

DEVELOPMENTS IN
THE CHECHEN CONFLICT

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BEFORE THE
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

MAY 9, 2002

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MAY 9, 2002

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The Commission met in room 340, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC, at 2:00 p.m., the Hon. Robert T. Aderholt, Commissioner, presiding.

Commissioners present: Hon. Robert T. Aderholt, Commissioner; Hon. Joseph R. Pitts, Commissioner; and Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Commissioner.

Witnesses present: Amb. Steven Pifer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State; Aset Chadayeva, Pediatric Nurse; Andrei Babitsky, Correspondent, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; and Anatol Lieven, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

HON. ROBERT T. ADERHOLT, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Commission, for attending this hearing on recent developments in the war in Chechnya.

The war between Russia and the region of Chechnya, the second in the past 10 years, continues with little respite. Much of the region is in ruins, resulting in a humanitarian disaster of enormous proportions. Violence connected with the war has crossed into neighboring regions. The Russian Government claims that in 1999 Chechen terrorists planted bombs in Russian cities that took the lives of hundreds of innocent citizens, although questions have been raised about the reliability of this evidence.

In Chechnya, an estimated 300,000 people have been displaced by the war, many of whom are living in refugee camps in neighboring regions. Hundreds of people, suspected insurgents or otherwise, have been killed or have disappeared after being detained by Russian military forces.

Human Rights Watch has documented eight mass graves and eight other makeshift burial sites where corpses of disappeared and others have been found. The largest of these mass graves, with 51 bodies, was discovered near the Russian army headquarters in February of last year. The Human Rights Watch report continues that most of the bodies found in those graves were last seen in the custody of Russian federal forces and most bore the unmistakable sign of torture. Injuries commonly found on the bodies include broken limbs, scalped body parts, severed fingertips and knife and gunshot wounds.

Russian soldiers have died in ambushes, mine explosions or skirmishes with guerrillas. Some have reportedly been killed after capture by Chechen forces.

The Russians assert that the war is an anti-terrorist operation and evidence reveals that some elements of the Chechen insurgency have been linked to the lethal plague of international terrorism.

I believe we should work with any nation committed to fight against international terrorism, and I also understand that the Russian Government has legitimate concerns about the criminality and the lack of governance that is characterized by Chechnya after the period of 1994-1996 war. Murder, kidnaping, and even mutilation of victims frequently occurred, and Chechen authorities were either unable or unwilling to repress the criminal elements in their territory.

However, the fight against terrorism cannot be *carte blanche* to repress human rights, and we are currently seeing some in participating States of the OSCE, and it certainly cannot be an excuse to unleash war without the slightest regard to Geneva Conventions or the OSCE Code of Conduct against an entire people. The vast majority of the people of Afghanistan were glad to see the allied forces liberate them from the repression of the Taliban regime. Can anyone say the same for the Chechen people and the Russian army as it is currently operating?

Recently, President Putin stated, "Let us hope that the use of force in Chechnya will soon be a thing of the past." I know that people in Chechnya are tired of the use of force and the special operations. We can only add a heartfelt amen to those sentiments and hope that he will undertake a meaningful and sincere effort to stop the indiscriminate killings and the human rights abuses in Chechnya, many of which are perpetrated by Russian forces nominally under his control.

At the same time, I would urge the Chechen leadership to heed the call of the United States Government and to dissociate itself from terrorist elements and to consider any just and reasonable solutions that would end the suffering by the people of Chechnya.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses today and will have some questions following the testimony. I would like to add that the Commission has extended an invitation to the Russian Embassy to send a representative to provide testimony at the hearing today, but their schedule did not permit that. The embassy is welcome to provide any written remarks for inclusion in the hearing record itself.

First of all, we are glad to have Ambassador Steven Pifer, and he will be on the first panel. We welcome you to the Commission, and we look forward to your testimony.

Amb. PIFER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to be here to talk about Chechnya and U.S. policy as regards it. With your permission, what I would like to do is submit a written statement for the record and then just offer some brief summary comments.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Without objection.

**AMB. STEPHEN PIFER,
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR EUROPEAN
AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Amb. PIFER. Thank you.

The Chechen conflict is now several months away from its third year. It has brought tremendous destruction and ruin to Chechnya and, sadly, there is no real sign at this point that this situation is going to end at

any time soon. The U.S. Government is committed to doing all that it can to bring about an end to this conflict and to relieve the suffering of the civilian population.

