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# REVIEWS

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**Review of: D.V. Tumakov. The hot spot of the new Russia: the Chechen crisis of 1991–1996 in the assessments of the Russian society.** Yaroslavl: Avers Plus, 2017. 740 p.

A young researcher from Yaroslavl, Candidate of Historical Sciences Denis Vasilyevich Tumakov published in this July the second of his monographs dedicated to the events in the Chechen Republic in 1991–96. It should be immediately noted that the author has taken on a very difficult topic in the contemporary Russian history, since it is customary to assess the historical events when they become remote for a reasonable period of time. As per historical standards, the events in Chechnya occurred very recently, and the wounds inflicted during the two Chechen wars have not healed yet (I mean the wounds inflicted on the Russian nation, which also includes the population of the Chechen Republic being its part).

In the two Chechen campaigns, which all together lasted from 1994 to 2009, many people were involved, either voluntarily or otherwise: they were representatives of the two warring parties, the civilian population of the republic in the hardships of the war, journalists of various mass media who covered the tragic events in their materials, etc. One can say with certainty that during those years, the whole country literally monitored the events in Chechnya, since the war concerned everyone: some were fighting there, and that means that their relatives and friends watched anxiously what was happening in that republic; others had their relatives and acquaintances under fire and shells, lost everything in one moment and thanked God if they were still alive; still others, with a sinking heart, caught every message from Chechnya, because at that time the fate of the country was being decided there, since the situation was extreme and the local war could grow into a civil war, as the example of the rebellious republic could be contagious for the other national entities. Moreover, the attitude of the society largely expressed by the mass media and the most prominent members of the public was completely different and contradictory. Some supported the actions of the federal troops, which had a task to put things in order in the Chechen Republic and to destroy the militants for the sake of preserving the integrity of

the country. Others, on the contrary, expressed support for the leaders of the republic, who declared it independent and sovereign, and justified the actions of the separatists by severely criticizing the operations in which the federal troops took part. For the latter, it was even more uneasy, because the army itself was not in the best condition at the time, and its spirit was almost broken by the criticism that it was hailed on, from several mass media.

All of this shows that Denis Tumakov, who has taken on the investigation of these events, faced a very difficult task, because he had to prepare such an analysis of events, which would indicate all the twists of those tragic events: the origins, causes and factors that led to triggering off the wars in the North Caucasus, the reminiscences of their direct participants, the opinions and assessments of the representatives of the two opposing parties, the estimates of the public opinion in the Russian society and so on. And decidedly Denis Vasilyevich successfully coped with this most difficult task by using in his work the archival materials, memoirs of participants of the events, materials of domestic and foreign mass media, documents of authorities, parties and public organizations, etc. which allowed him to ensure the depth of analysis and objectivity in assessing the events that the researcher referred to.

The young author has had a long way towards writing his monograph. While still at school, he became interested in this topic and faithfully studied it in the years that followed. Whilst studying at the university, he prepared several term papers and a thesis devoted to the events in Chechnya in 1991–96. In the subsequent years, the author prepared several articles and a monograph<sup>1</sup>. But the recently published work is the result of many years of his efforts in the search and synthesis of materials on this topic. And it can be noted that without exaggeration, the author perhaps became one of the most authoritative researchers of today, who devoted a lot of time to studying the Chechen events and turned over a huge array of materials that he was looking for and retrieved in different cities of Russia and as referred to various sources.

The published works of the young researcher D.V. Tumakov, in which he has invested a lot of efforts and energy, allows a more profound and serious assessment of the events that took place in this country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The monograph by D.V. Tumakov consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion and an extensive reference list.

In the first chapter, ‘The Separatist Regime in the Chechen Republic, 1991–94’, which includes three paragraphs, the author analyzes the reasons of separatists’ rise to power in Chechnya in the autumn of 1991, describes the conditions under which Ichkeria, then actually being an independent nation, existed in 1991-94; the internal

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<sup>1</sup> Tumakov D.V. *Restless Region: Armed Conflicts in the North Caucasus in the First Half of the 1990s and Yaroslavl Region*. Yaroslavl, 2016.

Chechen confrontation of various political forces, the ups and downs of relations between the central Russian government and the governance of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

The second chapter ‘The First Chechen War, 1994–1996’ is central to the monograph. It consists of eight paragraphs and is dedicated directly to the analysis of the military operations, in which the federal troops participated on one side, whereas the Chechen militant groups being on the other.

The third chapter, ‘Assessments of the Chechen Crisis in the Russian Society’ consisting of three paragraphs, is very important and essential. It makes possible better understanding and comprehension of the events that took place in this region. The author gives his attention to the reaction of broad layers in the Russian society and the main political forces of the country and their response to the events of the first Chechen war.

