

# *Caucasus Belli*: New Perspectives on Russia's Quagmire

BRIAN GLYN WILLIAMS

Baiev, Khassan, with Ruth and Nicholas Daniloff. *The Oath: A Surgeon under Fire*. New York; Walker & Company, 2003. xxii + 376 pp. \$26.00. ISBN 0-8027-1404-8.

Evangelista, Matthew. *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2002. xii + 244 pp. \$19.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8157-2499-3.

Tishkov, Valery. *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. xx + 284 pp. \$19.95 (paper). ISBN 0-520-23888-5.

Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. viii + 224 pp. \$25.00. ISBN 0-226-674342-0.

For those studying the transcontinental Russian Federation as it attempts to forge its post-Soviet identity, there is very little debate concerning the seismic importance of events in Connecticut-sized Chechnya. The wars in Chechnya have led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Chechens who are *nominally* Russian citizens and to the displacement of half a million others. The two wars have also led to the death of between fourteen thousand and sixteen thousand Russian Federal soldiers (that is, a number that surpasses the Soviet Union's losses in *ten years* of fighting in the Texas-sized country of Afghanistan) and the maiming of thousands more. The two wars have also seen Grozny, the largest city in the North Caucasus, literally wiped off the map. (For those who are unaware that a city the size of Little Rock, Arkansas, was tactically obliterated in Hiroshimaesque fashion in 1999 see the stunning satellite images and photographs from the streets of Grozny at [freechechnya.org](http://freechechnya.org).)

The ongoing wars have also had a ripple-effect. The entire strategic north Caucasus flank has been destabilized, especially the neighboring republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, Ossetia, and Karachay-Balkaria (not to mention the former Soviet republic of Georgia), all of which have seen spillover from the fighting/terrorism in Chechnya. The wars have also cost the Russian Federation billions in funds and resources that are vitally needed elsewhere. And in a self-fulfilling prophecy, the Russian Federation's wars on Chechen secular-nationalist separatism (described in the Yeltsin years as a war on "bandits" and

now as a “war on international terrorism”) have driven former Soviet citizens of Chechen extraction into the arms of Al Qaeda-style foreign *ihadists*. If this were not enough, the wars have led to the rise of Vladimir Putin, who has stripped away the autonomy of Russia’s provinces and dismantled much of the free media and civil society built during the Yeltsin years.

By any standards the conflict in Chechnya has not been the “small victorious war” promised; rather, it has been an economic, political and human rights calamity with far reaching ramifications for the development of post-Soviet Russian society, and these wars will continue to impact Russia for the foreseeable future. The Putin administration, which rose to power on the promise to “clean out the shit house of Chechnya,” does not appear to have an exit strategy. Having so closely linked themselves to the success of their own version of America’s “shock and awe” campaign, the coterie of former KGBniks, politicians, and generals around Putin cannot just walk away from Chechnya as Yeltsin did in 1996.

The carnage in Chechnya will thus continue to plague Russia for some time to come; that is, until the Russian Federal forces find a miracle solution to waging counterinsurgency warfare in the Caucasus, or the Chechen separatists discard their historic claims for self-determination. As neither outcome appears to be likely (on the contrary the Russian Federal forces have control of most parts of Chechnya only by day, and the Chechens have increasingly come to espouse the maximalist language of international *ihad*), Western scholars must factor this war into their analysis of Russian economic, political, military, and historical issues.

For this reason, it is vital for the community of Russia scholars to know more about the origins of the two Russo-Chechen wars, the dynamics involved in these conflicts, and the little-understood race of highlanders known as the Nokchi (Chechens) who have impacted post-Russian development more than any other ex-Soviet nation. But until recently there has been precious little available in the form of serious scholarship on the Second Russo-Chechen War (October 1999–present). While there have been excellent studies on the First Russo-Chechen War (1994–96), those studying Chechnya have long decried the lack of resources on Russia’s on-going, but still misunderstood, second conflict in Chechnya.<sup>1</sup>

There are so many questions that need to be answered. For instance, having been burnt so badly in the first war—approximately forty-five hundred Federal soldiers were killed—why did Putin reinvade Chechnya? Would the Kremlin’s acceptance of Chechen independence in the 1990s have set off a chain-reaction drive for independence in other Russian republics? How has the dynamic of the current war differed from the previous one? How have the Chechens been transformed by almost a decade of conflict on their territory? How has Russia been transformed by the Chechen “albatross” around its neck? What is life like in this forgotten war zone on the edge of Europe? And, are the Chechens really a nation of terrorist henchmen with ties to bin Laden’s *ihad* against “Jews and Crusaders”?

