the center of Grozny, at which point they basically controlled about half the city. Grozny was finally cleared of rebels around late February.

**Russian Strategy and Tactics**

Since the Chechen War evolved over several weeks of combat and was far larger in scope than Operation Just Cause and the Mogadishu firefight, the development of strategy and tactics deserves a special mention.

The Russian strategy that evolved was to bully the cooperation of the people in order to cut off support for the Chechen fighters. Towns and villages were pounded from the air until they signed individual truces with Russian forces.

Their poor tactics in the first assault on Grozny notwithstanding, the Russians had a well-developed doctrine for urban warfare based on their extensive experience both before and after World War II. They used direct-fire artillery, RPGs, automatic grenade fire, and machine guns to provide suppressive fire, smoke bombs to cover approaches to building objectives, demolitions to create entryways, and small teams of infantry to clear buildings room by room. Special assault units proved to be the most effective fighting formations.

---

34 The Russians had also developed a counterinsurgency doctrine in Afghanistan to fight a nonlinear battle with raids and ambushes using spetsnaz, airborne, and air assault units. They found that the key to nonlinear counterinsurgency operations was decentralized command and independent brigade and battalion operations.

35 The Russians basically reinvented the wheel—the lessons they learned in World War II—by creating special units consisting of three mechanized infantry platoons, two
Chechen Strategy and Tactics

For the Chechens an outright military victory was unlikely, so their goal was to inflict as many casualties as possible on the Russian people and erode their will to fight. The Chechens used an “asymmetric” strategy that avoided battle in the open against Russian armor, artillery, and airpower. They sought to even the fight by fighting an infantry war. Time and again, the Chechens forced their Russian counterparts to meet them on the urban battlefield where a Russian infantryman could die just as easily as a Chechen fighter.

The Chechen strategy has been described as the battle for “successive cities.”36 After Grozny fell, the Chechens moved their operations base to Argun, Shali, and other cities to continue the battle of urban attrition. Dudayev deliberately used cities throughout Chechnya as strategic strongpoints from which to defend his country.37 As one Chechen put it, “We were very happy they came into the city because we cannot fight them in an open field.”38

Overall, the Chechens used a mobile area defense. A fixed defense based on strongpoints was vulnerable to Russian firepower, so the

flame-thrower platoons (each with nine Shmel launchers), two air defense guns, one minefield-breaching vehicle, a combat engineer squad, a medical team, and a technical support squad. The minefield-breaching vehicle was the UR-77, which used a rocket-propelled line charge launcher mounted on the rear hull for explosive breaching of mine fields. The Shmel flame-thrower was a favorite among Russian troops. Called “pocket artillery,” the Shmel is a single-shot, disposable weapon that looks like a U.S. light antitank weapon (LAW). It was used against places with confined spaces—such as bunkers or interior rooms—and performed like a fuel air explosive. It was also an effective anti-sniper weapon. See “Russia’s War in Chechnya: Urban Warfare Lessons Learned 1994–96,” p. 9.


Chechens relied more on a fluid and elusive hit-and-run defense.\textsuperscript{39} The mobile Chechens used back alleys, sewers, basements, and destroyed buildings to slip around and through Russian lines. Chechen vehicle detachments transported supplies, weapons, and personnel quickly and easily throughout Grozny. Chechen artillery deployed near schools or hospitals, fired a few rounds, and dispersed to avoid counterbattery fire.\textsuperscript{40}

At the tactical level, the loose organization and command of most of the Chechen volunteer force had both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, independent groups of autonomous units could operate efficiently in the fluid, nonlinear, urban battlefield, helping to alleviate the complex command and control problem. On the other hand, a lack of discipline and responsibility to higher command led some groups to abandon their posts when they got bored or heard shooting elsewhere, leaving crucial posts undefended.\textsuperscript{41}

Most bands wandered about without overall command coordination.

Extensive use of the ambush, fighting at night, and the use of anti-tank hunter-killer teams were the hallmarks of Chechen tactics.\textsuperscript{42} Roving bands of 10–15 men (who could further subdivide into 3- to 4-man cells) would swarm toward the sound of Russian engines and volley fire RPG-7 and RPG-18 antitank missiles from upper-floor windows.\textsuperscript{43} Chechens used classic ambush techniques: wait for a column of vehicles to wander all the way into a kill zone, take out the

\textsuperscript{39}This is not to say that strongpoints were ignored. Three defensive belts were constructed in Grozny. The inner belt consisted of five major fortifications across the streets leading to the presidential palace. See Carl Van Dyke, "Kabul to Grozny: A Critique of Soviet Counter-Insurgency Doctrine," \textit{Journal of Slavic Military Studies}, Vol. 9, No. 4, London: Frank Cass, December 1996, p. 698.

