

Dissertation title: The Authoritarian Shortcut: Russia's Unorthodox Population-Centric Counterinsurgency during the Second Chechen War and Strategic Implications for Western Military Planners.

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Abstract

For authoritarian incumbents, waging counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare is often a wantonly cruel, yet remarkably successful business. While previous research has shown that authoritarian regimes employ a wide array of kinetic and non-kinetic techniques to suppress insurgency, the authoritarian model of COIN warfare remains heavily under-theorised. This study proposes a novel theoretical framework expounding the logic of authoritarian COIN operations and empirically examines its mechanisms by looking at Russia's COIN experience during the Second Chechen War. In investigating the strategic rationale underpinning the authoritarian toolkit of COIN measures, this research aims at establishing whether authoritarian counterinsurgents can effectively deliver mission success. Drawing upon a large pool of secondary sources and primary data collected during face-to-face interviews with eyewitnesses of the Chechen conflict, this study demonstrates that Moscow prevailed against the rebels by resorting to a sophisticated combination of heavy-handed intelligence, information, military, political, and economic measures. Although victimising civilian populations in wartime constitutes an ethically controversial practice, Russia's COIN experience demonstrates to a Western audience that the calibrated use of coercion can contribute to minimise and deter pro-insurgent popular mobilisation. Future research is warranted to determine whether a combination of coercive and persuasive measures could assist democratic states in further improving their strategic blueprints for COIN warfare.