In the conclusion, the author sums his work up, trying to convey to the audience something important that he wanted to say whilst working on his published works. D.V. Tumakov notes that despite almost bloodless collapse of the USSR in late 1991, the disappearance of the great power caused escalation of many longstanding ethnic conflicts and the emergence of new ones on the borders of the former superpower. Sumgait, Baku, Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria – the list is not exhaustive referring to the ‘hot spots’ of the former USSR. A great and powerful country did not allow these crises to leak out, investing enormous resources in the development of the bordering republics, developing their economy, pursuing a certain cultural policy, considering the national diversity of the country. The escalation of the national conflicts occurred after the ‘Center’ weakened economically and politically and was unable to keep in its orbit the representatives of the new elite that gradually gathered political strength, the elite that was ‘ripening’ in the republics of the former Soviet Union, whose political capital was based, as a rule, on separatist aspirations and the desire to gain independence. This was facilitated by mistakes and miscalculations of the country’s leaders<sup>2</sup>. Some republics (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) refused to pay taxes to the federal center at all, whilst receiving subsidies from it.

It was hard to overcome the collapse of the great power. The wars that were waged in the post-Soviet states – and this was noted by D.V. Tumakov – claimed, per the estimates of various sources, up to 100 thousand people’s lives. But the conflict between the federal government and the rebellious Chechen Republic was the most

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, the famous expression of B.N. Yeltsin can be recalled, who appealed to the Russian regional leaders with the following words: “Take sovereignty as much as you can swallow!”

protracted and bloody; it demanded the use of a powerful military group consisting of regular military formations, units of the Internal Troops of the Ministry for Internal Affairs, aviation and other military machinery that were used during the Chechen war.

The republic led by the former Major-General D. Dudayev, successfully used the fact that the government of the Russian Federation had no clear and consistent policy regarding the events in Chechnya. Representatives of different political forces offered contradictory solutions to the pacification of the Caucasian republic. Some were supporters of the forceful solution of the problem, others advised to negotiate with D. Dudayev and his entourage, playing on the contradictions that existed among the various Chechen clans. Still others advised to lead a long and laborious work by helping Chechnya economically and gradually eliminating the contradictions between the central government and the authorities of the self-proclaimed republic.

The public sentiments of the Russian society were also quite vague. The whole country watched the course of events in the Caucasus, as mass media covered them extensively. Moreover, not only the representatives of the national mass media, but also the journalists of provincial media visited the area of combat. The author of the monograph notes three most striking positions of public perception of the first Chechen war: official, liberal-antiwar and left-patriotic.

The official view was based on the fact that D. Dudayev's regime was illegitimate and negotiations with him were impossible, which gave an excuse to bring in the regular troops into the republic and to disarm the militant groups. The subsequent events showed that the Kremlin underestimated the capabilities of the governance of Chechnya, which managed in a short time to prepare for the warfare by guerrilla methods, by having accumulated huge stocks of weapons and military equipment and by recruiting and training a considerable number of militants. After the introduction of federal troops in December 1994 and after their subsequent debellation out in Grozny on New Year's Eve, it became fast evident that the war would be bloody and protracted, which within a short time made it unpopular in the public consciousness of the Russian society.

Representatives of the liberal-antiwar wing pointed to the miscalculations of Russia's political authorities, the errors of military leaders, unpreparedness of the troops to conduct such operations, lack of equipment, the use of poorly trained military conscripts in the military operations, the mass death of civilians, etc. This position was quite popular in the society and was supported by a large part of the population. The liberal press was annoyed by this war that occurred at the time when the country was under very difficult economic conditions, and the population was experiencing the consequences of a protracted economic crisis, barely making ends meet.

The left-wing and the national-patriotic forces did not have a well-defined position on the war in Chechnya. At the same time, they supported the actions of the nations' leadership and criticized it for its miscalculations.

The first Chechen campaign (1994–96) has left different evaluations in the public opinion. D. Tumakov gives very precise and presentative definitions of the outcome of the first Chechen campaign. As an example, the military doctor V. Fyodorov, whilst expressing the mood of the Russian military, responded about it in such a way: “The army has remained spat upon and with beaten face” (p. 717). And here is the evaluation of the war outcome given by one of the representatives of the separatist party: “We have made it clear for Russia that our soldiers need to be valued and respected” (P. 717). After these words, one should ask whether this result was worth those victims that the war brought; in fact, per official information only, the loss of the joint forces in Chechnya amounted to 5,552 military men killed, prisoned and missing, as well as 35,289 people ill, 16,098 wounded and shell-shocked (p. 713). The losses of the militants remain unknown to this day. As D.V. Tumakov notes regarding some sources, the Russian command estimated the losses of the militants as 17,391 people killed and prisoned, whereas the officials of the self-proclaimed Ichkeria confirmed the death of only about two-three thousand militants, and some independent sources believed that five-six thousand of the Chechen separatists were killed.