The objectives with regards to Chechnya today are the same as they have been in the past; we seek a political settlement that will end the fighting, promote reconciliation, and recognize the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. We also seek accountability for human rights abuses committed by all sides in the conflict and an end to them, and we seek unimpeded access to the displaced persons by humanitarian organizations. We are working toward these objectives in our ongoing discussions with the Russian Government, in concert with friends and allies, and in partnership with international and nongovernmental organizations.

We were encouraged by the speech on September 24 by President Putin which, to our mind, created an opening for a dialogue between Russia and the Chechens. We were also encouraged by the quick response by Mr. Maskhadov the next day. Unfortunately, that opening led to only a single face-to-face meeting in November and at this point, we see no real continuation of that face-to-face contact.

We do not ask the Russian Government to try to reach accord with terrorists, but we believe there are moderate Chechens in Chechnya with whom discussions can be undertaken, such as Mr. Maskhadov. We hope that Russian-Chechnya political contacts will be resumed in the near future, but we are not able to offer a reliable prediction as to when that might be. At the same time, we have seen evidence of individuals or certain factions in Chechnya who are linked to international terrorist elements, including Al Qaeda, and we have called on Mr. Maskhadov and other moderate Chechens to dissociate themselves from these terrorists.

Despite the death of Khattab and the rumored death of Basayev, we believe that the conflict in Chechnya is likely to continue at its present level. We believe there is no military solution possible for this conflict.

As a result of the fighting over the last 2 years, an estimated 300,000 Chechens have been displaced, most of them are living either in Chechnya or in nearby Ingushetia. The United States has been the largest single provider of humanitarian assistance to the North Caucasus. Since 1999 we have contributed more than \$30 million; in fiscal year 2001, we contributed \$22 million. About \$12.5 million of this went to the United Nations and its agencies and the International Red Cross; and about \$10 million went to U.S. nongovernmental organizations which have programs in the North Caucasus region.

Much of the contribution has been in the form of food aid, such as wheat, flour and cooking oil. Our contributions also have funded much needed emergency health care, water and sanitation projects, education, and shelter, as well as mine awareness programs. All of our contributions, except earmarked funds for our nongovernmental organizations, are provided directly to the United Nations and the Red Cross for distribution to their agencies and implementing projects.

Beyond our contributions, we have assigned at our embassy in Moscow a refugee coordinator. He works with the international community and Russian officials on the delivery of our humanitarian assistance, and he also reports on further needs in the area. The coordinator has

visited the region several times to visit camps and settlement housing for displaced persons and he reports regularly to us. Ambassador Vershbow also plans to visit the region.

We stress that humanitarian organizations should be given the necessary unimpeded access to the region to reach the displaced. We have also stressed in our discussions with the Russian Government that the return of the displaced to Chechnya should be voluntary. The danger to civilians in Chechnya remains our greatest concern. The human rights situation is poor, with a history of abuses by both sides and little or no accountability by either. Russian forces rely on security sweeps of Chechen fighters, but these are often followed by credible reports of serious human rights abuses, such as summary executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, beatings or extortion, and sometimes rape. Frequently, some of those taken into detention disappear, sometimes the bodies being found days later.

Russian officials have acknowledged that Russian soldiers have committed crimes against civilians, but investigations and prosecutions have not kept pace with the scope of the human rights violations that have been reported by credible witnesses. Russian commanders in Chechnya have issued orders intended to prevent these abuses—most recently, order number 80 which was put out at the end of March—but much more needs to be done to instill discipline in the Russian security forces to prevent abuses and to prosecute those who commit them. Publicly and privately, we have made this point to the Russian Government at all levels.

The Chechen fighters, I would note, are not without blame. The Chechen fighters also must be held to account.

In closing, I would just note that Russia is cooperating with us in the war on terrorism, and we are embarked on building a new, more cooperative bilateral relationship. President Putin has made it clear that he sees a partnership with the United States and the West as in the best interest of Russia.

In just 2 weeks, Presidents Bush and Putin will be meeting in Moscow and discuss how to further strengthen relations between our two countries. We hope that they will be able to record concrete progress on a number of parts of the bilateral agenda. As part of this new relationship, however, there remain issues on which we disagree. Chechnya is one of those issues, and it is an issue that we have raised regularly and candidly with the Russians.

