

BOOK REVIEW

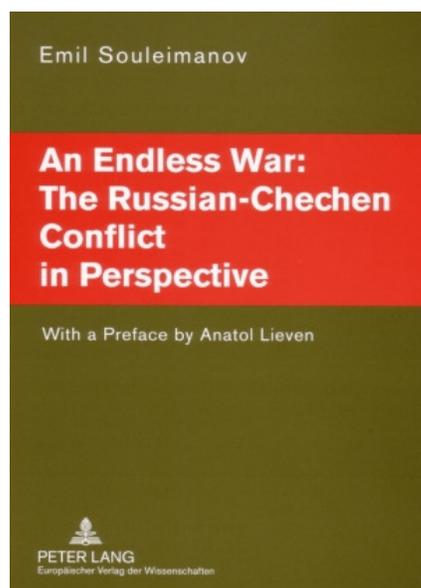
AN ENDLESS WAR: THE RUSSIAN-CHECHEN CONFLICT IN PERSPECTIVE.

WITH A PREFACE BY ANATOL LIEVEN

BY EMIL SOULEIMANOV

(Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2007, pp. 366, ISBN 978-3-631-56040-2, pb. € 39.20 / £ 29.40 / US-\$ 60.95)

*Review by Martin Malek**



This volume sheds light on the background to the war in the small, autonomous republic of Chechnya – a war that has almost been forgotten by the world’s public but that is still, apart from a hiatus between 1996 and 1999, ongoing. Its roots go back almost two centuries, to when Tsarist Russia thought it necessary to bring “civilisation” to the North Caucasus with fire and sword.

Using numerous sources, Emil Souleimanov from Charles University in Prague illustrates this historical background, the characteristics of Chechen culture, as well as the surprisingly complex structure of its society; though he mainly focuses on events since 1994, when Russian president Boris Yeltsin believed he could discipline breakaway Chechnya with military might in no time at all.

The result, however, was a war with tens of thousands of dead and human rights violations on a massive scale, especially on the part of the Russians, which Souleimanov, who is of Caucasian descent, graphically describes in a separate chapter.

He also discusses the role of Islam and the radicalisation of parts of the armed Chechen resistance, as well as its actions outside Chechnya, which attracted European and North American attention (especially the taking of hostages in a Moscow theatre, and in a school in the North Ossetian town of Beslan in 2004); the ascent of Ramzan Kadyrov, who now,

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on behalf of the Kremlin, rules Chechnya with an iron fist; and the consequences of the war in Chechnya for Russian society.

This plausibly structured and objective report can be read as a counterbalance to the Kremlin's official description of the intervention as a "war against terrorism," a description which, following 9/11, met with increasing acceptance in the US and Western Europe.

Readers familiar with literature on Chechnya, however, may question the validity of the preface by Anatol Lieven, who has spared no effort to defend and justify Vladimir Putin's post-1999 war (see, for example, his articles "Nightmare in the Caucasus" from the year 2000, "Morality and Reality in Approaches to War crimes: The Case of Chechnya" from 2001 and "A Spreading Danger: Time for a New Policy Toward Chechnya", written together with Fiona Hill and Thomas de Waal in 2005). Apart from this reservation, this book can be highly recommended to readers outside academia as well.

About the author:

Emil Souleimanov is assistant professor at Charles University in Prague, Institute of Political Studies and at the University of Public Administration and International Relations (Czech Republic). He holds his M.A. and Ph.D. in International Relations from Charles University and LL.M. from the St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University. He has published widely on the issues of security and nation as well as state-building with regional emphasis on Russia and the Caucasus. He has also provided numerous analyses to the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and the NATO.