Fortunately, four new books have been published which not only answer these important questions but also help us understand the meaning of the First Russo-Chechen

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Sebastian Smith, *Allah’s Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus* (London, 1998); Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, 1998); and Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: A Small Victorious War* (London, 1997).

War. The content of all four commands our attention, but some are of special interest because of who wrote them (an average Chechen, a Russian minister of nationalities/anthropologist, a Ukrainian-Russian human rights activist, and a Western scholar) and, therefore, because of the perspective they bring to the recent Russo-Chechen conflict.

By far the most interesting and informative is Khassan Baiev's *The Oath: A Surgeon Under Fire*. It is incontestably the most powerful work ever written on the Chechen conflict(s) and is certainly the best book to read for an introduction to the Chechen people. What separates Baiev's work from other books on Chechnya is that Baiev is himself a Chechen and the people he writes about are not "international terrorist" abstracts, they are friends and family.

Dr. Baiev is the village surgeon who made headlines across the globe in the winter of 2000 when he operated on a wounded Chechen field commander whose bloodied troops stumbled through a mine field into his village. Baiev was propelled from obscurity into the limelight when a Western reporter discovered that the bearded commander who came to his village hospital to have his foot amputated was none other than Russia's most wanted man, Shamil Basayev.

Overnight Dr. Baiev, who had previously been beaten by Chechen extremists for treating wounded Russians, became a man wanted by Russian Federal authorities for treason. His crime of fulfilling the Hippocratic Oath by treating Chechen "international terrorists" (including Basayev, who later master-minded some of Russia's worst cases of terrorism, and many ordinary Chechen fighters), forced him to flee to America. His harrowing story of being targeted by gangs of marauding Chechen fighters, hunted by the dreaded Russian security forces, and escaping from his homeland can at times be overwhelming. Students who read this book in a course I taught on Chechnya claimed to have had nightmares, and many of them were profoundly disturbed by the dark picture Baiev paints.

I met Dr. Baiev at Harvard University some time later and found him to be an incredibly humble family man whose voice trembled when he recalled the unimaginable horrors he and his people had been through. In Baiev, one sees the human face of a people who have been demonized as a race of "bandits," "Nazi collaborators," "anti-Soviet elements," "mafia," and "international terrorists" for over a century. In Baiev's moving account, the Chechens are simply normal people whose lives have been destroyed by events larger than themselves.

Only the hardest of hearts could fail to be moved by Baiev's truly epic account of a small Chechen village and its history from the Brezhnev period to the current Russo-Chechen War. Baiev commences his account by lovingly bringing to life the rhythms of his small town of Alkhan Kala. Ancient courtship rites, respect for elders, life as a Chechen in the Soviet Union, mystical Šufi Islam, and the uncertainty which swept Chechnya when the USSR collapsed create a backdrop to Baiev's account of the Russo-Chechen conflicts. In essence Baiev provides a *context* for the subsequent wars between Russia and Chechen separatists, which are all too often depicted by uninformed media sources as taking place in an ahistorical, Osama bin Laden-driven *void*.

Rather than defining them as a race of super-terrorists, Baiev's biographical account depicts them as a provincial version of *sovetskii chelovek* (Soviet man). According to Baiev, the Chechens managed to retain many of their patriarchal customs even as they integrated themselves into Soviet society. But beneath the Soviet-Chechen surface lurked the counter-memory of Stalin's cruel deportation of their people in 1944. Baiev remembers being taken up into the mountains by his father and told of villages that were massacred

and relatives who were humiliated by their “own” government. In addition to this sense of grievance, the Chechens of Baiev’s account of the 1970s and 80s maintained a variety of traditions (such as *virid-teip*-clan ties and the stealing of women for marriage) that separated the people of this backward province from the Soviet mainstream. It was these distinctively Chechen patriarchal-Islamic-highlander-clan traditions that predisposed this sub-race of *Homo Sovieticus* to resort to violence against the Russian center after 1991.

