Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics

Main Article—Review Essay

Codes and Violence during the Chechen Wars

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Souleimanov, Emil Aslan & Huseyn Aliyev, *How Socio-Cultural Codes Shaped Violent Mobilization and Pro-Insurgent Support in the Chechen Wars* London, UK / Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan / Springer Nature – International Publishing, 2017, 79 pages. Hardcover ISBN: 978-3-319-52916-5. ISBN e-book: 978-3-319-52917-2.

Souleimanov, Emil A. & Huseyn Aliyev, 'Asymmetry of Values, Indigenous Forces, and Incumbent Success in Counterinsurgency: Evidence from Chechnya' *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol.38 No.5, 2015, pp.678-703.

Explanatory note *This major review essay is an adapted and enlarged version of my review published in the peer-reviewed journal* Terrorism and Political Violence (*see Ten Dam 2021*)*; this essay here includes additional observations and source references, including some of my own publications. My major article on 'Chechen Clans and Other Kin Groups in Times of War and Peace' in the Winter 2020 issue of our journal already contains some of my observations on several of Souleimanov's and Aliyev's works discussed much more elaborately in this review essay here* (*see Ten Dam 2020: esp. 218-219, 253, 259*)*. Incidentally, I certainly plan to review*

the brandnew book by Roberto Colombo and Emil Aslan Souleimanov titled Counterinsurgency Warfare and Brutalisation – The Second Russian-Chechen War (*Routledge 2021*) *in due course. This book's topic and major concepts like counterinsurgency and brutalisation* (*see Colombo & Souleimanov 2021*) *are also part of Souleimanov's and Aliyev's works, my reviews of their works and my own research and publications.*

NB: citations and other references from the main publication under review, Souleimanov's and Aliyev's co-authored book, are indicated only by the relevant page numbers of that work, e.g. '(p.1)', '(p.10)', etcetera. The other source references in the main text (*and footnotes*) *are shown in the Author-Date version of the Modern Humanities Research Association* (*MHRA*) *referencing style i.e. '(Author Year: page number)'.*

Introduction

Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, both security-studies scholars at Charles University and Metropolis University respectively in Prague, Czech Republic [1], have investigated and published a seemingly idiosyncratic yet highly relevant aspect of the Chechen Wars of independence in the 1990s and beyond: the "role of socio-cultural disparities among belligerents" in these wars (Preface p.v).

Their book is built on their earlier study on the same topic published in the *Journal of Strategic Studies* which likewise contrast the "*temporary* incentives rooted in motivation and ideology" with the "largely *permanent* socio-cultural codes that influence a conflict's dynamics" (Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 682). This earlier study likewise encompasses the First Chechnya War (1994-1996) and the first high-

intensity phase of the Second Chechnya War (1999-2005), which arguably is still ongoing, having spread and morphed into a collection of small-scale, weakened insurgencies in Chechnya and elsewhere in the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation.

Souleimanov and Aliyev posit that their case-study shows that, in asymmetric conflicts, socio-cultural values based on codes of *retaliation*, *silence* and *hospitality* upheld by insurgents from 'traditional' honour cultures facilitate, as socio-anthropological phenomena, violent mobilisation and pro-insurgent support.

These socio-cultural values among "*honorific* insurgents" (p.9) resemble my own typology of *violence-values* that I apply in my research on brutalisation in armed conflicts: *honour*, *blood-feud*, predatory *raid*, *hospitality* and *mediation*; these honourific values among Chechens and Albanians have solidified their societal values of martialism, resistance and (male) egalitarianism in their recent wars of independence in the Caucasus and the Balkans (Ten Dam 2009; Ten Dam 2010: 333-335; Ten Dam 2011: esp. 265-266; Ten Dam 2012: 226, footnote 2; Ten Dam 2015c: 578, footnote 3; Ten Dam 2020: 218-219).

Indeed, their observation that an overarching "concept of honor is irrevocably connected" to notions of (blood-feud) retaliation, silence and hospitality in "honor cultures that are organized along .. blood kinship" (pp.18 (quotes)-19) resembles my own observation that such "violence-values" which can be seen as "derivatives of the central "honour" value ... characterise many or most tribal and other pre-industrial societies" (Ten Dam 2010: 335 (quote); Ten Dam 2020: 219).

