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The Tactics of Insurgent Groups in the Republic of Chechnya

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Introduction

The current situation in Russia, the United States, the Middle East and many other countries, clearly highlights the problem of the war against terrorism. Today's terrorism is neither desperate nor isolated. In Russia it is amply financed, well led and efficiently organized into battalions, companies, platoons and squads. The terrorist organization here in Russia includes all the essential military specialties -- combat engineers and demolition specialists, snipers, RPG gunners, combat-vehicle drivers, and so on.

Russia has encountered these problems before, during the Caucasus War and the war in Afghanistan, and it is facing them again today as it carries out counter-terrorist measures in the Chechen Republic. The classic elements of combat as taught in our military academies, e.g., army and front operations encompassing hundreds of miles of territory, are not applicable in today's world, even though their study remains important. Increasingly, Russia's military academies are emphasizing combat actions in local conflicts. Today's focus is on the lessons learned in Afghanistan from 1979-1989 and on Russia's current daily experience in the Northern Caucasus region.

North-Caucasus Insurgent Groups: Methods and Tactics

The units of Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs [hereafter, "MVD"] are currently working to uphold law and order and provide public security in the North Caucasus region, where they confront various types of armed organizations. These groups are generally located on Chechen territory, and the Russian military commonly refer to them as illegal armed formations. Enemy actions in Russia's North Caucasus can be described as guerilla actions, since they take place on territory that the enemy knows well, and because the primary tactics used are raids and ambushes.

These insurgent groups are nothing new to MVD organizations or troops. During the Soviet period the MVD dealt with “hot spots” for more than 50 years, including those in Central Asia, the Northern Caucasus, Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, and the Baltic states.

Today’s experience shows that rebel detachments of 60-100 people are formed locally and become parts of larger units under a unified command. While they are deployed over a vast area, they all operate with a single intent. Although their basic weapon is the rifle, they also possess modern heavy weapons, including anti-aircraft missile systems, recoilless rifles and mortars.

When the first Chechen conflict began in 1994, Russian troops encountered Chechnya’s well-organized, standing armed forces. These forces had practically all branches of arms equipped with the corresponding weapons and hardware. As the conflict developed and their hardware was lost, armed bands switched over to partisan tactics where heavy equipment becomes a burden and cannot be fully exploited.

The insurgents obtain weapons primarily by capturing them from Russian troops in ambushes and raids. They also acquire them illegally through third countries with the help of their principal financial benefactors.

The structure of the insurgent groups generally includes: a field commander and one or two deputies who make up his staff (typically the latter are trained former soldiers or MVD personnel); a team that protects the commander -- this bodyguard team accompanies the leader and protects him during a temporary halt or when he is in a base camp; a recon team and a network of scouts (the latter may be local civilians who are not directly a part of the detachment); signalmen; special forces; snipers; and riflemen. Additional specially designated insurgents support the detachment by obtaining food, ammunition and other necessities, as well as by conducting liaison. The groups also organize security and counter-intelligence services.

Detachments consist primarily of well-trained personnel ranging in age from 20 to 50. They are usually volunteers, but conscription of the male population is also an option. Insurgents who have been forcibly conscripted are inferior to volunteers in terms of training, combat qualities, and mental preparation for combat against the forces of order.

A significant number of ex-convicts who have been released from penal colonies, holding camps and prisons help fill the ranks of the insurgent detachments. Criminals who have outstanding arrest warrants also find cover and shelter in these armed bands. Thus, it comes as no surprise that these groups successfully employ such tactics as robbery, plundering, marauding and violence as common tactics.

Detachments generally are regional. Residents of a single village band together in so-called “self-defense detachments.” Residents of a single county area are formed into “national militia brigades and regiments of Chechnya.” These detachments fight only in the areas from which they are drawn.