\textsuperscript{40}Thomas, "Some Asymmetric Lessons of Urban Combat."

\textsuperscript{41}For example, soldiers held no rank.

\textsuperscript{42}It should be noted that most Chechens were for the most part inexperienced, although some had fought in Afghanistan, in the Nagorno-Karabakh regional conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, or in the Abkhazia region of Georgia. Chechens were generally excellent shots, most having learned to use a rifle at an early age. The most successful Chechen RPG gunners were usually teenagers as young as 16. Based on commends by Arthur Speyer, RAND/TRADOC/MCWL/OSD Urban Operations Conference, Santa Monica, California, March 22, 2000.

\textsuperscript{43}One Chechen described battle group size as 20 to 50 people. See Spector, "Commuting Warriors in Chechnya."
leading and trailing vehicles to create a trap, and finish off the rest of the vehicles one by one, shooting any survivors as they bailed out. Russian tank armor proved vulnerable to top attack.\textsuperscript{44} The Chechens also booby-trapped bodies, buildings, and obstacles—anything that Russian soldiers might have to move or clean up.\textsuperscript{45}

### The Rest of the Chechen War, Including the Second Battle for Grozny in August 1996

After the first battle for Grozny, Chechen forces continued their retreat southeast to the cities of Gudermes and Shali. When the Russians moved to encircle these smaller cities with armor, the Chechens were forced to evacuate to avoid being captured. Taking casualties from heavy artillery and air bombardment, the Chechens quickly withdrew from villages in the flatlands to the forested foothills and mountains where it was impossible for Russian tanks and IFVs to operate. By May 1995, the Russians controlled the main cities and towns and the Chechens were forced to hole up in the mountains (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{46}

Russian commanders thought the Chechens would find little cover in the mountains, becoming more vulnerable to their airpower.\textsuperscript{47} They also believed the Chechens would find it difficult to support a modern partisan army without aid from abroad. However, the Chechens managed to force a temporary cease-fire with their successful surgi-

\textsuperscript{44} Ninety-eight percent of destroyed Russian tanks were hit where reactive armor could not be placed. The top armor of the T-72 and T-80 tanks, especially the turret roof and engine deck, was thin and easily penetrated by the shaped charge of an RPG warhead. The Russian vehicles were also hampered by an inability to elevate their crew-served weapons in defense.

\textsuperscript{45} Thomas refers to an FBIS article that describes how the Chechens sometimes would put a pet inside a booby-trapped building to attract attention. See Thomas, “The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: The Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya, III. The Battle for Grozny, 1–26 January 1995,” p. 82.

\textsuperscript{46} Geographically, Chechnya lies on the north side of the Caucasus mountain range, more than 1,000 miles south of Moscow. The northern part is a grassy plain, but the heartland is in the south, a wild and rugged region where rivers thread their way through gorges from the ridge of the Caucasus. The high hills are still covered with thick beech forests, useful terrain for guerrilla operations.

cal attack on the Russian city of Budyonnovsk, giving them time to reorganize and consolidate.

The turning point of the war came on August 1996, when the Chechens launched a surprise counteroffensive on Grozny, Argun, and Gudermes to demonstrate to the Russian people that the insurgents could still strike when they wanted. As the North Vietnamese did in their Tet offensive in 1968 in South Vietnam, the Chechens launched a costly attack that no doubt would eventually have ended in failure to achieve a strategic and political goal, in this case to embarrass Yeltsin. The Russian president had just proclaimed the war over and was getting ready to celebrate his inauguration for a second term.\textsuperscript{48} The second battle for Grozny made it obvious to the Russian people that the war was far from over.

Over 1,500 Chechen fighters infiltrated on foot into the city to attack Russian army posts, police stations, and key districts. The entire 12,000-man Russian garrison was pinned down under mortar, machine gun, and sniper attack. Poor Russian morale and a lack of necessary troop strength allowed the Chechens to infiltrate into Grozny with impunity.\textsuperscript{49} Over the course of the next several days, Russian relief columns, tanks, and IFVs attempted to relieve their besieged outposts. All the Russian columns were ambushed and destroyed.