Souleimanov and Aliyev convincingly argue in their Introduction (Chapter 2) that the existing scholarship and literature on asymmetric conflict has so far largely failed to take into account the social-cultural disparities among belligerents i.e. the asymmetry of socio-cultural values in such conflicts (Preface p.v; p.7). In the Foreword (Chapter 1), Col. Robert Cassidy speaks of a "relative absence .. of studies that analyze the socio-cultural values of the adversaries in asymmetric conflict" (p.1). This statement supports the authors' assertion that "socio-cultural disparities have been largely ignored" in asymmetric conflict studies (p.8) which tend to focus on "disparities between the physical and material assets of the belligerents" (p.11).

Already in their earlier study Souleimanov and Aliyev assert that while "extensive research has been conducted on political, economic, and ideological motivations of insurgent combatants, researchers have not addressed the effects of socio-cultural values on conflict dynamics and outcomes in great detail" (Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 679).

Souleimanov and Aliyev underpin their account in Chapter 3 of the history and ethnography i.e. *teyp* (clan), *gar* (sub-clan) and *nekye* (patronymic extended family) structures of the Chechens, and particularly their empirical study in Chapter 4 of the socio-cultural codes as manifested in the First and Second Russo-Chechen Wars, with meticulous archival and field research.

Beyond studying the relatively scarce primary sources, they have conducted 43 "often repeated face-to-face interviews" of mainly members of the Chechen Diaspora abroad between 2009 and 2013, though five of them were from Russia or Chechnya in particular, being

interviewed during their "temporary stay in Europe" (p.24). Due to security concerns, presumably to prevent identification and reprisals by Russia or even by their own communities, the identities of 32 interviewees remain confidential i.e. anonymised through pseudonyms; even the time and location of individual interviews remain non-specified. The make-up of the respondent group is made as diverse as possible in order to allow diverse perspectives: "former (five) insurgents, their relatives (four) and close friends (five), as well as eyewitnesses (18) of both wars who stayed away from hostilities" (p.25). The authors have further interviewed 11 often ethnic-Chechen experts up to late 2014 who agreed to be identified in their study.

Codes and capabilities among insurgents—and incumbents—in Chechnya (and elsewhere)

Souleimanov and Aliyev posit that incumbent forces from 'modern' institutionalised cultures in which the honorific, male-centered codes of retaliation, silence and hospitality are presumably rare or absent, lack the advantages of popular local mobilisation and support—unless the incumbents manage to co-opt former rebels and other members of their communities through either force or incentive.

They argue that this observation of theirs is probably valid across the world, referring to kindred conflict dynamics concerning similar "honor and revenge-centered social-cultural values" among e.g. Pashtuns in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) and the Albanians in the Balkans (pp.13 (incl. quote), 17). They furthermore argue that the honourific codes

through which insurgents garner the popular support for their (separatist) armed struggles significantly affect conflict dynamics and outcomes, and account for rebel victory or at least rebel endurance in protracted warfare, making the insurgents with these codes and support bases very hard to defeat.

Therefore, in their concluding Chapter 5, Souleimanov and Aliyev boldly state that the socio-cultural codes of retaliation, silence and hospitality "create a unique form of asymmetry between the honor cultures on the one hand, and the industrialized cultures on the other hand" (p.57).

Yet one could wonder if the "asymmetry of values" is such that "these codes are absent from modern societies" and thus altogether absent among "institutionalized incumbents" (p.9) in Chechnya or any place where an asymmetric conflict takes place. Thus one can easily find 'pre-modern' "notions of honour, duty and self-sacrifice" (Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 684) in for instance the US and Israeli militaries, both being part of industrialised societies, despite recurrent violations of these notions. So some scholars on "post-heroic warfare" (p.13) do overgeneralise when they state that these 'post-heroic' societies have ceased to uphold these honour values (see Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 684, note 30).

