

Bush, Putin and Chechnya

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Since 1994 to the present day, one of the G-8 countries has been continuing an ongoing campaign of torture, rape, kidnapping, robbery and murder targeting an ethnic minority within its borders. An estimated 250,000 of an estimated 1996 population of 1,000,000 has disappeared. Although organizations such as the Human Rights Watch (HRW) routinely report the quotidian pattern of disappearance, mutilated corpses by the roadside, aerial bombings of civilian dwellings, beatings and rapes, Western countries and the international press largely ignore these grotesque human rights abuses and instead choose to focus of human rights abuses in other, more distant, less controversial regions such as Dhafor in the Sudan or Zimbabwe. And so the misery in Chechnya continues as the Russian military and FSB (ex-KGB) attempt to crush Chechen nationalism, while the world looks away.

The intent of this paper is to demonstrate using Chechnya, Bush and Putin as the example, of how international concern for human rights is far from an international ideal shared by all economically developed nations but rather one of many 'poker chips' played when benefit is perceived, ignored when advantageous, and that this spirit of real politik is the norm rather than an aberration. The democratically elected government of Chechnya and the Chechen people have been casually sacrificed by the USA and the European powers on the altar of power politics as they appease a brutal Russian 'dirty war' against Chechen independence. President Bush and the European leaders have emasculated the relevant offices of the United Nations (UN Commission on Human Rights) and the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as they acquiesced to systematic moves by Russia to block and shut down international scrutiny of its oppression in Chechnya. They have deliberately avoided convening an International Criminal Tribunal on the pattern of the one presently at work reviewing and punishing human rights abuses in former Yugoslavia, although the patterns of massacres, torture, disappearances and 'filtration' (concentration) camps are equally as horrendous as those revealed in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. Aside from HRW and similar minded NGOs, these issues are largely ignored. Finally the Western mass media have, with few exceptions (UK 'Guardian' and 'Sunday Observer' for example), connived in this willful choice to be deceived by blatantly false Russian propaganda.

American President Bush and the Russian President Putin reportedly have a warm relationship of mutual respect; a relationship which might be thought strange considering the respective roads they traveled to reach their respective exalted positions: Bush, scion of the premier American political aristocratic house; Putin, a careerist KGB officer lifted up in Cinderella fashion by the Yeltsin junta. However Bush and Putin have many points in common: both are men of modest talents lifted into place

by powerful interests that believed they would be bland caretakers. Both have staked their presidency's on a 'one-trick pony', Bush on his 'War on Terror'; Putin on his promise to 'waste the terrorists' (i.e. the Chechen independence fighters); both realize that veering away from 'the mission' into the myriad of other policy issues would be both confusing and dangerous, and hence cling to their ponies with desperate vigour. Finally both understand that the other has the means to derail his mission, as the US Reagan regime did to the Soviet Army's invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980's when they supplied the Mujahadeen with advanced anti-aircraft Stinger missiles and compromised Soviet control of the air.

Bush's war on 'Terror', an abstract noun, is by nature an amorphous effort which Bush and his warriors have a hard time defining. However in Russia's case, 'the terrorists' are the Chechen people and President Putin's promise to "waste the terrorists even when they're in the toilet" has the chilling significance of a public promise to destroy a whole people. In this he follows traditional Russian sentiments towards the stubborn Chechen mountaineers who never stopped fighting their Russian invaders during 300 years of occupation. General Alexei Yermolov, commander in chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus in 1816, made famous the aphorism, 'The only good Chechen is a dead Chechen' and his troops enthusiastically followed his orders to pillage, rape, burn and murder until the Chechens submitted. Stalin ordered Beria, his NKVD Chief, to deport with no warning the entire Chechen people in February 1944 onto the freezing Kazakh steppes, over a third of the 478,000 deported dying en route (1.) as his solution to the obstinacy of the spirit of Chechen independence.

As a screenplay the travails of the Chechen people would make excellent Hollywood cinema material: a hard-working, family minded frontier people from the mountains, living in clan-based egalitarian society without rulers, aristocrats, military or clergy. Primitive democrats, each Chechen male trained from childhood in weapons use stood ready to defend their lands against any foreign invaders. It has parallels with the early America of Davy Crockett and his Kentucky frontiersmen, tough, resilient, beholdent to no one, and like Davy Crockett and his comrades at the Alamo, brave to the point of a suicidal élan. And in this movie the Russian Army would be cast as the villains much as General Santa Ana's Mexican forces are in this dramatic saga of the founding of the US state of Texas.

