

Chechnya-The Case for Independence by Tony Wood.
Verso 2007

The Russian war on the Chechen republic and the Chechen people is one of the great international scandals of the last 20 years, yet since 2001 the international community has given Russia *carte blanche* to do what it likes, including perpetrating horrendous human rights abuses, because of the fact that the Chechen rebels are Muslim and the international community has bought in, in large measure, to President Bush's 'War on Terror'. Because President Putin has portrayed his brutal subjugation of the Chechens as part of that war, he has rarely been challenged for the actions that have been taken there and the acts perpetrated in his name and that of Russia.

In Chechnya - The Case for Independence, Tony Wood gives a detailed history of Chechnya from the 16th century onwards, when Russia's southwards expansion began, and shows how its people have repeatedly been on the wrong end of Russian and Soviet ill-treatment. Chechnya emerges as a brutal place, with a brutal people that are often their own worst enemy, with internecine strife sometimes doing an external invaders job for them.

Wood's depiction of the invasions under both Yeltsin and Putin is grim in the extreme, but even more disturbing is his description of the cynical way in which Chechnya has been used to bolster the Kremlin's authority, often with the active collusion of Chechen warlords.

It is hard not to conclude, on reading Tony Wood's book, that Russia has created a long term problem for its own territorial integrity, provoking the barely sleeping giant of pan-Caucasian Islamic nationalism and extremism, and also that it has energised the global Islamist terror network by providing a training ground for Arab terrorists and an engine for grievance.

As well as providing a balanced view of Chechen history, this is an extremely valuable contribution to the debate on Putin's Russia, and gives important and disturbing pointers to the future if the Chechen problem is not solved to the advantage of its own people, rather than those of Russian politicians.

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