In later chapters Baiev traces the “Kalishnikovization” of his people’s culture during the First Russo-Chechen War and the breakdown of traditional Chechen society in the interwar period (1996–99). He then tells of the horror average Chechens felt when they heard that a band of several hundred Chechen, Arab, and Dagestani extremists under the leadership of Shamil Basayev had invaded Russian Dagestan in August 1999. Most war-weary Chechens felt that this dangerous adventurism would give the Russians a pretext to invade their country again, but few expected the tragedy that unfolded.

Not surprisingly Baiev’s eyewitness account of major events and the *dramatis personae* involved in the subsequent Chechen resistance to Russia make his work an unparalleled historical document. His keen insight into current Chechen politics and the culture of the misunderstood Chechens also make his work invaluable for political scientists and anthropologists. Most important, Baiev’s work, which criticizes Wahhabi-funded extremists among the Chechens and brutal Russian commanders alike, is refreshingly objective. The only heroes in Baiev’s book are the ordinary Chechen people. And by the end of Baiev’s work one comes away shaken by the senseless cruelty of a war that destroyed their world and transformed the Chechnya of Baiev’s youth into a veritable hell on earth.

If Baiev’s work tells the story of the Russo-Chechen Wars from the common man’s perspective, Matthew Evangelista’s *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* analyzes the conflict from viewpoint of those who orchestrated these wars at the highest level. Evangelista skillfully probes the underlying causes for the Russo-Chechen Wars that destroyed Baiev’s world and explores the Kremlin’s rationale for fighting in Chechnya. Evangelista’s work asks the question that surprisingly few analysts have asked: “Was the destructive invasion of Chechnya really necessary to prevent the Russian Federation from disintegrating along the lines of the USSR?”

If one accepts the validity of Putin’s dire warnings that accepting Chechen independence would lead to the “Yugoslavization” of the Russian Federation, then the answer is yes. But Evangelista’s methodically researched work takes issue with this basic assumption and takes the reader on background excursus through the folly and flawed assumptions that led Russia into its Chechen quagmire.

Evangelista commences with a new analysis of the “inevitable” descent to war by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and secessionist Chechen leader Djohar Dudayev. As Evangelista systematically makes his case it becomes clear that a major cause for the outbreak of war between Russia and Chechnya in 1994 was Boris Yeltsin’s refusal to meet with Dudayev and treat him as an equal. Rather than negotiate with the unstable Chechen leader, Yeltsin dreamed of a “short victorious” war in Chechnya. This punitive expedition would serve as a warning to Russia’s other wayward provinces, from Tatarstan to the *Primorskie Krai* on the Pacific. This war was intended not only to exorcise the demons of the Soviet humiliation in Afghanistan but also to duplicate the U.S. intervention in Haiti. It was only after thousands of Russians and Chechens had lost their lives and Chechnya was all but destroyed that the stunned Russian Federal forces withdrew in defeat from the breakaway republic in 1996.

But was it necessary to make an example of tiny Chechnya to prevent other Russian republics from succeeding? The answer in Evangelista's work is a resounding no. As Evangelista makes clear, "there was no great rush on the part of the regions actually to secede from the Russian Federation. ... The Chechen example was one that no other region sought to emulate" (p. 123). And in the aftermath of the humiliating Russian defeat not even the neighboring Caucasian Muslim republics such as Dagestan chose to break with the weakened Russian center.

Over the course of four chapters Evangelista utterly disproves the notion that the breakaway Chechen Republic represented the first in a series of secessionist "dominoes" that would destroy the Russian Federation. The Chechen case was unique and could have been defused by dealing with the Chechens as equals who deserved a special status analogous to (or exceeding that of) Tatarstan's autonomy.

Evangelista's findings certainly undermine much of Putin's rationale for going to war against Chechnya the second time around, in 1999. While Evangelista does not exonerate the Chechen secessionists for their role in causing the war, Putin's war in Chechnya is defined as "an anti-democratic overreaction." Putin's flawed attempt to imitate the United States' casualty-free campaign in Kosovo by launching a more aggressive Second Russo-Chechen War was not just the first step in a slippery slope that would lead to years of grinding conflict. As subsequent events clearly indicate it was also the first in a series of steps toward centralization that have stripped Russia's provinces of much of their autonomy. If Chechnya was in fact a "domino," it operated in the inverse and presaged Putin's antidemocratic power grab elsewhere.