As we embrace this opportunity, we now have to build a stronger relationship with Russia. We do so without compromising our principles and commitments to promote peace and respect of human rights in Chechnya.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here, and we certainly appreciate your attendance today.

We appreciate, based on your statement, the fact that officials in our government at all levels raised the issue of human rights in Chechnya with their counterparts. How do Russian officials respond to these points?

Amb. PIFER. Well, we have raised the issue regularly. For example, Secretary Powell, when he was in Moscow in December, raised it directly with President Putin. Foreign Minister Ivanov visited Washington last week, and it was one of the issues that the Secretary raised at

that time. It has been raised also by President Bush to President Putin, and we anticipate it will come up at the summit in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 2 weeks.

The Russian reaction that we have heard in the last couple of months basically parallels what they've been saying publicly; they have tried to depict a situation in Chechnya where the situation is normalizing—where they are setting up legal institutions, local government institutions, basically to restore civilian life to some sense of normalcy.

Our sense is, based on all we have seen, that the assessment is overly optimistic and really masks the true situation where we continue to see human rights problems and continued fighting. As I said in my opening remarks, we do not see a military solution to this problem.

Mr. ADERHOLT. We keep hearing press reports about large numbers of Chechens fighting on the side of the Taliban, yet no one seems to be able to produce more than a handful, if even that, of the alleged Chechen fighters. For instance, during his visit to Moscow, General Franks, the commander of Operation Enduring Freedom, referred to about 35 nations represented at the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, and said to be sure the Chechen nationality is represented among those 35 nations.

Do you have any names or other data on these alleged Chechens reported held at Guantanamo Bay or other U.S. military detention facilities in Afghanistan?

Amb. PIFER. On this one, this really is an issue that comes under the purview of the Department of Defense. So with all respect, it's preferable to defer to my colleagues from the Pentagon to answer. We have not, in the past, discussed openly the nationalities or the names of those being detained at Guantanamo Bay as a matter of Defense Department policy. So with all due respect, I'd like to defer on that question.

Mr. ADERHOLT. OK.

The U.S. Government is in the process of sending a reported 150–200 military advisers to Georgia to help that country deal with the presence of elements of Al Qaeda that our government claims exist in the Pankisi Gorge on the Chechen border. However, yesterday's wire reports reported that the Georgian defense minister claims that the Al Qaeda terrorist network does not have a presence in the Republic of Georgia.

Has our government formally responded to the Georgian Government on this issue?

Amb. PIFER. President Shevardnadze has publicly acknowledged the presence of [off-mike] have been in the Pankisi Gorge, and it is our belief that a certain number of individuals who are linked to international terrorism and who are supporting the operations of their colleagues in Chechnya, in fact, do operate in the Pankisi Gorge.

This was a situation that has been raised by the Russians. There were several cases of Russian air strikes in the Pankisi Gorge last fall. We expect the concerns here about these individuals in the Pankisi are legitimate. But what we have argued to the Russians is they ought not to take action, that this is really a problem for the Government of Georgia to resolve. The training and equip program to which you refer, which is just beginning in the last couple of weeks, is intended to help give Georgia's security forces the capacity to deal with these individuals operating in the Pankisi Gorge.

Again, what we're trying to do is to help Georgia be in a position to resolve its problem, because we do not think the situation in Georgia would be advanced were the Russians to take action across the borders.

Mr. ADERHOLT. We have been joined by Commissioner Hastings. Do you have any questions at this time?

**HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS,
COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much. My comments aren't necessary at this time. I do not have any opening statement. I'm really pleased to welcome all of our witnesses. Ambassador Pifer and I had a really good exchange in these meetings before.

We appreciate, based on your statement, Ambassador, the fact that officials at all levels raise the issue of human rights in Chechnya with their Russian counterparts. How do they respond, the Russian officials? And is it our expectation that President Bush will be about the business of asking that question?

Let me ask you, did Congressman Aderholt ask a very similar question previous to my coming here?

Amb. PIFER. We talked a little bit about that. But just to reiterate the main points, the relationship between President Bush and President Putin is such where President Bush feels very comfortable raising difficult issues, whether it is the question of media freedom or Chechnya and these questions have come up quite frequently in the past. And it is my expectation that this will be on the agenda when President Bush visits Moscow in 2 weeks' time.