Which is to say that from a popular American viewpoint there would be a lot to like about the perennial struggle of the Chechen people against Russian invaders. From the traditional American 'Cold War' mindset, the struggle of the Chechens for independence against Soviet Communist (read Russian imperialist) aggression should be natural point for the application of American support. Thomas Goltz, an American journalist, describes in his book 'Chechnya Diary' how he was assigned by ABC to make a TV documentary on 'the Chechen spirit' (2.) exploring what motivated Chechen civilians to take up arms against overwhelming Russian military power. His journey took him to the Chechen village of Samashki in 1995 just before the Russians attacked and he narrates, elbow to elbow with the Chechen farmers, how they battled the Russian armour with small arms and ammunition either bought or captured from the Russian soldiery. It is a tale of almost insane heroism on the part of the Chechen civilian fighters and

it ended badly as the Russian rampage after the village surrendered resulted in the infamous Samashki massacre with hundreds of elderly, women and children butchered by Russian troops.

Goltz looks back with sadness at how the Chechen village defenders that he described would now be labeled as 'Muslim terrorists' (3.) His stated purpose was to draw such attention to the horror at Samashki by filming the struggle that somehow American or world opinion would persuade Russia to back off its slaughter in Chechnya (4.). Unfortunately for Goltz just as his video moment appeared in April 1995 it was instantly eclipsed by the Oklahoma Federal Building bombing in the USA and the Samashki massacre and the barbaric misery of the Chechen people were instantly forgotten by the American mass media. 'If an American is not at the center of the story, then it's not a story in America.' And stories from Chechnya have never reappeared since on American TV, except in their new post 9/11 guise as 'another tentacle of the world Al-Qaida terrorist conspiracy.'

President Bush's speech writers, well aware of the American public's predilection for idealistic paens in favour of the spread of democracy since President Wilson's time, have made such a call a key theme in the Bush presidency. President Bush has declared his grand strategy to be that of promoting democracy worldwide. His 'Shock and Awe' campaign of destroying the Iraqi infrastructure, toppling the secular Baathist regime of Sadaam Hussein and finishing the job his father started in the first US-Iraq War smoothly morphed into a rosy democratic crusade. In his post 9/11 urge to strike out at 'terror', Bush led America into two invasions, following the classical imperialist playbook of the British Empire; one in Afghanistan and the other in Iraq. The British repeatedly failed in their efforts to conquer and control the warlike, anarchic Afghans, and only maintained their influence in Iraq after suppressing a vicious Iraqi guerrilla insurgency. America appears increasingly bogged down in an ever-growing insurgency in both countries. However American clarion calls for worldwide democracy continue to ring out: therein lays justification for almost any interventionist conduct.

On the brutal invasion and suppression of the democratically elected Chechen Maskhadov government by the Russian military post- 1999, President Bush has been almost silent. On HRW reports on over 3,000 verified disappearances and extrajudicial executions of Chechen citizens since 1999, largely by Russian or pro-Russian Chechen collaborationist security forces, and the weekly crop of tortured corpses found strewn across Chechnya, Bush has said nothing. On the indiscriminate Russian artillery bombardment of crowded Chechen refugee villages and the use of advanced fuel-air vacuum bombs in the center of the Chechen capital Grozny killing thousands, Bush had no comment. Clearly Chechnya had been written out of the script for American sponsored world-wide democracy or any basic concern over human rights. What had happened?

President Bush's Russian strategy has seen some dramatic shifts over time. In the 2000 election debates with the then Vice-President Gore, Bush remained the unchanging Cold Warrior keen to keep strategic pressure on Russia. Once elected, Bush rapidly moved from defining Russia as an adversary to regarding it as a possible partner. As Condoleezza Rice, the national security advisor put it, "US-Russian relationship is considerably different now. We are not strategic adversaries." (4.) Bush described his new

rapprochement with Putin in more personal terms at their Slovenia meeting in June, 2001: (1) "looked the man in the eye; I found him very straightforward and trustworthy." This, the very same ex-KGB spy, who as Russian President ordered the deliberate bombings of three Russian apartment blocks and consequent deaths of hundreds of Russian civilians, to blame on Chechen 'terrorism' and create a 'casi belli' for launching a sudden attack on Chechnya in 1999. (5.)