Evangelista argues that, since 9/11, Putin has won the public relations war by depicting his secessionist opponents not only as an existential threat to the integrity of the Russian Federation but also as a component of bin Laden's *jihad* against "Jews and Crusaders." This conflation of the Chechens with Al Qaeda is a classic example of *dezinformatsiia*, for even such Chechen extremists as Shamil Basayev, are primarily interested in fighting Russia, not the West. In Evangelista's final analysis the West should be much more discerning when it comes to understanding the true dynamics behind the Russian invasions of Chechnya and less gullible in accepting Putin's axiomatic statements defining its bloody campaign against Chechens separatists and *jihadi* extremists as a black-and-white "war on international terrorism."

Valery Tishkov's *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* shares many of Evangelista's findings even if it tends to reflect the viewpoint of the Russian center. Tishkov's book starts out with a foreword by Mikhail Gorbachev, whose views on the avoidability of the Chechen conflict mirror Evangelista's. They also lend credence to Baiev's claim that manipulative politicians on both sides drove their people to a war that was not predestined. "There might have been talks with a peaceful outcome, as happened in Tatarstan," Gorbachev writes, but "in the end, ambitions, haughtiness and arrogance of leaders—primarily Yeltsin and Dudayev—overpowered feelings of responsibility for the lives of the citizens."

Tishkov, a Russian anthropologist and former nationalities minister, commences with a critique that demythologizes much of the history of the conflict. In this section Tishkov skillfully deconstructs the image of the Chechens as a race of "noble savages" who were uniquely incapable of accepting Soviet/Russian rule. He makes a convincing case that their experience in the USSR was more typical than has been generally depicted.

Tishkov, for example, downplays the uniqueness of the Chechens' recent historical experience (including the 1944 deportation, which other more quiescent ethnic groups

also experienced) and claims that the Soviet-era Chechen-Ingush ASSR “was among the autonomous republics developing fast enough, economically and culturally, with a sufficiently stable political and interethnic climate, that Moscow felt no need to worry about it excessively.” The Sovietized Chechens, Tishkov argues, were not the uniquely bellicose race of mythical highland warriors they have been painted as by the media. On the contrary, they were typical Soviet citizens inhabiting an average backwater republic who were victims of political manipulation. Tishkov even asserts that, “contrary to widespread assertions that the “highlanders” had always been armed, the citizens of the Checheno-Ingush Republic had no arms to speak of before 1991” (p. 93).

Tishkov is certainly correct in his assertion that Chechen ethnic entrepreneurs have hyped the warrior ethos of the “invincible” Chechen highlanders as means for mobilizing their people. Most of the Chechen separatist leadership of the early 1990s was the product of Soviet culture (writers, a Soviet general, journalists, teachers, former Komsomol members, and so on), not mountain shepherds. This case is clearly made in Tishkov’s excellent chapters which shed new light on Chechen President Dudayev’s rise to power after the Soviet collapse. Tishkov’s work is packed with new information on the ways Chechen nationalist demagogues and mafia militias utilized a glorious history of resistance to the tsar to galvanize their people for an unnecessary struggle with the Russian center. Their aim was simply to seize power in much the same way that elites did elsewhere in the former USSR from the Baltics to Siberia.

Beneath Tishkov’s argument, however, one can sense that this former minister of nationalities still identifies with the Russian center. In his efforts to downplay the legitimate nature of the Chechen “historic” claim for national self-determination, Tishkov falls into the trap of glossing over certain characteristics of the Chechens (their distinctive *teip*-clan system, for example) that make them uniquely predisposed for settling historical grievances with the Soviets/Russian Federation. Tishkov’s own evidence on page 43 that the Soviet authorities collected an astounding haul of fourteen thousand weapons from the Chechens (including machine guns!) in 1968 would seem to contradict his earlier statement about the lack of arms among the Chechen “highlanders.”

The Chechens, it would seem, were armed to teeth even in 1968, a time when most citizens of the Soviet police state did not have access to weapons of any sort, much less machine guns. And it must be stated that, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the Chechens were the only nation in Russia to seize the Soviet arsenal found on their territory (including tanks, fighter aircraft, heavy artillery, and enough machine guns to start a war). This made them the most heavily armed people in the Russian Federation. When the Russians invaded in 1994, tens of thousands of average Chechens who had never heard of bin Laden converged on Grozny with these weapons to defend their *ka’am* (nation) and many of these citizen-*boeviki* (fighters) helped rout the Russian army. This certainly makes the Chechens stand out in comparison to, say, the Yakuts, Tatars, Kalmyks, or even the neighboring Muslim highlanders, the Dagestanis and Ingush.