The answer that we received from the Russians on Chechnya, when they described the situation, is one very similar to what Russian officials have been saying publicly of late: the situation is normalizing; and they are restoring the legal institutions, the local government institutions, that will allow life in Chechnya to get back to normal. Our sense is that that really masks the reality, which is much more difficult.

I would note that on April 18 when President Putin was giving his state of the federation speech, he made the point that the fighting in Chechnya was over. That same day Chechen fighters killed 19 Russian security personnel in a bomb attack. That just indicates to us that the fighting is going to continue. Our fear is that, without some real political dialogue between Moscow and the moderate elements in Chechnya, there really is not going to be a way to bring this conflict to a conclusion.

Mr. HASTINGS. Right. As you no doubt know, I serve in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Our Russian counterparts, with the exception of Mr. Zhirnovsky, have always been favorably disposed to discuss matters. I might add, quite honestly, they are set upon not only by us, but by a significant number of other people, previous to 9/11, in dealing with Chechnya. Naturally, because many of the former Soviet Union states have very strong feelings in that regard, you would expect that they would express them in a parliamentary forum like the OSCE.

Do you, as a diplomat, run into what I have run into? I might add, I'm going with Congressman Curt Weldon and others on a long trip over the Memorial Day holiday, and our first stop is going to be in Moscow.

But they make an argument: "Maybe now you understand a little bit about terrorism, now that it has happened to you." Do you run into that same kind of thing? And this is just a practical question that I'm asking, not something so much substantive for this agenda.

Amb. PIFER. I think there has been a certain sense in Russia that after September 11 now America understands the war on terrorism. To be clear, there was a slight shift in our position with regard to Chechnya after September 11. We began to call both publicly, but also in our private contacts with the Chechens, on the Chechens—the moderate Chechens—to dissociate themselves from those who are linked to groups like Al Qaeda and other international terrorist groups. That was, rightly or wrongly, something that our policy was silent on before September 11.

But having said that, we do not see the situation in Chechnya as one where you are talking about solely a conflict with international terrorism. There are moderate elements there. We appreciate that on September 24, President Putin seemed to draw a distinction between the international terrorist elements and the moderates.

We were encouraged by that. We tried to use our contacts with the Russians to urge them to move forward on that, again, while rejecting any discussion with the terrorists—or the international terrorist groups—to engage the moderates and try to get a political dialogue going.

We were somewhat hopeful as we saw some indications of contact. Then finally in November, a face-to-face meeting between Mr. Kazantsev, who is the presidential representative to Chechnya, and Mr. Zakayev, representing Mr. Maskhadov. That gave us some encouragement. But unfortunately, there was only that single meeting and there has been no follow-up.

Mr. HASTINGS. I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. That's all I have at this time.

And thank you, Ambassador.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Let me just follow up with a couple more questions.

You mentioned that our government has called upon the Chechen leadership to diassociate itself with terrorists. Have there been any concrete steps that we know of by the Chechen leadership to rid their forces of partisan fighters that may be associated with international terrorism or disassociate themselves from non-Chechen guerrillas who are using the Chechen conflict to wage jihad against Moscow?

Amb. PIFER. We have seen statements by Mr. Maskhadov criticizing and condemning international terrorism. We have also heard privately that moderate Chechens would like to find some way of beginning to draw back from the groups which were primarily associated with Mr. Khattab, whom we now believe is dead, but also with Mr. Basayev.

But that said, we haven't seen clear evidence of a real drawing-back by the moderate elements. So they've said the right words, but we haven't seen specific steps that I could cite to you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. In this connection, the former foreign minister of Chechnya on several occasions claimed that Chechnya's problems were caused by Zionists. In fairness to the present Chechen leadership, the former foreign minister has not been part of the Chechnya government for several years now.

However, according to the *FSU Monitor* published by the Union of Council for Jews in the former Soviet Union, the JTA news service reported that, in March 1999, President Maskhadov blamed international Jewish centers for working to topple him from power. Can you confirm this report?

Amb. PIFER. We actually have tried. We heard reference to it, but we have not been able to track down that report. So at this point I'm not really in a position to offer a comment on it.