True, an initial focus on counterinsurgency or COIN campaigns "fought primarily by *institutionalized* Russian military against *honorific* insurgents, not by *honorific* pro-Moscow Chechen armed units against *honorific* Chechen insurgents" from 1994 to 2005 may indeed be helpful in "understanding the underlying logic of asymmetry of values" (p.24).

Even so, such a focus could unintentionally underrate the significance of honourific values across *all* warring parties in the Russo-Chechen conflicts in particular and asymmetric conflicts in general—including cases in which (pro-)state rather than non-state armed actors are the militarily weaker ones.

Codes and capabilities among incumbents eventually trump those of insurgents in Chechnya

Souleimanov and Aliyev do emphasise that honourific pro-incumbent actors may at times occur and affect conflict dynamics and outcomes. Yet they exclusively focus on indigenous pro-incumbent actors deriving from the same communities as the rebels while discounting any honourific ethnic-Russian (para)militaries playing any role in the Chechen conflicts.

Thus they do extensively describe how the pro-Moscow ethnic-Chechen *kadyrovtsy* paramilitary force under Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov and founded by his father Akhmad Kadyrov—which, as Russian President Vladimir Putin intended, became the main COIN force fighting the insurgents from 2005 onwards—"drew on the same socio-cultural values as the insurgents" (p.29, note 31; Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 689-690).

This actual symmetry of values yielded Moscow the advantages of *kadyrovtsys*' "better knowledge of the socio-cultural terrain, personal networks, and of the insurgents' mountainous hideouts and *modus operandi*" (p.39). Indeed, one of their main conclusions is the fact that

the rise of the *kadyrovtsy* "reversed the asymmetry of values, previously to the insurgents' advantage, because part of the local population, related to *kadyrovtsy*, started relying on the same socio-cultural codes to retaliate against their enemies and provide support to the *kadyrovtsy* while denying it to insurgents" (p.45).

The *Benoy* clan to which Kadyrov belonged to, consisted of over 80,000 members, being thus by far the largest among "roughly 150 *teyps* or large clans" or tribes among the Chechens (pp.33-34 & 42, note 8). Indeed the very given that the *Benoy* alone reportedly "amounts to 15% of the Chechen population" (Sokirianskaia 2005: 456 (quote); Ten Dam 2016: 70; Ten Dam 2017: 51; Ten Dam 2020: 251), facilitated this shift in power and effectiveness to pro-Moscow Chechens. This shift was crucial, even though sub-clan identities from *dözal* (nuclear families) upward have superseded that of the *teyp* in Chechen society due to urbanisation and demographic displacement in Soviet times.

Last but not least, from the early 2000s onwards the Russians themselves became, mainly through the *kadyrovtsy*, more knowledgeable about the Chechen insurgents and their supporters, and better able to target the latter's relatives "as a means of psychological warfare" (p.49). This deployment of indigenous paramilitary units harbouring roughly the same socio-cultural codes as the insurgents was the main reason why the Russians were able to mobilise enough Chechens on their side to isolate and marginalise the latter—on their own the Russians may have been unable to do so after 2005 despite their superior resources and firepower.

Even under Kadyrov's continuing brutal rule, however, the "Chechen-based insurgency is still alive" with dozens if not hundreds of insurgents still holding out in mountainous areas, still receiving recruits and popular support through the codes of retaliation, silence and hospitality (p.62). These developments, Souleimanov and Aliyev argue in their Conclusion, "testify to the resilience of asymmetry of values" (Ibid) and thus support rather than weaken their asymmetry-of-values proposition as a major if not exclusive explanation of asymmetric conflict.

Still, the said developments may testify to the resilience of honourific values among all armed actors, rather than the asymmetry of honourific and institutionalised values between insurgent and incumbent actors respectively. Thus one should not lose sight from the fact that honourific (pro-)state actors have been relevant throughout the First and Second Chechen Wars until 2005—the longitudinal timeframe of their case-study—even if one would agree with the authors' assessment that the Russians have "never succeeded in establishing a solid pro-Moscow social base" (p.51) in Chechnya during the First Chechen War.