When estimating the composition and numbers of the insurgent groups, their “reserves” must also be considered. These are sympathetic groups of the populace who have permanent places of residence and are outwardly law-abiding citizens but who almost always have hidden weapons caches. Former members of the insurgent groups may also belong to the reserve. These are people who, during disarmament programs, “voluntarily” refused to support the insurgents, laid down their arms, and gained legal status. From time to time, these two types of reserves merge into active rebel detachments to take part in large-scale actions. They also perform intelligence work and spread disinformation among the forces of order.

Experience in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and especially in Chechnya shows that the insurgent groups also include mercenaries and volunteers from other regions and from abroad. The mercenaries are the best-trained and most combat-ready fighters and are utilized for the most difficult missions that require a high degree of competence. They also work as advisors for detachment commanders and as instructors at training centers. They may be combined into separate detachments (or comprise their core) that are used for specific combat involving terror and special actions.

Although the basic contingent of the insurgents has already served in the military and undergone military training, their centralized leadership sets up training centers or schools. This is chiefly because carrying out terrorist actions in a guerilla war requires special skills, knowledge and abilities.

The insurgents are trained primarily in weapons, raids, terrorism, field survival, and camouflage. Another area of training is the use of propaganda with the local populace. The training centers train the insurgents fairly well.

Analysis of numerous conflicts demonstrates the high degree of effectiveness of insurgent groups. A key factor in their success is their use of lessons learned from the history of past partisan warfare. A veteran of the Afghanistan conflict shared his personal experiences in his book, *Tactics of Armed Groups*. But the book begins with the experience of fighting the Bashmakhi Movement (1918-1933) in Soviet Central Asia. Small insurgent detachments of 10-15 or more attacked small garrisons, command points, vehicle columns and individual groups of soldiers. They also hit poorly guarded administrative and economic targets. When necessary for more difficult actions, the groups and detachments would combine into larger groups of 500-900 men or more. In these situations the insurgent tactics did not differ greatly from those of regular forces.

“All of the following were typical mujahideen actions: careful consideration of the correlation of forces and means; comprehensive preparation for combat; extensive use of ambushes, land mines, and barriers made by blowing up roads, bridges, dams and tunnels; well-organized reconnaissance utilizing various sources (the local population, counter-revolutionary elements of the army, state security bodies, state institutions); carrying out raids and acts of terror by disrupting transport and attacking outposts, and striking economic and military targets.”

Thus, the tactics of these armed groups are based on the following principles:

- Close ties with the local populace;
- Actions carried out primarily by small detachments and teams;
- Knowledge and skillful use of terrain; laying ambushes at tactically advantageous points;
- Active use of conditions of limited visibility, especially darkness;
- Careful selection of objectives and development of simple, realistic plans of action;
- Preceding their actions with thorough reconnaissance (even when not attacking, the insurgents diligently and attentively monitor the actions of soldiers and police forces);
- Secret and surprise actions, use of military cunning;
- Suddenly opening fire at close range and then retreating to safety;
- While withdrawing, leaving in place small ambushes and individual insurgents who fire from narrow and barely maneuverable spots, thus covering the retreat of the other insurgents and inflicting losses on pursuers;
- Close coordination among detachment personnel during any actions;
- Reliance on the exhaustion of law-enforcement personnel;
- Psychological support of their activities;
- Well-organized security and intelligence.

Expanding these Principles

Maintaining close ties with the local populace is a fundamental principle in the operation of insurgent groups. The locals provide them with personnel, food, clothing, storage facilities, medical aid and sometimes direct military help. This is by no means a complete list of the “services” the locals provide. That is why the separatist organizers instill in the locals the idea that the rebel detachments are “defenders of the people.” Therefore, the insurgents spread false information and lies about vicious acts supposedly committed by the forces of law and order.^[2]

The slightest hint of any loyalty on the part of the local population toward the federal forces is brutally crushed, even if that means killing the people involved.

The most widespread insurgent technique is the use of small detachments over a large amount of territory, thus creating the effect of a “universal presence.”

Describing this tactic in 1962, US President John Kennedy stated: “War with insurgents, partisans and bands is a new type of war, new in its intensity and old in its origins, a war that uses infiltration rather than attack, a war where victory is achieved by taxing and exhausting the forces of the opponent rather than by destroying him. It requires new strategy and tactics, specialized forces and new forms of combat.”

