FOREWORD

The war in Chechnya is a difficult trial for the new Russian state and for all its citizens, especially the Chechen people. The reasonable desire of the population of this former autonomous region of the Soviet Union to enjoy democratization and to correct the historical injustices done to the Chechen and Ingush peoples—the Stalin-era deportation and subsequent discrimination—have been misused to fuel nationalist hysteria and anti-Russian feeling.

In the prewar years, the socioeconomic and political situation in Checheno-Ingushetia was difficult. Many young men were without work, especially in the hill country. The leadership of the republic suffered deep corruption along clan lines. Murky ideas of creating an independent Islamic state in Chechnya spread among part of the intelligentsia and the Islamic religious leadership, although the religious issue was used from the very start primarily as a political slogan in support of a break with Russia.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had a particularly negative effect on Chechnya. Not content with the breakup of the fifteen former Soviet republics, which in and of itself was a huge historical shock, leaders and activists in several autonomous regions undertook the much more dangerous project of further disintegration of the country. In response, leaders of the fifteen republics who were involved in dismantling the central authority and the common state were setting a dangerous and often irresponsible course in regard to their own internal autonomous regions. Some promised the autonomous regions unlimited sovereignty, others tried to abolish them. Both approaches led to armed conflicts that resulted in ethnic cleansing and numerous casualties.

There was a chance to prevent violence and war in Chechnya. The thirst for power among those at the center and the lack of attention to what was

happening at the periphery, as well as the ambitions of some Russian national leaders who came from the region, allowed a series of dangerous manipulations to unfold in Chechno-Ingushetia: the rise to power of General Dudayev, the destruction of the institutions of the state, the loss of control over arms stores, the appearance of armed groups among the civilian population, and the easy agreement to split the republic in two.

The illegitimate regime pushed the republic toward chaos and dangerous adventurism. The first victims were the non-Chechen population, who were robbed, pushed out of the republic, and sometimes killed. The helpless reaction of the Russian authorities and the silence of international human-rights organizations remain on their consciences. The slogan of self-determination turned out to be more important than human rights and elementary order in the country.

This was the time when supporters of further disintegration in Russia appeared in the outside world. If it had not been for their sympathy, financial subsidies, and secret instructions, events might have taken a different turn. There might have been talks with a peaceful outcome, as happened, for example, in Tatarstan. In the end, the ambitions, haughtiness, and arrogance of leaders—primarily Yeltsin and Dudayev—overpowered feelings of responsibility for the fates and lives of the citizens. Irresponsible improvisations led to war in 1994, which ended in August 1996 with a pseudo-peace, since no fundamental agreements were reached, except the proud but ahistorical claim to have brought about “the end of the 400-year conflict between Russia and Chechnya.”

There were many guilty parties in this war, and history will put everything in its place. But the human lives lost cannot be brought back, and the destruction is difficult to reverse. But what happened after August 1996 has a somewhat different meaning. For three years, the destruction of the state and society in Chechnya proceeded apace. The militarization of the population, its ideological preparation in the spirit of Islam, the theft of the republic’s resources, robbery, and murder, all fueled hatred and prepared the way for a new war, this time with the help of international terrorist forces.

All this led to the attack in the summer of 1999 on Dagestan, which raised the risk of a widening of the armed uprising into other regions of the North Caucasus and the destabilization of the south of Russia. The Russian state and its federal government could not ignore this challenge. The support from the Dagestani and Russian populations for decisive action against the Chechen separatists and foreign mercenaries speaks for itself.

That was followed by the shift of military action to Chechnya itself, with the aim of eliminating this international base of armed terrorism. By this time, a new generation had grown up in Chechnya, fully propagandized about the “great victory over Russia” and the extremist ideas of radical

Islam. Recruits from this generation preferred armed resistance to federal forces, and the local population lost control over it. Unfortunately, Russia's armed forces are not too well suited to such complex operations, leading to cruelty and civilian casualties. About half the population of Chechnya has left its small homeland and found refuge in other regions of Russia.

This volume, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*, was written by a man well known in our country, whose works and speeches I consider well deserving of attention. Even before the era of perestroika, Valery Tishkov was a leading scholar on issues of nationality and the formation of a multinational state. In July 1990, he was a delegate to the Twenty-eighth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where he participated in the discussion of these issues and proposed adoption of the tenet that "individual rights are above those of the nation and that the party opposes special rights for so-called native nationalities in relation to the rest of the population of the republic," which was ultimately included in the congress's program statement. This principle had and continues to have many opponents, but if it had been implemented, we would not have suffered many conflicts, including the war in Chechnya.

All this makes the author not merely an ivory-tower academic but also an active citizen, a scholar-politician who through his scholarly works and his social activity has had a real influence on events in our country. Tishkov's new book is impressive for its materials, its approach to the problem, and its analysis. Much has been written about the Chechen war, and there have been many journalistic interpretations of it. Many of these works are politicized and amount to polemics, however, like the bullets that are fired in Chechnya.

Tishkov has written a different kind of book and offers a new view on the war in Chechnya. This is a book not about the war but about Chechen society, which has been forced into this war and cruelly traumatized by it. The firsthand accounts it contains from many Chechens in different areas, both fighters and those who stayed out of the fighting, both supporters of Dudayev and opponents, are the book's strength. The book exposes the deeper truth about people in time of war, in particular the Chechens.