Think of the pro-Moscow Chechen fighters battling those of separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev in the months leading up to the First Chechen War and throughout this war itself, many of whom exhibited honourific values as well. Souleimanov and Aliyev do mention "pro-Moscow Chechens" (e.g. p.37) in their study, yet rarely explicate their socio-cultural values.

They likewise mention partially foreign Salafi-Jihadist factions and armed units within and eventually beyond the separatist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (e.g. pp.37-38), yet fail to explicate their particular

socio-cultural values, and indicate whether these have been identical or similar to the honourific codes of retaliation, silence and hospitality among the more secular separatists. Most importantly, they do not discuss the socio-cultural codes of Russian soldiers and paramilitaries in any detail in their study, apparently just assuming these to be non-honourific.

These oversights may be due to in part to their critique of alternative motivational propositions to their asymmetry-of-values proposition on the causes, dynamics and outcomes of the Chechen Wars, propositions which mostly center on ideology of "either ethnic nationalism or Salafi jihadism" (p.57). It may be true that "ideological explanations of collective mobilization" overlook non-ideological incentives and drives like "physical survival .., economic gain .. and personal retaliation" among individual members of insurgent forces during particularly the early phases of mobilisation and conflict when indoctrination has yet to take hold (p.58(quotes)-59).

Even so, one should try to identify socio-cultural codes—and ideological motives ranging from political to religious convictions and non-ideological motives ranging from avarice and self-interest to self-preservation—among representative members of both insurgent and incumbent forces, however difficult and hazardous micro-level research on individual motivations may be in "warn-torn areas and societies" (p.66, note 2). In sum the distinction between honourific rebel and institutionalised incumbent can be overly simplified—or even empirically invalid—in many instances and cases.

Be that as it may, Souleimanov and Aliyev rightly point out that the

honourific, male-centred codes of retaliation, silence and hospitality of the *kadyrovtsy* and other pro-Moscow Chechen forces did not immediately and easily trump those of the insurgents. For one thing, the latter, rooted in the local custom of blood-revenge, felt obligated to retaliate against both Russian and pro-Moscow Chechen forces whenever the latter targeted their families and supporters, even if the retaliations themselves were hazardous for the insurgents themselves or endangered the insurgency itself.

Honour i.e. self-respect, exhibited through oath-taking, tenacity, courage and obligation to avenge humiliation and suffering, required the insurgent Chechens to fight on and avenge particular transgressions against their kin; this was even true among those Chechens who did not desire or seek independence or saw that independence was untenable against a major power like Russia. Consequently, kin-based retaliation rather than attaining independence as such became "one of the key incentives for violent mobilization" during especially the Second Chechen War (pp.48 (quote)-49).

Cycles of brutal reprisals by and among insurgents and incumbents in Chechnya

Given this honourific obligation to retaliate, the brutal reprisals by the Russians against the insurgents' families and supporters ranging from rape to murder were counterproductive and protracted the conflict. Random reprisals against the larger population during especially the First Chechen War, when the Russians lacked the information to target insurgents and their families and supporters selectively, were certainly

counterproductive as these brutalities drove initially non-committed Chechens to retaliate and thus "into the ranks of the insurgency" (p.51).

The separatist insurgents enjoyed "virtually unlimited support" among the Chechen population at any rate, particularly during the First Chechen War, due to the traditional code of *siskal* (hospitality) central to *adat* (customary law) which compelled even non-separatist Chechens to aid the insurgents with "not only shelter and food but also ammunition, medication, warm clothes, and even information with regard to the movements of Russian troops" (p.52).

In contrast, the more selective if equally brutal violence by *kadyrovtsy* and the consequently better-informed Russian forces helped to avoid the use of random and indiscriminate violence against the larger population so typical of the First Chechen War, and therefore helped to avoid widespread popular resistance in the Second Chechen War (see also Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 697-698).