The insurgents compel the forces of order to operate in small units separated by a considerable distance from one another without mutual fire and communications support. Working in small groups, the rebels are able to tie down large formations.

The insurgents also make full use of darkness. It provides them with concealment and the element of surprise, causes disorientation and panic among the personnel being attacked, disrupts command and control, and ultimately helps the insurgents achieve success even against numerically stronger forces.

At night the insurgents combine surprise attacks with withdrawal along previously chosen routes, along which they lay ambushes. They also deliberately “point” the pursuers toward nearby posts and garrisons of other federal troops. When they succeed in doing this, the slightest error in coordination and communications results in the federal forces firing on one another.

Night is also used for provocations during armistices or when negotiations are underway. The insurgent leaders then usually blame these provocations on third parties or on the forces of law and order themselves.

Exhaustion of the enemy is generally regarded as one of the most important insurgent goals. As Chechen separatist leader Dudayev put it: “We will operate so that not a single occupying soldier will be able to walk freely on Chechen land. Whether he is on the move, in his base camp, sleeping, or eating, he will be in a constant sense of fear.”^[3]

Another time-honored insurgent principle is to propagate psychological support for their subversive activity. The importance of this principle is constantly increasing. The primary goals of psychological actions include maintaining the combat morale of detachment personnel; supporting their authority among the local population; and demoralizing the forces of order. Radio, television and the press (both local and foreign) are widely used for this purpose. The media are used to disseminate lies or distort the facts.

The tactics of the insurgent groups are active and audacious. It is extremely rare for them to go on the defensive. They do so only in exceptional cases -- when defending base camps and selected built-up areas or when their detachments are surrounded or threatened.

Once the forces of order have established control over an entire area or most of an area, the insurgents shift to guerilla warfare. Their most common methods involve ambushing lines of communications and attacking small garrisons. Today the following are also typical partisan acts: extensive use of mines and booby traps; widespread use of snipers; the conduct of large-scale terrorist actions involving the taking of hostages, as occurred in Budyonovsk, Kizlyar, and Pervomaysk.^[4]

Rebel commanders rely on the following principles as they plan their guerilla actions:

- Do not enter into direct combat; break off from the forces of order and take up new, better positions;
- Never remain in contact with the forces of order for very long; try to withdraw unnoticed and take up new, advantageous positions or move to hideouts;
- Attempt large-scale strikes on federal forces only when sufficient rebel forces are available;
- Use small units to attack individual soldiers, obtain weapons, or repel blows;
- Maintain psychological pressure on the forces of order by firing on them regularly;
- Use mortars, self-propelled howitzers and other heavy weapons when attacking important objectives and fortified positions, since significant forces are concentrated in these small

sectors, and concentrated fire from “nomadic” weapons can inflict heavy losses on such forces;

- If the forces of order launch a surprise attack on a broad front, conduct an organized withdrawal in small groups while deploying ambushes and delivering retaliatory fire.

Attacks

Guard posts, regimental command posts, police headquarters, military headquarters, air fields and warehouses are the most commonly attacked objectives. The goal is to damage, destroy or capture them. Careful reconnaissance and skillful disinformation precede the attacks, with the locals assisting in the disinformation activities. The insurgents study the approaches to the objectives, guard systems, communications, and obstacles, and the weapons positions. They also determine the reinforcement capabilities (composition, movement times and routes) of defending troops. Surprise is always used. A group of about 30 men carry out the attack; these are divided into point recon, guard take-down, a covering team and the main body (the assault force). Sometimes a special diversionary group may be designated.

The point recon team moves toward the objective, noting any recent changes in the guard system, as well as the most advantageous axes for the attack and subsequent withdrawal. If the recon team has an unexpected encounter with superior forces, it withdraws laterally away from its main body. The team coordinates this with the main body in an effort to lead the MVD force into a fire sac. On occasion the point recon is conducted by insurgent accomplices drawn from the local population.