Later in 2001 at a Bush-Putin meeting in a joint statement the two Presidents stated they intended to link US-Russian consultations on missile defense and the ABM treaty to strategic arms reduction talks. In effect President Bush was looking for Russian acquiescence in a re-negotiation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that would allow the development and deployment of a US missile shield (President Reagan's notorious 'Star Wars' plan.) At the very same time the Russian military was massacring Chechen civilians and FSB orchestrating mass 'disappearances' of anyone suspected of Chechen independence sympathies, Bush remained absolutely quiet on the issues of democracy and human rights violations in Chechnya, ignoring US State department advice to keep pressure on Putin over Russian human rights abuse. Such monumental silence was a clear green light to Putin that the Russian military could continue and increase the pressure on the Chechens, secure in the knowledge that the American President would turn a blind eye to whatever brutal conclusion the Russian army forced upon the Chechen people. Bush had thrown Putin the bone he craved. In that silence lukewarm European pressure upon Russia to stop their anti-Chechen campaign was rendered absolutely powerless.

Post 9/11: Bush's 'War on Terror'

The September 11th, 2001 Al-Qaida airliner attacks in the USA provided the President Bush with the *raison d'être* for his administration: the 'War on Terror' had begun. President Bush cast himself in a heroic role battling international terror, and he went in search of allies to lend legitimacy to his plan of multiple international invasions. However in the case of Russia he had a few ghosts to lay to rest: many of his closest associates had been intimately involved in the Reagan regime's arming of the Afghani Mujahadeen ('freedom fighters' including Osama Bin Laden) with both conventional and advanced arms (like ground -to- air shoulder missile units). This dramatic increase in the guerrilla fighter's technological edge blunted the effectiveness of Soviet air power and without control of the air, the Soviet army lost control of the countryside. Twenty years later it was the American military invading Afghanistan, depending on air power to achieve victory. Clearly Bush had to make peace with Russia. He intended to establish US bases in ex-Soviet areas such as Uzbekistan (K2), Kyrgyzstan (Manas) and Turkmenistan to support American 'regime change' in Afghanistan. He wanted no foreign interference or clandestine aid for the Taliban regime. A natural corollary of this need for airbases was an acceptance and financial support of notoriously brutal dictatorships in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

And so in Chechnya the terror war only continued to get worse: villages which had been bombed were raked over and over by artillery barrages; drunken Russian soldiery made repeated 'cleansing' forays through the ruins, leaving violated civilian corpses in their wake. It was, as Yelena Bonner, widow of the

Nobel Prize winning human rights activist, Andrei Sakharov, described it, 'the political genocide of the Chechen people.' The very fury of the Russian assaults and the failure of the West and the UN to respond effectively to the constant tide of Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya, led factions of the Chechen resistance in desperation to accept Arab Jihadi volunteers and money from radical fundamentalist Islamic groups. The fundamentalist Wahhabi sect, the state Islamic religion of Saudi Arabia, turned on the funding taps during the First Russo-Chechen War (1994-96), supplying financial aid for refugees, fighters and ideological indoctrination as it attempted to expand its influence into the hitherto Sufi influenced Islam of the Caucasus. (6.) The struggle was recast as one between Russian infidels determined to crush a small Moslem people. Shamil Basayev, a Russian Chechen computer salesman before the struggle began, gradually took on the historical persona of Shamil the Imam, a fanatic Muslim leader of the mid 19th century who fought the Russian invader for twenty-five years. This trickle of support, Arab volunteers in the dozens, personified by Khattab, a Jordanian Jihadi (notorious for making a video of the destruction of a Russian motorized column) gave Putin the opportunity to suggest that the Chechen 'freedom fighters' were nothing more than Al Qaida 'terrorists' threatening the world order. It was an interpretation that President Bush would embrace convincingly.