Indeed, in comparative research on the battlefield lethality of co-ethnic and non-ethnic militias in 84 intrastate conflicts between 1989 and 2014, Aliyev and Souleimanov found that "co-ethnic militias—that is [pro-government] militias recruited from the same ethnicity as rebels—are deployed amongst their co-ethnics and therefore tend to target civilians less than non-ethnic militias" (Aliyev & Souleimanov 2019: 471). This finding appears to hold true for the *kadyrovsty* and any other pro-incumbent Chechen forces as well, at least to some extent and for so far 'co-ethnic' can be equated with 'co-tribal'.

Even particularly cruel reprisals like *zachistkas* (cleansing, mop-up

operations) during the Second Chechen War by both Russian and pro-Russian forces were effective in some instances, as "villagers exerted increasing pressure on the local insurgents to either leave .. or .. cease attacks" so as to avoid such reprisals (p. 53) and as "many Chechens, being aware of the chances of their families being exterminated, sought demobilization" (p.66, note 6).

These Chechens ultimately sought safety and survival for themselves and their kin, even at the risk of dishonour in the eyes of their compatriots. After all, the "Chechen obligation to avenge cruelties, injustices or 'mere' insults by "foreigners" is particularly painful and hazardous" (Ten Dam 2012: 234): "If a man takes up arms and joins the separatists" he "leaves his wife, children and family without a protector. ... If, however, he decides to ... give up revenge and dedicate himself to his family, he ceases to be a "Chechen" " (Souleimanov 2007: 273).

In sum, during the Chechen Wars the "Russian brutalities and local customs steer many a Chechen into an impossible 'Catch-22' situation" (Ten Dam 2012: 235) of either honour or survival. Many of the former insurgents actually 'resolved' their quandary by joining the *kadyrovtsy* who had threatened to target their relatives, helping the latter to further enhance their knowledge about rebel identities, whereabouts and tactics; the former did so in order to seek protection from the ire of the still active rebels and compatriots in general. Yet as they did so they entered a 'no-exit situation' of potentially endless blood-feuds (*chir*)—together with hardcore *kadyrovtsy* and even their relatives who sympathised with the insurgency yet felt bound to defend their family's safety and honour—against the rebels.

These intracommunity blood-feuds during particularly the Second Chechen War were targeted at each others' direct perpetrators or their friends and relatives rather than random attacks against each warring side broadly, as one tended to know each other in the 'big village' which Chechnya was. Survival was relative, and still meant recurrent danger to all warring sides (see Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 690-695).

Virtually all Chechens—particularly the Chechen males given their patriarchal obligations to defend family and clan—had to face this stark choice: defend above all one's honour and that of one's family and clan, or protect above all one's family and clan and secure their survival. By all accounts most of them chose or were rather socially pressed to choose the first option, at least well into the Second Chechen War. Consequently "thousands of [pro- and anti-Russian] Chechens found themselves trapped in the vicious circle of blood feud" (p.53).

The pressure put on the Chechens to retaliate any wrongs against their clans, families and themselves I consider the primary manifestation of psychological *honour-stress* (my term) in Chechen culture, as this obligation does not just require them to do so without showing any fear, but may endanger their clans, families and themselves even more than before—to the point of possible extinction at the hands of either Chechen or foreign enemies: "Chechens have a saying for this relentless pressure to self-sacrifice (*yakh*, acceptance of duty): "it is tough to be Chechen" " (Ten Dam 2012: 234).

Actually, I need to point out a sad phenomenon in the Chechen Wars that at times 'resolved' the honour-based conundrum described above,

a phenomenon that Souleimanov and Aliyev do not describe at length in their book: reprisals by (pro-)Russian forces were often such that an insurgent's family or (sub-)clan were practically wiped out at any rate. Consequently he or occasionally she need not think about safeguarding any surviving family or (sub-)clan members safe his or her own survival, as they are dead anyway. Thus he or she could seek revenge with abandon and without any restraint to avenge the deceased. This all too often led to *brutalisation* i.e. increasing violation of local and international norms of violence (see Ten Dam 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015a,b,c, 2016, 2017) by such avengers in particular, just as much as the Russians and the pro-Russian Chechens have been guilty of on a larger and more systematic scale.