The covering group covertly assumes positions near the objective. It blocks the potential maneuver routes of local rapid-response or reserve forces and the lines of movement of the larger reserves of the federal forces that have been designated to assist the garrison forces and sentries. During the attack the covering group provides fire support to the main force and then covers the detachment's withdrawal.

Moving behind the covering group, the main assault force uses a surprise attack to capture or destroy the objective. If it proves impossible to hold the objective, or if that was not the goal, the detachment leaves the objective and quickly dissolves into small groups.

The attack on Regimental CP #10 on 20 January 1996 provides a typical example.^[5] As darkness fell, a team of about 10-12 insurgents surrounded the CP unnoticed at a distance of 70-100 meters and opened close-range fire from five directions simultaneously. Several personnel were injured, two armored personnel carriers were destroyed, command and control was lost, and the fire system was disrupted. In the resulting confusion, security personnel left their posts and withdrew haphazardly to the regimental field site.

On 31 May 1996 a rebel detachment captured a regimental CP near Shuanya. The attack had been preceded by a detailed study of the daily routine at a number of regimental CPs in the Nozhayt-Yurtov, Kurchaloyev, and Gudermes areas of the Chechen Republic. The insurgents chose the least fortified post, one that was also badly situated in a basin between two hills. These factors made it possible for the insurgents to surround the force. Before dusk they conducted

intense fire on the CP for about an hour using mortars, anti-tank guided rockets, grenade launchers and rifles. In the first few minutes of the battle they destroyed an armored personnel carrier and a maintenance-transport vehicle, blew up ammunition stockpiles, and knocked a field radio station off the air. At the same time, the insurgents' covering group mined the approach routes for any reserves, while diversionary groups fired on neighboring military forces. The crew of a ZU-23-2 [a 23mm self-propelled anti-aircraft gun that can be used in ground combat] that was supposed to be on alert was on a detail some 70 meters away from its weapon and was cut off from it. All defenders' ammunition was expended due to their undisciplined fire to repel the attack and the failure of the commanders to control that fire. Having thus "disarmed" the garrison, the insurgents captured 26 men who were unable to offer any further resistance -- two officers, five sergeants and 19 soldiers). They also seized a BTR-80 armored personnel carrier, a ZIL-131 Russian radio truck, a ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft gun, an AGS-17 grenade launcher, and all the defenders' small arms.

A detailed review of the capture of this command post indicated that the "friendly" relations that personnel had established with the local population helped make the attack successful.

These examples are not isolated incidents. Local residents would continuously show up near the locations of the federal forces' garrisons (sentries), never showing any aggressive intentions. They would make contact with service personnel, bring them food, cigarettes, liquor, buy fuel and lubricants, or offer to buy ammunition. Once the personnel or individual soldiers relaxed their vigilance, the locals would make a preliminary agreement to sell the personnel something, such as liquor. Generally at dusk when it was time to change the sentry, they would arrive to hand over their "merchandise." Having gotten close enough to the soldiers, they would quickly overpower and disarm them. They would then also disarm, capture or kill the remaining personnel.

In addition to attacking with the goal of destroying or exhausting personnel, the insurgents conduct systematic fire on front-line garrisons (sentries) of the federal forces. They operate in groups of 5-10, primarily after dark. As a rule, several groups aim at a single objective. One member of a group draws fire on himself, after which the others fire on the answering weapons from other directions.

The insurgents also conduct "drive-by" shootings from rapidly moving vehicles passing by federal forces.

Snipers

Snipers represent a huge threat to the Russian forces of order. In a whole series of conflicts the impact of sniper actions has been so great that some experts rightly refer to a "sniper war."

Snipers are equipped with special sniper weapons, as well as with automatic weapons and rifles (including sporting rifles) that have been adapted for sniper purposes.

The typical individual sniper is a professional who plans his actions in detail, selects advantageous and little-noticed positions in attics, upper stories of buildings (in corner apartments that allow firing in several directions), factory smokestacks, and in tower cranes and traveling-and-overhead cranes. These positions may also be equipped as hideouts where weapons and munitions are concealed.

