

Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus

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Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus

By Robert Bruce Ware and
Enver Kisriev. Armonk, NY, and
London, United Kingdom: M.E.
Sharpe, 2010. xv + 251 pp. US\$
35.95. ISBN 978-0-7656-2029-3.

In this book, 2 authors, an American philosopher who turned from political philosophy and international ethics to political analysis of ethnic and religious conflicts in the Caucasus, and a scientist working at the Daghestan Research Center at Makhachkala, share their competence to provide a double view on one of the most conflict-filled regions on Earth, aiming to reveal the different positions and to add to mutual understanding. Common associations with Dagestan are terrorism, Islamism, ethnic fragmentation, territorial isolation in high mountain valleys, neighborhood to Chechnya, Imam Shamil, and Caucasian war. All these associations are dealt with, but the main focus of the book is on the opposition of Russian conquest and Caucasian freedom, of sovietization and tradition, and of Russian hegemony and Islamic resistance.

The first 3 chapters go back to the history. The first chapter explains the

mountain context as the spatial frame for the differentiation of economy and social structure, and reflects the situation between different empires and then going back to Russian imperialism and the spread of Islam. The second chapter deals with the confrontation between the tsarist conquest and the murids who tried to establish an Islamic state in the East Caucasus. The third chapter argues that Soviet rule in the North Caucasus betrayed Islam in Dagestan and replaced religious identification of the population by a dubious ethnic construction since the politics of *korenizatsiya* in the early 1920s.

The following 4 chapters, comprising two thirds of the text, deal in detail with the political and social development since the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the beginning of processes of democratization. The collapse of the central authorities transferred new responsibility to the peripheral territorial entities of Russia. In Dagestan, the multiethnic structure required a special solution for the problem of adequate representation of the main ethnic groups in the regional government. In this respect, Dagestan developed a sophisticated electoral system that worked well for approximately 15 years. However, an opposite position was established when representatives of Wahhabism came to Dagestan and tried to introduce Islamic elements of governance. Further fragmentation

of the society resulted from this development: some of the Islamic population remained on the way to democracy, others fell under the influence of the Wahhabites and even supported terrorist attacks. Today, Dagestan is frequently shaken by political murder and terrorism and, therefore, is one of the most destabilized regions of the North Caucasus.

The book is based on a profound knowledge of Dagestan's history and political development. The authors provide detailed information on the main actors and all relevant events. The analysis of the relevant scientific literature is complemented by consideration of the content of daily newspapers. The argumentation always tries to find a way that not only presents the "Western" (or Russian) view but also takes into account the regional necessities and understanding. This has resulted in a coherent work that should be read by all who want to get a deeper insight into the political and social development in Dagestan, even if sometimes the search for a simplifying overview must be postponed.

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