This incidentally begs the question whether all the 158 Chechen and 55 non-ethnic Chechen clans identified by Chechen and non-Chechen historiographers (esp. Mamakayev 1973; Kutlu 2005) and Chechen nationalists alike[2], have in fact survived the brutal Russo-Chechen Wars. Probably not, as Souleimanov and Aliyev do mention at one point the "murder or disappearance of the males (and sometimes even females) of entire families and clans" (Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 697-698).

Have the members of the most affected, most badly mauled clans survived in sufficient numbers so as to remain functioning clans or at least surviving sub-clans? That seems unlikely. Moreover, "reportedly a number of the 'classic' clans already ceased to function and exist even prior these conflicts due to Soviet indoctrination, industrialisation and urbanisation" (Ten Dam 2020: 220-221 (incl. quote)).

In that regard, I must reiterate the following bleak observation which I have made before regarding our glaring lack of knowledge on clans and other kinship groups in past and present societies like those of the Chechens:

> At first sight the broader patterns of (ethnic-)Chechen clan and other kinship entities, identities, distributions, characteristics and presentday existence i.e. survival in and beyond Chechnya seem to be generally known and agreed upon—yet on closer inspection turn out to be highly uncertain and contested. Indeed, the lack of up-to-date knowledge and lack of consensus on the rare out-of-date knowledge on Chechen clan and other kin groups remarkably resembles the gaps in research and knowledge on their Albanian counterparts (Ten Dam 2020: 221; see further Ten Dam 2018a, 2018b).

Conclusion: insurgency and counterinsurgency codes and capabilities vis-à-vis conflict outcomes in Chechnya

Be that as it may, the traditional code of silence to outsiders regarding one's own family and clan—especially when coupled with either the code of retribution which could engender blood-feuds or the code of hospitality even to one's enemies which could temporarily halt or even resolve blood-feuds—initially worked for the insurgents and against the incumbents. Thus both customary hospitality, often "prioritised even above retaliation", and silence provided a safe haven for both friends and enemies in times of (relative) peace and war, with the code of

silence helping to hide the fact that one did provide hospitality to any 'hostile' (Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 698(quote)-699).

Consequently just "a small number of Chechens—mostly the so-called Moscow Chechens, or former communist *nomenklatura* .. —chose to collaborate with the Russian authorities" (Ibid.: 696). Yet "even Moscow's Chechen sympathizers often hesitated to provide the Russian authorities information regarding insurgents" because a) it was "not uncommon for them to have fellow clan members among the insurgents" whereby informing on them would directly violate the code of silence and be considered dishonourable, and b) such collaboration would incur "physical assault from both locals and insurgents" given the honour-based obligation to retaliate (p.50 incl. quotes).

Only when the *kadyrovsty* paramilitary force led by the powerful *benoy* clan became involved did the obligations of retribution, silence and hospitality begin to turn in the incumbent's favour—and even then indirectly: the *kadyrovsty* paramilitaries were obliged to retaliate once rebels targeted their relatives and supporters, and 'collaborating' Chechens generally informed on the rebels to the "pro-Moscow Chechen authorities only, who were themselves often related to the locals in terms of blood kinship" (p.52)—rather than to the Russian authorities direct, thereby safeguarding at least to some extent the kin-based code of silence.

These trends made offering aid and hospitality to the insurgents more hazardous than ever before for pro-insurgent and non-committal Chechens alike, thereby gradually eroding such aid and hospitality to basic commodities and emergency supplies at most. Indeed, one could

conclude that (pro-)Russian forces have responded as violently to silence and hospitality as to retaliation from the rebels and the wider population, even though the first two socio-cultural codes are essentially non-violent and defensive, as opposed to retribution usually manifested as blood-revenge.

Last but not least, Souleimanov and Aliyev note that all three socio-cultural codes eventually advantaged the *kadyrovsty* rather than the insurgents simply because the former became more numerous and better-armed than the latter, as the former had the backing of Russia's political, economic and military might. In that sense, I would add, such physical and material assets as observed in classic asymmetric-conflict studies did play a vital role in the courses and outcomes of the First and Second Chechen Wars.