The snipers are skilled at creating the right conditions for killing the maximum possible number of people in a single action. After wounding one soldier, usually in the extremities, the sniper inflicts similar wounds on fellow soldiers or medical personnel who come to the injured person's aid. Then the sniper finishes them all off. The primary victims of snipers are personnel who are defenseless.^[6]

The insurgents make successful use of snipers and sniper teams as a part of their combat groups that fire on troops. A group may include one or two snipers (an observer and a shooter), as well as combat engineers who mine the firing position after withdrawal. After occupying dominant buildings or the lower floors of buildings near areas where Russian forces are situated (or locations where they are serving), the group opens fire on the objective, sometimes at random. Utilizing the noise of the battle, the sniper selects and destroys the most important targets.

Ambushes

Laying an ambush is the most efficient and frequently used method of partisan warfare.

The most likely spots for ambushes are bridges, confined areas, hidden turns in a road, the slopes and crests of hills, large forests, passes and gorges. In all instances the location and equipment are very carefully chosen. The choice must assure concealment of the ambush's location, the element of surprise, effective fire of the munitions/weapons used, and the opportunity for rapid withdrawal.

In terms of their purpose, ambushes may be intended either to impede, or to destroy (or capture). The choice of the type of ambush depends directly on the combat situation, the correlation of forces, terrain, etc. If the purpose is to delay the movement of forces and assets, to alter their direction, or to force a premature deployment into combat positions, then a significantly smaller force is needed than for ambushes to destroy or capture. Whereas it only takes a few people to detain a company-size or smaller unit for several hours, destroying that same unit requires a militant force of a comparable size.

Depending on the location, the tactical formation and the method of action, ambushes may be head-on (meeting), parallel, or circular. The meeting method of ambush is usually stationary and is set up on the movement route of the units with the goal of pinning them down or destroying the advance units. This method is often used on small units and the transport assets that follow behind them independently. The ambush site is set up well in advance, reserve and false positions are prepared, and withdrawal routes are designated. The meeting ambush is often used in combination with a simultaneous feint on some other objective in order to cause reserve forces to move toward that objective.

In the parallel ambush, the militant forces constantly move along a convoy's axis of advance. The objectives of the parallel-ambush attack are the convoy security force, reconnaissance, rear columns, and sometimes the main force. In this case the insurgent main body is dispersed and sited along the movement route on one or both sides.

The circular ambush is the most difficult of the three types to prepare and execute. In anticipation of movement by federal forces and assets, groups of insurgents position themselves along the perimeter of a pre-selected area. The first group opens fire on the convoy's flank, initiating the battle, and then withdraws, drawing the convoy's attention toward itself. The other groups act in a similar manner, thus forcing the federal forces and assets to advance in various directions or repel attacks from several directions. In certain circumstances the ambushed force may lose control of the situation, including losing its command and control. If that happens, the ambushed force is doomed.

Depending on the mission, ambushes are usually carried out by forces of 10-20 people, although sometimes ambush forces exceed 100. In the latter case, the insurgents are usually positioned along several lines.

The composition of the ambushing detachment varies depending on the goal and the availability of forces. It may include: a fire or strike group; a diversionary group; a group that impedes the maneuver or withdrawal of federal forces (pins them down); a reserve group; and a group that observes, handles communications, and informs. If the detachment has heavy weapons, there will also be a transport group.

The primary force is the fire or strike group that kills people and destroys equipment. It is positioned near the zone of the planned actions and includes riflemen; a snatch group for capturing prisoners and weapons; and demolitions specialists.

The diversionary group positions itself at some distance from the ambush kill zone. Its mission is to draw the retaliatory fire of the security force and sometimes of the main force, as well as to support the surprise actions of the strike group. The diversionary group is the first to act. The signal to begin may be the explosion of a mine or demolition charge. Sometimes the diversionary group is positioned along the same axis as the strike group and fires on the approaching forces from a greater distance, then withdraws. As members of the attacked force give pursuit, they open themselves to a flank attack.

