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# The Image of Chechen Separatists in the Polish Media

**Book review: Alicja Stańco-Wawrzyńska, *Cel: walka. Obraz terroryzmu w polskich dziennikach*, Adam Marszałek Publishing House, Torun 2017, pp. 153.**

Chechnya is a Russian region striving to be proclaimed independent from the Soviet Union and then Russia. Still, *de facto*, it never did. Chechnya has been and continues to be an area that intrigues and interests researchers all over the world. This place has a vast, researched, and not fully explained genealogy and martyrdom, which many researchers and experts mention from time to time. However, due to the end of hostilities and the appearance of new ones in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are not many books and publications about Chechnya. In Poland, new scientific books on Chechnya have not been on the market for some time. However, with the book's publication in question, this trend will change. There will be many experts and scientific moving monographs on Chechnya.

Consequently, a short review of the book (from series *Biblioteka Azji i Pacyfiku*) devoted to Chechnya or Chechen terrorism in Poland was proposed. The author made a selection in the newspapers appearing daily in Poland. Because both *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* devoted a lot in the 1990s and 2000s remarks and places to Chechnya and terrorism, the authors were groups of Chechen fighters. The selected period of the analyzed articles is not accidental because 1996 was when the First Chechen War ended, and 2011 as the author pointed out, “for the last quite loud attack in January 2011 the year of the attack at the airport in Moscow (...)” (p. 7). It is probably about the attack at the airport, Domodedovo. However, the author briefly mentioned that one could attribute the attack at Domodedovo airport as this “quite loud attack”. Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the work was divided into four parts.

In the first part, *Terroryzm a media*, the author devoted much attention to depicting the background of historical and present perception of terrorism in the media and its representation in the world media. It has been pointed out that terrorist attacks are too important a phenomenon that they should not be omitted in news services (p. 42). Here we may agree with the author who says that a terrorist attack is an important phenomenon. If we changed “important” into “shocking”, “tragic”, it would do the role of informing the public opinion in Poland or around the world about these tragic attacks’ consequences no matter in which part of the world it takes place. In my opinion, “Important events” include the election of the president of, e.g., the United States, Russia, France, or Germany, or other significant events that will significantly affect the fate of a given country or world, e.g., the election of a pope or the closure of two saints to Muslims place, Mecca and Medina.

The next chapter, *Obraz zamachowców z Czeczenii w “Gazecie Wyborczej”*, is devoted to discussing 48 selected articles out of 596 published between 1996 and 2011 and the problems of Chechnya, especially Chechen separatists, including Basayev. Press articles were chosen to qualify them for dramatic/subdued, brutal/mild, favorable/unfavorable categories. Yes, one can argue why there could not be more of these articles. Still, on the other hand, the author decided that these 48 articles would fit perfectly into individual categories and can be considered an innovation and a significant part of this work. No one has yet focused on the specifics of unique articles. This chapter’s advantage is that it also uses the books of people present in Chechnya during the first and second Chechen wars without news about help for Chechens (Pietrasik, 2020, p. 239). *Relacja o działaniach bojowników w “Rzeczpospolitej”* is the next part of the publication, was focused on presenting subsequent press articles. The criteria for selecting individual articles were the same as in the previous section. However, 32 articles were analyzed here. It is not the quantity but the articles’ quality in question that matters. Interestingly, after presenting this part, the author states that most press articles were characterized by a favorable attitude towards Chechen terrorists before and after the *World Trade Center* attacks. A similar situation occurs when analyzing the articles in the last part of the work.

The last chapter of 15 pages is focused on Basayev (*Czeczeński celebryta? Kilka słów o Szamilu Basajewie*). Why Basayev and not Raduyev, Gelaev, or Khattab? Basayev was the one who appeared most often in the context of planned and ongoing terrorist attacks in Russia. He ran a page to determine what the next actions are planned and what the terrorists are demanding. His recordings also appeared. Was he a celebrity? After presenting the terrorist activity and Basayev’s behavior, the author stated: “The thesis about the phenomenon of celebrity has also been positively verified” (p. 136). Here, one must be careful in formulating this type of term towards someone who led the terrorist attacks. Please note that the term celebrity is usually associated with a known person but in a positive sense. He frequently appears in advertisements, films, fashion shows, or leads his profile on social networking sites, adding positive vibes. This person should not be calling for forbidden acts (as did Basayev) or is often mentioned in the press or on websites in a positive sense. Although

Basayev realized his media assumptions, he was negatively portrayed on the Internet, and thus he was the hero of bad events. In my opinion, he was not a celebrity, and I agree with the statement that Basayev was an icon of separatist terrorism in Chechnya (p. 136). None of the terrorists became a celebrity, although he often appeared in the media and appeared on the Internet, each of them, even Osama bin Laden, was primarily and mainly a terrorist, not a celebrity. So, in my opinion, Basayev and bin Laden were only the initiators of terrorist attacks, who had access to the media and the Internet. They were not celebrities as such. It is worth mentioning that Basayev was active in the media and other Chechen warlords. For example, Aslan Maskhadov, Khalim Sadulayev, or Dokku Umarov.

The publication's cover is not an essential part of an exciting and well-substantive book, but it can be misleading. This cover could well be chosen when the author mentions the phenomenon of terrorism. When there is a narrowing of the research field, in this case of Chechen terrorism, a cover identical to the issues raised would be appropriate, for example, a group of Chechen fighters, or Basayev himself, who was often mentioned in the book. It is a pity that the author did not present her points concerning Chechen terrorism in the Polish press since 1992. At that time, the first events bearing the hallmarks of terrorist activity took place in Chechnya. It should also be recalled that there were several more terrorist events before the First Chechen War. It should be noted that representatives of Chechen terrorism include not only Shamil Basayev, but also many other separatists, such as Ruslan Gielayev, Dokku Umarov, Zelimchan Yandarbijew, Arbi Barayev, Salman Raduyev, or the Saudi Emir Khattab, who fought since the First Chechen War on the side of the Chechens. However, as we look at the press articles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, Basayev was most often mentioned in Chechen terrorism and terrorist attacks in the 1990s and 2000s in Russia.

In conclusion, the discussed book, which has 153 pages, is a valuable source of information on presenting and showing Chechen terrorism in the Polish press. There is no doubt that well-developed media studies can become an inspiration for further research in this field. They may be a vital source for many future journalists, political scientists, media scientists, or Russian experts to prepare diplomas and scientific theses or articles. This publication aspires to an English version, which may be a valuable item in the English-language literature on the subject. It may help understand the Polish press's message of terrorist events in Russia claimed by Chechen fighters or for scientists from outside Poland who will want to deepen their knowledge in this area or use selected, interesting statements that we have come across in this publication.

#### **References:**

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