In their research Souleimanov and Aliyev base many of their policy recommendations on "a large and rapidly growing literature" on indigenous forces (IF) in counterinsurgencies (COIN) demonstrating that a strategic use of pro-incumbent IF "contributes to the incumbent's success in local conflicts" (Souleimanov & Aliyev 2015: 678)—which is in fact due to redressing the "imbalance of values among combatants" (Ibid.: 687).

Regarding the "crucial role of IF in COIN" (Ibid.: 682) I do have some issues with the authors' recommendations on how to utilise "socio-cultural knowledge in locally conducted COIN operations" (p.64) in order to overcome the strength of honourific codes among insurgents by particularly the "deployment of indigenous units" (p.65) harbouring these same codes. For one thing, *counterinsurgency* is a loaded concept,

which departs rather one-sidedly from a pro-state and pro-incumbent perspective. If ill-defined, this concept may lead analysts, policymakers, practitioners and readers to assume all too easily that insurgents are universally 'bad' and need to be universally opposed, fought and defeated at all times—worse, they may start to believe that insurgents need to be vanquished not just through relatively benign 'hearts-and-minds' strategies but at all costs and by any means possible.

Even if the counterinsurgency concept is neutrally applied in theory, it may lead to COIN operations in practice which are as brutal as the Russian-led ones during the Chechen wars, violating all kinds of rights enshrined in human rights law and humanitarian law. In their "practical recommendations for policy-makers" (p.57) Souleimanov and Aliyev do not explicitly oppose and warn against such violations, even though they extensively describe the counterproductivity and rather limited effectiveness of the brutal Russian-led COIN operations in their book.

Souleimanov and Aliyev neither come up with any suggestions on how to make peace with rebels through conflict-resolution mechanisms that involve their socio-cultural codes. They merely warn that even benign "policies and methods of counterinsurgent forces" will be ineffective if the socio-cultural codes of the insurgents and their communities are ignored or opposed rather than co-opted through indigenous forces (p.65 incl. quote). This rather narrow concern with COIN-effectiveness constitutes the one truly false note in their otherwise excellent, innovative and thought-provoking study on the Chechen Wars.

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Endnotes

1. Main affiliations of the authors at the time of the book's publication and as presented in the book itself. Yet both Souleimanov and Aliyev have had other affiliations before that and since then. Thus Dr. Huseyn Aliyev is Lord Kelvin Adam Smith Fellow at the School of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Glasgow since 2017, while Prof. Emil A. Souleimanov, associate professor at the Department of Security Studies of Charles University, Czech Republic, is also research director at the Institute of International Relations Prague (www.iir.cz).
2. Chechen nationalists come up with very precise identifications of the names, ethnicities and numbers of clans and sub-clans in Chechnya, like those supporting the apparently defunct yet emotionally salient Chechen Republic of Ichkeria with a residual government in exile in the UK. On their website, they list the names of 158 ethnic Chechen clans (or tribes) distributed among nine *tukhums* (tribal unions), and 55 non-Tukhum or non-tribal Chechen and non-ethnic Chechen clans residing in the republic, based on just a few authoritative yet outdated works by Mahomet Mamakayev and Tarik Cemal Kutlu. See *Waynakh Online*, www.waynakh.com/eng/chechens/tribal-unions-and-clans/ (last acc. 12-6-2021). Apparently these identified clans do not include any ethnic-Chechen clans residing mostly or fully outside Chechnya, like any in neighboring Ingushetia, Dagestan, Georgia, elsewhere in Russia or further abroad.

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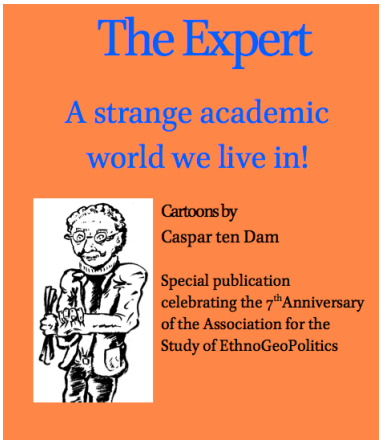

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