The group that impedes the maneuver and withdrawal of the federal forces and assets (pins them down) occupies positions along the presumed axes of their actions -- usually along the only possible axes. The group commonly lays out land mines and other obstacles along these axes.

If necessary, the reserve group reinforces the strike group or the blocking group. Its mission is to support the main force's exit from the battle. It is responsible for monitoring the situation and for covering the detachment's flanks and rear.

The group that observes, communicates and informs does not participate in the battle. Its concern is reconnaissance, determining the time when the federal forces will move out from their encampment area, as well as the composition and direction of their movement. The insurgents in this group actively listen in on conversations over non-secure radio nets and follow the convoys. Information on movement is promptly reported to the detachment's main force. Personnel in this group can operate without weapons; they "land" like a bird on the convoy's tail and later pass it as though they are just a random vehicle.

The transport group is spread out in hideouts along the lines of the detachment's planned withdrawal. It stands ready to evacuate the detachment and any prisoners or weapons that are taken.

Typically an ambush lets scouts and security elements who are moving ahead of the convoy pass. Using a remotely controlled blast mine, the insurgents knock out the forward vehicles of the main force, after which they concentrate their fire on command vehicles and the center of the convoy. Tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers and any heavy weaponry are the priority targets.

In one successful rebel action, a logistics convoy of an MoD infantry regiment was ambushed near an observation post in the area of Yaryshmarda. Working in advance, the insurgents rigged a remotely controlled blast mine in a road that ran along the western edge of the area's defense. The convoy's lead tank was blown up by the mine. Next, the BMD-1 command vehicle was destroyed, killing the convoy's commander and its forward air controller. The insurgents jammed the UHF command frequency to sever the convoy's communications with its base of operation. Firing for about 90 minutes at close range from prepared positions, the insurgents killed most of the personnel and destroyed nearly all the equipment. The operation involved two detachments and four combat teams with a total of 150 insurgents.

The insurgents often set up active ambushes in order to kill the greatest possible number of personnel. They plant guides among the local population to steer the federal forces (recon, guards, small convoys, etc.) directly to these active ambushes.

Terrorism

Terrorism is one of the most effective weapons in the insurgents' arsenal and includes a broad spectrum of actions. They may capture individual service personnel or civilians, taking unprecedented numbers of hostages, perhaps hundreds. They may also blow up facilities and kill high-level officials in the process. Terrorist actions are calculated to have the greatest possible psychological impact not only on military personnel but also on the civilian population of entire regions.

To achieve their assigned tasks, the insurgents often employ the classic terrorist arsenal, such as raids, hostage taking, blackmail, and threats. The terrorist actions are marked by their surprise, audacity, cunning, resolve, and cruelty.

Hostage taking has a special place in the terrorist arsenal. Field commanders and individual rebel groups use this method to defeat the Russian forces and to exchange the hostages for insurgents that have been detained. They also take hostages just to collect the ransom money. Insurgents do not attempt hostage taking against units of MVD troops or police who remain cautious and alert, set up 360-degree observation, are constantly ready to repel an attack, and do not enter into unofficial contact with the locals. On the other hand, carelessness and self-assurance on the part of commanders, soldiers or police create the right conditions for and provoke their being taken hostage.

A typical example of hostage taking occurred on 12 December 1994 during the initial movement of federal troops into Chechnya. The incident was carried out by local residents during an anti-military rally as the troops were leaving Khasavyurt in the Dagestan Republic. An MVD military convoy was blocked. Insurgents hidden among the crowd and disguised as women and children moved close to the convoy vehicles. Threatening the personnel with weapons and hand grenades, the insurgents captured 40 service personnel, two APCs, and a ZIL 131 vehicle. To prevent any maneuver by the convoy, heavy vehicles had been placed in advance in neighboring streets to close them off. Reasons for this capture included a badly chosen route; indecisiveness on the part of commanders and soldiers; and a loss of vigilance and combat alertness.