In the fall of 2002 President Bush visited Russia again for talks with Putin. On Russian NTV he explained that his administration saw the Chechen problem as a Russian internal affair which he hoped would be resolved peacefully. Bush then announced that he fully supported Putin's handling of the Moscow Nord theatre hostage incident in which an Russian FSB assault on Chechen militants who took the theatre audience hostage in order to force talks towards Chechen independence, resulted in the deaths of hundreds of theatre-goers to FSB toxic gas and the on-site execution of all the unconscious Chechens (7.) In essence Bush had pledged US support to any extrajudicial executions that the Russians might care to inflict on the Chechens.

Bush had come to Moscow to get President Putin's support for the American 'War on Terror', and in particular he wanted to link the Chechen militancy to the Islamic Al-Qaida movement as it related to the use of the Pankisi Gorge bordering Chechnya and Georgia as a refuge and training area for Al-Qaida militants. Naturally President Putin, having in the past suffered from nagging European pressure to tone down human rights abuses in Russian controlled Chechnya, was very keen that President Bush believe that the Chechen independence movement and Al-Qaida were one and the same 'terrorist' organization. Bush realized that Russia would not favour American troops buzzing beside its territorial borders in the Pankisi Gorge so instead opted for giving Russia a green light in its local suppression of rebel Chechens. (The strategic significance of the Gorge is that it is one of the few supply corridors for the Chechen militants over the Caucasus mountains into Georgia.)

Once President Bush had invaded Iraq he had two countries to militarily suppress himself. As the media blazed with video of American helicopters rocketing civilian homes, American bombers blitzing wedding parties, civilians riddled with bullets on Baghdad streets, Iraqis and Afghani summarily arrested and taken away for years without any due process of law, torture, sexual abuse, murders by American

and British soldiers, quite naturally the common ground grew between Bush and Putin; both really did face similar situations – Bush had invaded two countries and was trying to suppress by force their nationalistic guerrillas; Putin had invaded Chechnya and was trying to do the same. In fact Putin could claim more legitimacy in the Russian effort as Chechnya had been recognized as part of Russia and the Soviet Union for 150 years, while both Afghanistan and Iraqi had been independent countries until the American invasions. When looking at what was really happening rather than the ideals being professed and the justifications bandied about, President Bush and President Putin were natural allies. When President Bush declared the 'War on Terror' a new type of war with no historical precedents what he really was saying was that it was war that should be conducted with no U.N. Human Rights Commission overview; with no glancing backwards to the American Bill of Rights or Constitution; with no restrictive considerations of the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners and no limitations whatsoever on executive power. In all of these points, President Putin could not agree more.

On the larger, international stage, outside of the strict confines of the 'War on Terror', Condoleezza Rice and like minded neo-con ideologues that prepare President Bush's policy positions, have decided that Russia is a critical player in their efforts to rein in what they call 'rogue nations' like North Korea and Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Russia had been the critical supplier of military weapons to North Korea and a major technical moving force behind the development of an Iranian nuclear industry. Naturally the USA, determined to protect its status as paramount world hegemon, is keen to support 'nuclear non-proliferation', while both North Korea and Iran, publicly denounced by President Bush as part of the "Axis of Evil" are even keener to develop such weapons in self-defense. Again, the US administration's desire to resolve in its favour the North Korean and Iranian nuclear problems trumps any lingering concerns about Chechen human rights or democracy. Putin finds it in his interest to prolong the North Korean and Iranian dramas, as his military forces systematically destroy the Chechen people.

In effect, the Bush regime has achieved nothing in curbing North Korean and Iranian nuclear weapons development in five years of the Bush administration, 2000-2005, while Putin in the same period has destroyed the Chechen economy, murdered or caused to die through indirect causes (illness, malnutrition, 'collateral damage') a full 25% of the Chechen people and left the remainder a bitter, helpless shambles, while a few thousand fanatical Chechen freedom fighters battle on in a hopelessly one-sided guerrilla war. Chechnya has been sacrificed for nothing.