During the Chechen counterattack on Grozny, the Russians lost 500 dead, 1,407 wounded, 182 missing, and an unknown number of casualties among the 300,000 civilians present. Political will power for the war evaporated.\textsuperscript{50} By the end of August, Russian national security adviser Alexander Lebed had brokered a peace deal with Chechen commander Aslan Maskhadov that avoided declaring a victory for either side. It was plain to all who the victor was when all Russian forces were ordered to evacuate Grozny.


\textsuperscript{49}Later, a second wave of 1,500 reserve Chechen fighters infiltrated the city.

\textsuperscript{50}Other factors helped ease the acceptance of a peace agreement. By this time Dudayev was dead. The Russians found his replacement, Maskhadov, much easier to work with. One of the original political reasons for invading Chechnya—the fear of a Caucasus chain reaction of exodus from the Russian Federation—had proved unfounded.
The Chechen War lasted twenty months, killed some 50,000 civilians, 6,000 Russian soldiers, and 2,000–3,000 Chechen fighters, and resulted in an agreement to put off the question of Chechen independence for five years. The Chechens were able to assert their independence from Moscow and Yeltsin was forced to remove all Russian forces from Chechnya.

**Dominant Factors**

The Russians paid heavily for their attacks on the cities of Chechnya for many reasons, most of them related to the steady erosion of the Russian military since the end of the Cold War. Given the number of problems, it would be tedious to list every possible factor that might have influenced the outcome. There were many problems: poor command and control, a shortage of troops, poor training, the refusal of units and commanders to execute orders, low morale, and poor logistics are but a few. This analysis merely describes the significant factors that determined the outcome of this war.

Poor tactics was certainly the main reason for excessive early losses. Sending Russian armor straight into Grozny without infantry support allowed the Chechens to ambush Russian vehicles from overlooking buildings and street corners. The Russians also suffered from poor unity of command at all levels, highlighted by the absurd example of Yeltsin’s declaration of a cease-fire while Russian military commanders simultaneously launched offensive attacks.

---

51In particular, the budget cutbacks after the collapse of the former Soviet Union severely lowered training, morale, and troop quality.

52The focus of the cross-case analysis is on the factors related to recent changes in the nature of MOUT.

53Raymond Finch argues that poor leadership was the main reason why the Russians failed. The issue of absurd orders, the casual disregard for the fate of soldiers, the abysmal conditions of the common soldier, and general corruption were the main leadership failures. See Major Raymond C. Finch III, *Why the Russian Military Failed in Chechnya*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army, Foreign Military Studies Office, 1998. Effective joint operations were difficult, considering the number of services involved. In addition to Ministry of Defense (MoD) forces (generally referred to as the “army”), there were Border troops, Interior troops, the Presidential guard, and forces belonging to 13 other ministries. See Charles J. Dick, “A Bear Without Claws: The Russian Army in the 1990s,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, London: Frank Cass, March 1997.
Lack of training was another important factor behind the Russian failure. Even basic individual and unit skills essential to any combat environment were seriously underdeveloped because of the catastrophic budget cuts of the early 1990s.\(^\text{54}\) Some servicemen did not know how to dig a foxhole, lay mines, prepare sandbagged positions, or fire a machine gun, let alone conduct urban operations.\(^\text{55}\) The Russian army had not had a division-level field exercise since 1992. Helicopter pilots had less than a third of their required flight training. Russian deficiencies in urban operations tactics and training led to appalling losses.

The lack of a professional noncommissioned officer corps in the Russian army only exacerbated the training problem.\(^\text{56}\) Planning suffered as a result.\(^\text{57}\) In 1994, Russian units lacked sufficient numbers of small-unit leaders such as platoon and squad leaders, positions that are crucial in urban operations.\(^\text{58}\)

The Chechens won for many reasons, not the least of which was a defensive strategy that utilized urban operations to negate Russia’s firepower advantage. The Chechens enjoyed some crucial advantages: they fought on their own turf, spoke Russian, and in many cases had served in the Russian army. In the initial battle for Grozny,

---

\(^{\text{54}}\) Declining recruit quality also exacerbated the training problem. Morale and discipline had sagged among the enlisted ranks in the 1990s because of poor pay, poor billets, the domination of barrack blocks by gangs, the absence of a professional noncommissioned officer corps, and dedovshchina, a hazing tradition that made a new Russian recruit 80 percent likely to be beaten up and 5 percent likely to be raped. See Dick, “A Bear Without Claws,” p. 5.