The author's analysis of the situation in Chechnya, both before the war and during the conflict, contradicts the common view that the Chechens differ radically from the rest of the population of Russia. It is often forgotten that the Chechens and Ingush, especially the current generation, grew up in the Soviet era with their own autonomous republic and enjoyed diverse industrial and cultural outputs, a high proportion of educated people, and numerous outstanding citizens. The Chechens lived according to the same laws as the rest of the country, although they preserved their cultural uniqueness. The author has convincingly restored this forgotten picture, and this is very useful, since after all this destruction, more and more

Chechens are saying they had a perfectly good life. Until now, their propagandists and external advisers had continually harped on one theme: “genocide,” “ethnocide,” “ecocide,” “national destruction.”

This book confronts the difficult question of why such conflicts arise—why do people who have lived side by side start killing one another? Some explain this in terms of history, citing innate hatred, the incompatibility of civilizations, or the unusual social structure of the rival nationalities. Some say the war in Chechnya was bought and paid for. But the question remains of why it is so easy to lead a society into conflict: why people take up arms or find themselves unable to oppose the initiators and perpetrators of violence. Tishkov’s explanation has important theoretical and political significance and deserves the attention of an international audience.

As a scholar and an ethnologist, Tishkov concludes that the past, especially that which has not been personally experienced, cannot be adduced as the reason for the Chechen conflict. History is mobilized by political leaders and social activists as an ideological argument and nothing more. The Chechens were not the only victims of Stalin’s repression, but only for them did this trauma of the past become one of the main motives for an armed conflict. Social factors, such as unemployment among the male population, may create the conditions for them to take up arms, but not more. Other republics of the North Caucasus also have the same social problems, as do many countries of the world, but they do not inevitably lead to armed conflict. Neither do cultural traditions or particular family structures explain much, since most of this is artificially exaggerated by enthusiasts of ethnographic or militaristic romanticism. Finally, some argue that it is Islam, the religion of the Chechens, that makes them so steadfast and fierce, and that they have conducted a “holy war” against Russia and the Russians in the name of Islam and of the cleansing of the state of “infidels.” But this is a false assertion. Islam contains a strong humanistic component, and religious leaders have never advocated a war with Russia.

In reality, things are at once much more complicated and yet simpler than in many of the explanations and apologies. People are inclined to abandon law and order and to resort to unlawful ways of reaching their utilitarian goals when coaxed along by high-sounding ideas and slogans, obeying those who put forward and inculcate such slogans. In societies that are little modernized or have just emerged from totalitarian rule, people may readily give up their individual civic responsibilities for an authoritarian collective idea, particularly if it is based on ethnic or religious sentiments. Having stolen or commandeered their Kalashnikov guns, the illegal groups or “guards” go on to grab property and resources belonging to others—property and resources they needed to work hard for in previous years. The temptations of chaos and lawlessness can be so great that many are overwhelmed by them. This logic of events is demonstrated in the stories

Chechens themselves tell, stories of how they found their way into the armed “battalions” and became involved in the senseless practices of war.

Another of the book’s revelations is the state of a society immersed in bloodshed. People are subjected to an unprecedented flood of propaganda and to various external influences seeking not only to destroy the state control but to undermine an internal social order based on ancient moral principles and the authority of the elders. Ordinary people concerned above all with their own lives, with the welfare and safety of their families, find themselves victims of global ideological disputes and targets of rampant violence. Then the chaotic ruin of their homes and the death of their dear ones fall upon them and change their psychology: they are filled with despair and a lust for vengeance, they lose sight of what is happening in their land around them. They counter the situation by their own personal strategies for survival and the preservation of their families and property. They are numbed by the cruelty of war inflicted by both sides—including the destruction caused by the army in trying to cope with the insurgents.

In such conditions, the civilian population suffers more than the forces engaged in deadly combat. Civilian casualties in the Chechen war have exceeded those of both Russia’s army and the insurgents’ battalions and guerrillas. People are moved only by their desire to defend their homes and to take revenge. They have long forgotten the initial slogans of the conflict. Then various internal and external forces usurp the motives of war and take unspeakable profits from the chaos and the terror. The conflict is thus driven out of control by the society immersed in it. The reigning ideology has become extremism and intolerance. Opponents, even in one’s own ranks, are simply annihilated. Peace is perceived by some of the fighting men as a daunting prospect, one that calls for a resumption of responsibility and efforts to restore normal life, instead of toting an automatic weapon as a source of status and livelihood. Tishkov defines this state of society as demodernization and analyzes its features. What he finds is important for the understanding of all modern armed conflicts.

Of great value also is the author’s conclusion that violent group conflicts are not so much preordained as constructed by interested forces in certain favorable conditions, particularly when the state is weakened in an underdeveloped civil society or during the crises of deep political transformations. The barrier between war and peace is then more fragile, and violence may break out even in previously more or less flourishing lands. That fact alone calls for greater responsibility than we have hitherto seen on the part of politicians and intellectuals. These actors often begin by favoring and supporting some unrealistic and dangerous geopolitical project and then end—while watching from the sidelines—by showing much concern over human rights violations or terrorism. That scenario played itself out after World War II in many regions of the world and then erupted again in

Chechnya. These are lessons to be learned by politicians, by public bodies, and by ordinary people. And this is the great contribution of this engaging and important book. Here social science demonstrates its potential as a field of knowledge with eminent relevance and significance—for society itself, for effective government in the interests of the people, and for protecting them from falling hostage to armed sects and indiscriminate violence.

This book is a warning, and I wish it numerous thoughtful readers.

Mikhail S. Gorbachev