The very desperation of the Chechen people, ignored in their brutal suppression by the world, has lead to an increasing viciousness in their anti-Russian struggle. Shamil Basayev, a Chechen guerrilla leader, took responsibility for the Beslan school hostage taking incident in which over 1,200 children, parents and teachers were seized and over 600 died in the chaotic assault of Russian forces and North Ossetian armed civilians on the Chechen and Ingoush hostage takers. He explains that as the Russian public either supports or acquiesces in the current Russian policy of attempting to crush Chechnya by force, an effort that has seen the merciless slaughter of thousands of Chechen women and children, the Chechen guerrillas see Russian civilians as equally to blame and as legitimate military targets. (8.) Chechen suicide bombings, often by widows or mothers who have lost their children, of Russian civilian

airliners, of crowds of Russian civilians in Moscow, of truck bombs driven into Russian police stations and military hospitals speaks to the growing viciousness of the struggle.

The Chechen guerrilla leaders are trying desperately to focus international attention on the plight of their people, and President Bush and President Putin are struggling hard to deny the Chechens that attention. At the 50th anniversary of the 'Great Patriotic War' versus Nazi Germany in 1995, President Clinton boycotted the Red Square parade as a symbolic protest to the Russian invasion of Chechnya; in 2005 at the 60th anniversary President Bush had the most prominent seat beside Putin, and appeared to all very pleased at what he saw. Indeed, Bush and Putin shared a victory. (9.)

International Inaction:

The initial phase of the Second Russo-Chechen war in 1999 was a visual shock for the international world as journalists reported the brutal destruction of a civilian occupied city, Grozny, by all the powers of destruction available to a modern superpower. Massed artillery barrages, GRAD missile strikes, aerial bombardment with the latest in fuel-air bombs, the Russian military shattered Grozny to pieces block by block, blasting thousands of civilians to bloody shreds, many of them ethnic Russians, largely elderly unable to flee the city in time. Keen to avoid engaging Chechen guerrillas in street fighting, the Russian generals opted for almost total destruction on a scale comparable (in the downtown area) to Stalingrad in WWII. As the Chechen republic allowed reporters free access, the visual proof was soon available on TV and in print, and international reaction stirred in response.

The OSCE in 1999 insisted on a reaffirmation of its mandate in Chechnya, and in early 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe suspended Russia's voting rights. A clamour went up for the establishment of an International Criminal Tribunal midst pundits and NGOs. Late in 1999 the EU froze certain technical assistance programs to Russia and recommended that member states send embassy personnel to Chechnya to gather information; however in contrast to Kosovo, this request was largely ignored by member states. However with President Yeltsin's surprise resignation in December 1999 and the appointment by Yeltsin of Putin as acting President of Russia, international indignation dramatically decreased. 10.

Significantly neither the USA nor even any EU national governments made any moves towards recognizing the massacre of non-combatants in Chechnya as war crimes. Nor did any government or multilateral institution consider linking loans to any improvements in Russian activities in Chechnya, indeed the World Bank, traditionally the institution with the most leverage and a mandate to withhold loan aid on human rights grounds, released \$450 million US in structural loan payments to Russia during 2000, funds that went directly to the Russian government for unrestricted general budgetary spending. (11.), most probably funding the Russian war in Chechnya.

Anne Nivat describes a typical visit in 2000 by an EU representative. Tarja Halonen, the Finnish foreign minister –Finland then filling the presidency of the European Union – visited the Chechen refugee camps in Ingushetia for five hours, announcing over and over, "I represent the European Union, I've come to help you." The Chechen mothers surrounded Halonen demanding she stop the war and stop

the bombing of their children. Halonen replied, *"When the next mission comes, explain your position clearly."* Halonen never returned. (12.) Clearly Finland, enjoying a flourishing border trade with Russia, felt restrained in any comments that might be construed as of a political nature. Most EU nations did not even send representatives.

The Council of Europe member states did not act on PACE recommendations that they file an interstate complaint against Russia with the European Court of Human Rights, and indeed its Parliamentary Assembly soon allowed a resumption of Russia's voting rights in January 2001. In 2000 and 2001 the U.N. Human Rights Commission adopted a resolution condemning human rights abuses in Chechnya however it did not call for an International Commission of Inquiry, instead simply asked Russia to establish its own national commission, a craven gesture that guaranteed nothing would be achieved. Naturally Russia responded on cue with a 'Potemkin' national commission, headed by Putin's special envoy on human rights in Chechnya, which had neither the authority to investigate or prosecute violations of human rights law nor produced an official record of evidence of abuses. In 2002 the Russian government closed the field office in Chechnya of the OSCE (previously a source of many honest reports of Russian human rights abuses.)