A huge number of victims among the civilians should be mentioned as well. The author, having studied various sources, names the following figures: according to the estimates of the Russian human rights activists and national security, defense and law enforcement agencies, approximately 30–35 thousand Chechen people died in Chechnya. At the same time, in the periodical press, journalism and research literature, alternative data on the number of civilians killed were often cited: 50, 70, 80, 100, and even 120 thousand people (p. 713).

In his monograph, Denis Vasilyevich Tumakov reflected on the events of the first Chechen military campaign that took place in 1994–96. This campaign ended with the Khasavyurt Accord, which provided only some breathing space for the two opposing sides. The second Chechen campaign was inevitable, as neither the federal authorities nor the Chechen militants were happy with the outcome of the accord. The former were not satisfied with the fact that the republic became almost independent and completely out of hand for the Center. The Kremlin hoped, after the conclusion of peace, to gradually regain control of the rebellious region, but the government of the country did not have a clear recipe how it could be achieved. In addition, Chechnya was putting the central government to more and more troubles every day, as it became a bulwark of crime and terrorism; moreover, the existence of such a forma-

tion could in the future trigger break-up of the Russian state, as it demonstrated its weakness.

The results of the first war did not sit well with the governance of the unrecognized republic as well; it wanted complete separation from Russia and even more so, it intended to gradually expand its territory at the expense of the other North Caucasian republics and to create a unified Islamic state.

In August 1999, two groups of Chechen militants led by Basayev and Khattab attacked the border villages of Dagestan. At the same time, violent terrorist acts were committed, apartment blocks were blown up in Moscow, Volgodonsk and Buynaksk. The militants had reliance in weakness of the Russian government and in the fact that the population of Dagestan would support the invasion. The terror attacks in the Russian cities were also supposed, according to the plan of the terrorists, to provoke discontent among the population by the actions of authorities that were unable to ensure the safety of citizens.

However, the militants miscalculated. The second campaign ended with the complete destruction of the militias, peaceful life gradually began to develop in the Chechen Republic; many militants who had recently fought against the regular troops joined the new governance of the republic. Today, its leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, emphatically confesses his loyalty to Russia and its current President. The government of the country has invested and is investing huge amounts of money in restoring republic's economic potential and infrastructure. It is true that the activity of militants in the North Caucasus has decreased, but the coals of the conflict have not been completely cooled. They are embers, and therefore even today the situation in the North Caucasian republics remains complicated; militant attacks on churchmen, government officials, police officers and the most authoritative public figures continue to be committed. Financial feeding from foreign countries has decreased, but Russia's unfriendly regimes continue to finance the criminal underworld in the Caucasus, trying to complicate the relations between peoples of our multinational country. Thus, the publication of this monograph is relevant and useful even as a reminder and warning of what can happen if the government is weak.

The monograph by D.V. Tumakov is filled with information and is logically structured, reasoned by facts and evidence; and author's comments and conclusions are vouched by quotations from many analyzed sources. In our opinion, to some extent it fills the gaps that exist in the research literature focused on the study of events that occurred in the North Caucasus in 1990–2000.

It is impossible not to note the innovative approach of the author, who has tried to consider comprehensively not only the events that took place in the Caucasus but also the reasons of pressure and ethnic tension in this region, as well as the sociopolitical background that had formed in the country at that dramatically difficult time. In addi-

tion, in his monograph, the author cites testimonies of direct participants, who played different roles during the first Chechen war (from soldiers and officers to politicians of the highest level), as well as memories of innocent victims of the unleashed military tragedy. This method brings in actuality and realism in the work of D.V. Tumakov, which, in our view, is justified by the very nature of the events and their tragedy, and which could not be ignored.

With regards to the drawbacks, it can only be mentioned that the monograph does not have enough photographs and published archival documents, which would certainly give more credibility to the work. But this is not the author's fault but rather a problem that the researchers cannot solve on their own. Representatives of the scientific community are well aware of how difficult it is nowadays to find means to publish their works.

Apparently, Denis Tumakov will continue his studies, which will result in writing a new book dedicated to the events of the second Chechen war, which officially lasted until April 2009, when President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev officially quelled the regime of the counter-terrorism operation in the Chechen Republic. At any rate, we would like the author to prepare such a monograph, he has everything for it: energy, youth, scientific ambitions and interest in these events.