Hostage taking of individual police, service members, or small groups usually follows a set pattern. Generally the insurgents select a location far enough away from where an MVD or other military unit is positioned so that no signal of the attack can be picked up and assistance cannot arrive in time. Preferred areas include market places, coffee houses, food stands, and water sources. By observing over a period of several days, the insurgents determine at what time and how many personnel appear, as well as their intentions and the nature of their actions. For their attack the insurgents choose a moment when the planned targets are in no position to repel them, such as when their hands are busy or when their attention is distracted, as at a market place or in a coffee house. There are always two to three times more attackers than targeted victims, and they are usually armed with small-caliber weapons and grenades. The insurgent team divides itself into an attack team of two or three people and a team for cover and evacuation. The latter team consists of two or three people in light vehicles located at set distances along the withdrawal route.

In all instances the insurgents are audacious and try to get right up next to their intended victims. They then use a weapon to threaten, suppress and demoralize them. In this kind of situation a person who is not sufficiently cool-headed or lacks decisiveness loses his ability to resist. Further, a victim who tries to resist is killed immediately.

Sometimes undisciplined personnel are lured to apartments or houses under various pretexts. Teenagers or young men of about the same age as the target form an acquaintance with him. At some point the potential hostage is invited to an apartment or house that he knows. From there, under some harmless pretext he is taken to a different place where the capture is made. It is personnel who enter into unofficial relationships with the local population who become the targets of such actions. Further, in addition to planned actions, the insurgents exploit any oversight or lack of discipline.

The hostages are held in special, well-guarded camps and field prisons located in hard-to-access areas. Often the insurgent detachments trade the hostages among one another for work details, resulting in various calculations among the detachments. Sometimes ransom is demanded from relatives of the hostages. Some of the prisoners -- those who cannot be used for ransom or exchanged for insurgents that have been captured by the federal forces -- are used for “show” executions that are videotaped and distributed among the local population. The tapes are also used to demoralize and frighten federal troops.

Although the insurgent groups generally operate near their bases, they sometimes conduct raids. Typically this involves mercenary detachments. These raids involve covert movement along planned routes in combination with other attacks and the laying of ambushes.

Infiltration is the primary method used to concentrate the necessary forces and assets in the area of a large-scale action. In this method, unarmed insurgents move completely legally along several routes. Pretending to be local residents, they move in small groups or individually, passing through checkpoints and then moving to a staging area or arms room. Weapons are brought in advance or are transported on large-capacity vehicles hidden under cargo that is virtually impossible to inspect, such as agricultural products or other loose materials. The insurgents, who carefully observe the checkpoints of the Russian forces, determine in advance which types of cargo are not inspected and which duty personnel are not vigilant. Bribery is also used.

Mines

Mine warfare is an indispensable part of any partisan movement, and there is no limit to the scope, place or time of its use. The insurgents generally use Russian-made mines, including anti-tank mines TM-57 (pressure-operated blast mine) and TM-62, anti-personnel mines PMN-2 (blast mine), OZM-72 (bounding, fragmentation mine) and MON-50 or MON-100 (directional fragmentation mines), home-made blast mines, and grenades with trip wires.

The insurgents use mostly blast mines and individual mines along roadways. They prefer remotely detonated (using wires), hand-made blast mines of three types: those that destroy combat equipment; those that destroy personnel mounted on assault vehicles; and combinations of the two. A blast mine consists of one or several types of ammunition (usually artillery rounds) of various caliber, an electrical blasting cap, an extra charge of TNT and an ignition wire. It may be set up on the road surface, on the shoulder (about 2-8 meters apart), or in sewer lines. Sometimes the charge is placed on the ground disguised as a pile of trash, construction materials, etc. In order to increase the destructive effect, the charge may be covered with scraps of metal or wrapped in screws, bolts and other metal objects.

These demolition charges are also placed in destroyed or burned-out vehicles and equipment. When the charge explodes, it sends out a powerful torrent of fragments, killing personnel in a radius of up to 70 meters.