Again in 2003, the international community mustered a number of empty statements of concern, without any concrete diplomatic, political or financial consequences. Chechnya was placed on the agenda of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, but even there a resolution failed to pass as no government leader was willing to press the issue. Russia has repeatedly ignored requests that the U.N. special rapporteurs on torture and extrajudicial executions be invited to Chechnya.

With the numerous areas of common interest working between Bush and Putin, increasing European dependancy on Russian gas and oil , Russia's role as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, and its potential role as an important player in non-nuclear proliferation talks with Iran and North Korea, Russia has been able to shield its activity in Chechnya from serious international scrutiny. As Rachel Denber so aptly quoted Alexander Pushkin's, 'Confession', *"It is so easy to deceive me, for I am glad to be deceived."* International concerns over human rights are eminently strategic: if none of the big players have objections, then human rights monitors and international criminal tribunals can pursue human rights abusers as in Kosovo; however, if one does object, as America does, ignoring the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war in its 'War on Terror'; or as Russia does, concerning Chechnya, international standards on human rights are quietly ignored. No doubt Hitler would have appreciated such a finely tuned sense of strategic necessity had his regime survived WWII.

Chechnya Today

Ten years of fighting during the Russian re-conquest of the Chechen republic and the infrastructure is still in ruins. A 2004 WHO report found that of the 19 hospitals in Chechnya, nine had no constant water supply, two had only irregular access to electricity and 60% had no functioning sewage system. The national coordinator for the international doctor's association 'Medecins Sans Frontieres' (MSF) reports

that during the intensive phases of the fighting primary and tertiary health care was almost completely destroyed because the buildings where they were provided were flattened by Russian aerial and artillery bombardment.(12.) Khassan Baiev, a Chechen surgeon reports a deliberate Russian strategy of targeting health clinics and hospitals, (13.) He was forced to flee the country when the Russian military ordered his execution because of his sense of duty to his Hippocratic oath, treating all those in need, whether Chechen militant or Russian soldier.

Hospital Number 9 in Grozny was also totally destroyed during the second Russo-Chechen war however it is unique as the only hospital in the country that was rebuilt. A republic-wide survey of surgical departments revealed a massive shortage of even the most basic pharmaceutical and medical instruments; Hospital Number 9 has only one X-ray machine, currently broken down and at the time of the Lancet visit in April 2005 had no water supply. (14.).

Unemployment in Chechnya is estimated to be about 80%; families in remote areas are suffering from malnutrition. Infant and maternal mortality are three times worse than in the rest of Russia; nine times worse than in Western European countries. International analysts report that the vast majority of reconstruction funds have been looted by the collaborationist regime's bureaucrats. Nurse's monthly salaries are currently an equivalent of 27\$ a month; senior specialist doctors receive 133\$ a month, figures well below the averages of Third World African countries. Most of the medical support received in Chechnya at present is provided by various international aid agencies and NGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council, the MSF and World Vision. (15.) The full spectrum of international aid groups has not yet returned to Chechnya due to the fear generated in 1996 when six International Red Cross workers were murdered in their beds, a provocation attributed to a Chechen gang in Russian FSB pay.

Anna Politkovskaya, one of the very few Russian journalists brave enough to venture recently to Chechnya and report firsthand, describes the situation in her book, 'A Small Corner of Hell':

"The end of this hopeless war is nowhere to be seen. The 'purges' never stop...Torture is the norm. Executions without a trial are routine. Marauding is commonplace. The kidnapping of people by Federal soldiers in order to conduct slave trading (with the living) or corpse trading (with the dead) is the stuff of everyday Chechen life...And in the mornings there are cut-up disfigured bodies that have been thrown out after curfew...This is state versus group terrorism ...The (Russian) army and police, nearly one hundred thousand strong, wander around Chechnya in a state of complete moral decay." (16.)