One does not have to be a primordialist to see that there is something unique in the Chechens’ current conflict with Russia and their reaction to Soviet rule. Solzhenitsyn, for example, spoke of the Chechens as the only race he encountered who did not meekly accept Soviet rule. We also have ample examples of exiled Chechens resisting Soviet authorities in the “special settler” deportation camps and forcing their way back to their homeland. This Soviet-era Chechen belligerence compares dramatically to the attitude of stunned submission that best characterized the other ethnic groups targeted for deportation by Stalin.

Clearly there is more that is unique to the Chechens than Tishkov is willing to admit. To admit this is tantamount to admitting that the Chechens might have been uniquely deserving of special autonomous status in the Russian Federation, or even Baltic-style independence.

This minor criticism aside, Tishkov's book is an invaluable work that provides much-needed anthropological insight into a war-torn Chechen society that has been "demodernized" and traumatized by the recent conflicts. Tishkov's work is full of insight into the ways the Chechens went to war, how their culture was shattered by this conflict, and how this people's perception of themselves and the Russian Federation has been shaped by these calamities. As such Tishkov's book is required reading for anyone trying to understand a key ingredient in the Chechen conflict, and that is the changing character of Chechen society.

But for all its usefulness Tishkov's academic work all too often deals with Chechens as abstract subjects of an anthropological case study. For those who are willing to wade into the Chechen heart of darkness and understand its horrible impact on very real, living and breathing humans, Anna Politkovskaya's *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya* is a must-read. Politkovskaya's work breaks the wall of silence surrounding Russia's many Abu Ghraibs, Guernicas, and My Lais in Chechnya, and her work represents the most successful effort by a Russian journalists to get the word out on the Kremlin's crimes against humanity in this isolated land.

While Russian journalist Andrei Babitsky and French journalist Anne Nivat were influential in exposing the horrors of the war in its early stages, the Kremlin quickly banned uncensored journalism in the quarantined Chechen zone in the early days of the war. According to Politkovskaya, unfettered by the nose media the Russian Federal force of one hundred thousand stationed in Chechnya now preys on the approximately five hundred thousand Chechens inhabiting what has been described as an "ethnic concentration camp."

Nonetheless, Politkovskaya has boldly flaunted Putin's efforts to suppress free journalism in Chechnya and has made her way time and again, at considerable risk to her own safety, into this terrible war zone to report on what she has seen. And, as is obvious from her account, Politkovskaya has seen terrible things.

Politkovskaya describes a Caucasian enclave where Russian security forces and pro-Kremlin militias prey on a terrified citizenry, where generals sent to investigate human rights abuses are assassinated by their own troops, where the selling of the bodies of murdered Chechen civilians to their grieving families has become a Russian army racket, and where Chechen extremists seem to work hand in glove with Russian Federal authorities to perpetuate a war that has become a business. "In Chechnya the marauding and racketeering routine, masked as searching for bandits, continues nonstop," Politkovskaya explains. "All that has changed in the second war are those who commit the crimes. The activities that the antiterrorist operation sought to eradicate—violent hostage taking, slavery, ransoms for "living" goods—are now being performed by the new masters, the (Federal) soldiers" (p. 50).

While the war has shifted to the back burner for most Russians (except when it inconveniently reemerges in the form of desperate Chechen "black widow" suicide bombers and hostage-takings), Politkovskaya's account aims to stir up outrage among Russians. Sadly, her work has had little impact on a people who have come to equate Chechen *chernye* (Russian "blacks") with terrorists. Those bold reporters who probe such taboo

issues as the army's crimes against humanity in Russia are seen as unpatriotic at best, and traitors at worst.

This was clearly demonstrated when Politkovskaya was asked by the Chechen hostage-takers holding school children in Beslan, Ossetia (August 2004), to act as an intermediary with Russian authorities. When Politkovskaya, who has previously been arrested by the Russian army and harassed by the Russian Federal Security Service, attempted to travel to Beslan to mediate and assess the Chechens' demands, she was mysteriously poisoned and sent to the hospital. The outside world thus lost the opportunity to have an unbiased source report on the demands of the hostage-takers, who were subsequently slaughtered (like their predecessors in the Nord Ost Theater hostage-taking, where Politkovskaya similarly acted as a go-between) along with hundreds of innocent children. Their demands were never really known, and since then there has been considerable debate on how the massacre of the school children actually went down.