On mountain roads the insurgents set up explosive devices in the tops of trees or on rocky hillsides.

In addition to blast mines that are remotely controlled, anti-tank mines and contact mines are also widely used.

In built-up areas and in mountainous, forested areas, the insurgents set up explosive devices, improvising with various types of trip wires. Among the latter, “spider webs” are used. They may be horizontal, vertical or a combination of the two and are made of wire from the guidance system of anti-tank guided rockets, small switches and tree branches, brush, etc. The height at which the wire is set up varies. False wires are also used.

When a combination of explosive devices is used, one demolition charge is set up on the roadway surface to destroy vehicles, and a second charge (one or more remotely controlled fragmentation mines) is set up at a certain height (on a hill, a tree, or a post, etc.) to destroy the assault force. These devices are detonated simultaneously or nearly so. To determine the exact time of the explosion, an orientation point (a “sight”) is set up. This “sight” is composed of several easily visible objects that attract no attention and are aligned with the planned target. The demolition man is concealed about 500-1000 meters from the charge. As soon as the intended target is aligned with the orientation marker, i.e., is in the “sight,” the demolition man detonates the charge.

The cunning, inventiveness and insidiousness of the insurgents are without limit. They use extremely diverse methods for setting up various types of mines. In one example, a 5-10 kg explosive charge was placed in a roadbed, and a MON-50 directional fragmentation mine was concealed in the lamp of a power-line pole located right beside the road. Contact wires were run between the power plate and a removable device on the power line. When the armored target entered the kill zone, voltage was sent to the electrical blasting cap. The explosion knocked out the armored vehicle and the downward-directed fragmentation mine simultaneously destroyed the personnel riding on the armor.

When setting up explosives, in addition to standard explosives the insurgents use anti-lift devices, such as hand grenades, where the grenades’ fuse spoons are held down by the mines.

Both the Russian forces and the insurgents are benefiting from new combat assets, and these assets help the latter perfect their tactics. Nevertheless, the fundamentals on which the insurgents rely in their armed struggle with the forces of order remain virtually unshakeable -- they are the principles of guerilla warfare.

Conclusion

To do combat with the insurgent groups you must know their tactics well, their strong points and their weak. If necessary you must be able to use their own methods against them. All of the actions and daily activities of our troops are subject to planning, whereas it is impossible to predict the actions of the armed bands. Therein lies the greatest challenge in doing combat with them. We must guard ourselves as we fight them.

A knowledge of the principles of guerilla warfare; the ability to counter the cunning and insidiousness of the insurgents; combat methods that are intelligent and correctly selected; and a well-organized intelligence effort -- all of these will provide the basis for success for the MVD and its Internal Troops in the North Caucasus region.

[1] This article is the translated text of a talk Colonel Kulikov gave at Fort Leavenworth's Command and General Staff College in December, 2002. Colonel Kulikov is an active duty officer serving in the Internal Troops of Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). He was an MVD special forces commander during the second Chechen war (1999-present) and a liaison officer between the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) Armed Forces and Russia's Internal Troops (VV MVD) during the first Chechen war (1994-1996). [Note: Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) has its own troops that currently number about 200,000. Russia has used its MVD troops heavily in Chechnya. --Trans.]

[2] Col. Kulikov refers to the Russian Federal Forces as the "forces of law and order" [*sily pravoporyadka*] This group includes Russian Interior Ministry (MVD) troops and police, as well as Ministry of Defense forces. --Trans.

[3] Dzhokar Dudayev was the President of the Chechen Republic when the first Chechen war started in 1994. He was killed by a rocket in April 1996. --Ed.

[4] Hostages were taken in Budyonovsk in June 1995 and at Kizlyar and Pervomaysk in January 1996. --Ed.

[5] The author gives no indication as to where in Chechnya CP #10 was located. --Ed.

[6] Note: In both Chechen conflicts, Russian forces have reported the Chechen use of female snipers. --Ed..