\(^{\text{55}}\) The average Russian infantryman received very little MOUT training. Russian MOUT tactical training for small units consisted of about 5 hours out of 151 total required. See Kostyuchenko, “Grozny’s Lessons.”


\(^{\text{57}}\) For example, during the preparation for the assault on Grozny, no mockups of the city or its individual blocks were used.

\(^{\text{58}}\) The Russian army was short 12,000 platoon leaders in 1994. Urban warfare and counterinsurgency operations place a heavy premium on small-unit commanders. See “The Chechen Conflict: No End of a Lesson?” *Jane’s Intelligence Review—Special Report*, September 1, 1996; see also Zakharchul, “View of a Problem.”
the Chechen defenders outnumbered the attacking Russians 15,000 to 6,000.

Most importantly, though, it was the Russian government’s lack of a political-military strategy that integrated the seemingly disparate elements of the media, PSYOP, and ROE that cost them the war. The success of the Chechen political-military strategy probably serves as a wake-up call for future U.S. adversaries around the world.
### Table 3

**Battle Statistics for Recent MOUT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Strength of U.S. or Russian Forces at Start of Conflict</th>
<th>Strength of Enemy</th>
<th>U.S. or Russian Dead</th>
<th>U.S. or Russian Wounded</th>
<th>Enemy Dead</th>
<th>Enemy Wounded</th>
<th>Noncombatants Killed</th>
<th>Force Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firefight in Mogadishu</td>
<td>140&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; + relief convoys</td>
<td>≥2,000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>814–1,000</td>
<td>&lt;300</td>
<td>1:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OJC</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>4,000–6,000&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>200–300&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle for Grozny I</td>
<td>6,000–8,000&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10,000–15,000&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1,100–8,000&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5,000–6,000&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3,000–6,690&lt;sup&gt;h&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>24,000–25,000&lt;sup&gt;i&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle for Grozny II</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>500–1,000</td>
<td>1,407 (182 MIA)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechen War</td>
<td>20,000–40,000&lt;sup&gt;j&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15,000&lt;sup&gt;k&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>&gt;13,000&lt;sup&gt;l&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2,000–3,000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>25,000–80,000&lt;sup&gt;m&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** This table presents approximate figures only. Both sides tended to distort casualties figures for propaganda purposes, so it is extremely difficult to make precise estimates. The reader should also note that strength numbers are given for the start of the conflict. Actual strength varied over the course of each conflict, especially in the Battle for Grozny I, when considerable Russian reinforcements were later sent into battle.

<sup>a</sup>This approximate figure includes the helicopter crews with the assault force of about 75 Rangers and 40 Delta Force troops.

<sup>b</sup>The PDF contained about 15,000 men, with an effective combat strength between 4,000 and 6,000. McConnell (1991), p. 30, and Cole (1995).


<sup>d</sup>One writer estimates that federal forces numbered 8,000 by February 1, 1995. See Korbut (1999).

<sup>e</sup>A recent estimate places Russian troop strength at 10,000. See Mukhin and Yavorskiy (2000).
This is an estimate of casualties up to February 10, from Novichkov et al. (1995). Mukhin and Yavorskiy (2000) estimate 1,500 were killed.

See Novichkov et al. (1995) and Grishin (1996).


Initially Grachev used a force of about 23,800 men, 80 tanks, 208 APC/IFVs, and 182 artillery pieces. Later, the Russian force grew to 38,000 men, 230 tanks, 454 APC/IFVs, and 388 artillery pieces. Lieven (1998, p. 280) believes about 40,000 Russian troops entered Chechnya, but because many Russian units were seriously understrength, the number may have been as low as 20,000.

See Raevsky (1995), who also cites Russian sources indicating that 10,000 Chechens were waiting in Grozny. Thomas (1995, p. 30) cites Russian estimates of 11,000–12,000 Chechens.

This is an estimate of Russian MOD wounded as of August 30, 1996. See Grishin (1996).

The Russian national security advisor, Alexander Lebed, estimated that 80,000 civilians were killed in the fighting in Chechnya. In contrast, journalist Anatol Lieven (1998, p. 108) believes the Lebed figures are exaggerated and that perhaps only 25,000 Chechen civilians died in the entire war.