As one reads Politkovskaya's account of average people, both Russian and Chechen, swept up in the vortex of the Russo-Chechen conflict, one cannot help but feel a sense of despair. There is no other place in Europe where such horrors are being systematically perpetrated. Yet for many Western politicians, Russian crimes against Chechens hardly merit the indignant response that Austrian right winger George Haider's comments on Jews elicited, or the outrage many feel over Turkish treatment of Kurds or Serbian abuse toward Kosovar Albanians. And since 9/11 even the Cold Warriors in the Bush administration who once considered the Chechens to be romanticized "Davids" fighting a neo-Soviet Russian "Goliath" have come to see Chechens as "Al Qaeda terrorists."

Such glib assumptions collapse, however, when the Chechens are brought to life in works like Politkovskaya's. The following excerpt from a typical vignette in Politkovskaya's book brings to life the Chechen "Al Qaeda terror nation" and gives it a tragic human face similar to the one found in Baiev's work:

Malika was the administrative head of one of the toughest Chechen villages, Alkhan-Kala, after the previous head was killed. And reason should have told her to stay put, be careful. But she did the very opposite. She became the boldest, bravest village head in this zone of military lawlessness, where it is so difficult to survive. ... Alone and unarmed, she stood up to the tanks that rolled into the village... And she cried "Bastards" at the generals who had tricked her and secretly killed residents of her village. She fought desperately for a better life in Alkan Kala. No one else dared to do so in present-day Chechnya, not even the men. Then...

December 2. Again early in the morning. A call from the Moscow Echo radio station "Last night Malika Umazheva, the head of the Alkhan-Kala village administration was killed in Chechnya. Could you comment on this please?"

At the midnight curfew, unknown masked men in camouflage entered Malika's home and took her into the barn. Her teenage nephews, whom she raised after the death of her brother, grabbed hold of the camouflaged men and begged them not to kill her, but in vain. Malika was shot. Those beasts, who had become so adept during the war at killing off people like this woman in her fifties with high blood pressure, heart problems, and constantly swollen legs, went away. Another of my heroines was dead. (pp. 222-23)

As heart-rending story after story like this is told by Politkovskaya it becomes increasingly difficult to accept the Kremlin's blithe pronouncements that it is doing the

West a favor by combating a Caucasian wing of Al Qaeda by purging Chechen villages and throwing hundreds of suspected “terrorists” into hated “filtration” camps such as Chernokozovo (where abuses have been proven to surpass the much-reported case of American abuses in Abu Ghraib, Iraq). While there certainly are *bona fide* terrorists in Chechnya who are described as “Easternizers” in Politkovskaya’s insightful analysis of the makeup of the Chechen resistance, they are far outnumbered by what she calls “Blood Avengers” (those who are fighting the Russians in retaliation for the loss of loved ones) and moderates. What makes the Chechens unique in Politkovskaya’s work, then, is their sense of sorrow, rage, and misery. It is these emotions, combined with strong family ties and a sense of *namus* (pride in one’s home, family, honor, and homeland), that drive most Chechens to kill Russian “occupiers,” not some oath to bin Laden’s Wahhabi-dominated terrorist movement.

While readers of these four important books are bound to come away with a variety of emotions, the one that will most likely predominate will be sheer outrage. These compelling accounts prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that, behind the Kremlin’s glib rhetoric of combating terrorism, something terrible is happening to Russian citizens of Chechen extract in the hamlets of Chechnya. With the publishing of these powerful books, Western scholars can no longer claim that “they didn’t know.”

History will doubtless judge harshly those governments that, in the name of preserving their economic and military relations with this oil-producing ally in the war on terror, overlooked Russia’s inhumane policy of *zachistki* (“cleansing” sweeps of villages) and extrajudicial executions in Chechnya. For if the maimed and tortured bodies of the scores of “missing” Chechens who are given names and faces in these works are added up, one comes to a clear conclusion: despite the fact that Russia has changed for the better since the dark days of Stalin’s total “cleansing” of scapegoat nations, the Russian Federation of Vladimir Putin still has a long way to go.