Politkovskaya goes on to describe a society in the dying throes of collapse: starving Chechen refugees fighting over international aid packages; Chechen girls prostituting themselves to Russian soldiers for food; remote mountain villages in the dead of winter without water, gas, light, heat or electricity, no schools, no doctors, surrounded by Russian troops, their lives hanging on the brutal whims of their overlords. Indeed after one set of articles were published in Moscow detailing the casual brutality of Russian troops in a small village, Makhety, in the Vedeno district, on a follow-up visit she discovered that informers had pointed out who had spoken to her and over a dozen of them were subsequently murdered by Russian troops: to even speak to a Russian journalist, let alone a foreign one, is to court

speedy death. (17.)

President Putin, in an effort to deflect foreign criticism has begun a process of Chechenization, where the Russian FSB and GRU (military intelligence), gradually have transferred the more brutal aspects of suppression to a Chechen collaborationist force led initially by Akhmad Kadyrov until he was blown to bits, then by his son Ramzan Kadyrov, now responsible for an estimated two-thirds of the disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions. This process is described as 'normalization.' In a sham election in October 2003, Akhmad Kadyrov was elected president of Chechnya. The election featured massive voter fraud – a 98 percent voter turnout in Grozny although almost no one voted –, the murders and intimidation of opposition candidate campaign workers, the denial of opposition candidates of any TV time or newspaper space; almost every variation in the standard repertoire of a fixed election in a dictatorship. (18.)

At the same time Putin has been keeping European and United Nations observers at a distance, cancelling the OSCE observer presence in 2002, intimidating or murdering journalists and scaring away foreign observers with bombing provocations, threats and intimidation. Nivat reports that Russian authorities have virtually banned journalists reporting on the situation inside Chechnya; manipulating accreditation requirements and subjecting them to arbitrary arrests and deportation. (19.) For those that do slip in, Chechnya is probably the most dangerous place in the world for journalists to practice their trade, several dozen having been disappeared, executed at Russian military checkpoints, kidnapped and tortured. Only a few brave souls, mostly women such as Anna Politkovskaya and Anne Nivat have successfully risked their lives in the journey to discover the truth of the horror in Chechnya.

Conclusion:

Russia is a rogue state controlled by the FSB (ex-KGB) in collusion with hordes of criminal elements in the armed forces, police, industry and government. President Putin clearly ordered the bombing of three Russian apartment buildings in 1999, killing hundreds of Russian civilians to create a pretext to war with Chechnya and to fire up a xenophobic fury against the Chechens. Thereafter he let loose the full weight of the Russian military on the tiny republic of Chechnya, killing tens of thousands of ethnic Russians and Chechen civilians in indiscriminate bombing and artillery barrages. In the ten years of war Chechnya has been essentially destroyed, the infrastructure in ruins, the people a mass of dispirited refugees, the Russian army a murderous occupying force. War crimes easily on par with those in Bosnia and Kosovo are committed on a daily basis. A casually brutal 'ethnic cleansing' process is at work. For the Chechens there has been no democratization or humanization process in Russia, it is the same bloody dictatorial continuum, stretching from the days of General Yermolov, through the massacres and mass deportations of Stalin, to the present day pogroms of Putin.

Perhaps harder to understand. are the reprehensible attitudes taken by the advanced democratic powers such as the United States, Britain, Japan, France and Germany. While a few organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the MSF, Memorial and individuals such as Anna Politkovskaya put their lives at risk to reveal the horrors of Chechnya today, the leaders of the world blithely look away, 'so glad to

be deceived' by mendacious Russian lies. The United Nations's Human Rights commission is revealed as a hollow cipher, picked up or put down on the whim of the member states of the Security Council. The United States bears the heaviest responsibility as President Bush has decided that Russian support is essential for his 'War on Terror', for his attempts to muzzle other powers from developing nuclear weapons and to legitimize America's own shocking human rights record in Iraq and Afghanistan. The major European powers and Japan have just turned their heads away, occasionally murmuring concerns but making sure there never has been any bite to their watered down criticisms, each with an eye on courting favour. The lack of effective international response to the brutal Russian oppression of Chechnya is as shameful a mark on our civilization as could be imagined. Would the international community finally react effectively if Putin started to execute the entire Chechen population in concentration camps? Probably not: there would be almost no one to report it, almost no one would publish it and what did get reported would be ignored by the 'free world'.

Documentation:

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