Obviously we would reject that sentiment. And certainly, in our own contacts with the Chechens, as we engage with them and talk about how they ought to move forward, our focus has been on two messages. One is to leave ways open to a dialogue with the Russians. Although, of course, we are looking on Moscow to engage. Second, the importance that the Chechen fighters themselves observe human rights standards. Then, of course, since September 11, the new element in our position, which is the need to disassociate themselves from international terrorist groups.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

During the inter-war period of 1996 to 1999, there were numerous incidents of kidnaping, even mutilation of Russian citizens and foreigners in Chechnya. When the Maskhadov government was approached to intercede, their spokesperson answered that they could do nothing.

Mr. ADERHOLT. How much control do you think the president really has in Chechnya?

Amb. PIFER. I think certainly we would share that assessment. After the first conflict in Chechnya was brought to conclusion in 1996, and Mr. Maskhadov did play an important role on the Chechen side in reaching that conclusion, the Russians seemed to be prepared, and, in fact, were prepared, to give significant autonomy to the Chechens.

But the situation that we saw in Chechnya for the next several years was, indeed, somewhat chaotic. It was not one that you could argue was a stable society in which a normal life was possible. It was rather chaotic, with all sorts of problems.

Mr. ADERHOLT. You mentioned that investigations and prosecutions have not kept progress with the scope of the human rights violations that have been reported. Do you have any specific statistics on cases having been initiated or how many have resulted in trials and convictions or acquittals?

We understand that investigations are haphazard, many are suspended, few lead to trials, and few of the trials lead to just sentencing. Understand, for instance, that a trial of a certain Colonel Budanov for rape and murder has been dragging on since last year.

Would you comment on that please?

Amb. PIFER. We have Russian statistics, but we also have more detailed statistics from Human Rights Watch. By the Human Rights Watch count, there were 359 investigations opened, 294 by civilian prosecutors, 65 by military prosecutors. Nevertheless, of that number, approximately 360, only 70 of these cases remain under active investigation.

Let me cite one specific example of about 110 cases involving disappearances. More than 70 percent of the investigations have been suspended. So while lots of cases have been opened, we have not seen the sort of follow-through that we would expect, and that we think would be important in sending a message to the security forces that the Russian Government takes abuses of human rights seriously and is committed to prosecuting those who do abuse them.

On the one case that you mentioned, of Colonel Budanov, that is probably the one named figure where the trial has received a fair amount of press attention within Russia. However, as you mentioned, the case has dragged on. To some extent, I think, this is a test case, and people are watching this to see whether the system will handle it in a fair and correct way, and the jury is still out on that one.

Mr. ADERHOLT. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there have been instances where bodies have been found in mass graves in Chechnya. Even when the evidence points toward Russian complicity—and that might always be the case—our impression is that Moscow automatically blames Chechen terrorists. Is that the case?

Amb. PIFER. That certainly is my sense—that there is an automatic assumption, or an automatic attempt, to put the blame on the Chechens, but in many circumstances it is not clear to us, and in some situations it looks to us more likely that, in fact, these were the result of actions by Russian security forces.

Mr. ADERHOLT. What has been the record of the Russian Government in identifying bodies that have been found in mass burial grounds?

Amb. PIFER. I do not think it has been a very good record, but I do not have any specific percentages or figures that I could cite to you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. In the past 2 years, in 2000 and 2001, the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva has censured Russia's actions in Chechnya concerning all human rights violations while calling for a political settlement to the conflict. However, this year, without the presence of a U.S. delegation on the commission, a similar resolution sponsored by the European Union was defeated 16-15 with 22 abstentions. Unfortunately, this means that Chechnya will no longer be included on the agenda of the Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the General Assembly.

I note among the no votes and abstentions were some countries whom I would have thought would have been more inclined to add their voices of protest to what is happening in Chechnya. For example, Armenia voted against the resolution and Argentina, Brazil, Croatia, Japan, Peru, the Republic of Korea, South Africa and Thailand abstained.

Why did these governments decide to abstain from the vote, thereby killing the initiative?

Amb. PIFER. Mr. Chairman, I wish I could answer that question. We had worked very closely in the run-up to the vote with the European Union on the text of the resolution that the European Union put forward. We had understood that the European Union countries were also working to build support within the Commission for a positive vote, and in the days immediately prior to the vote were indicating to us that they thought that the vote would prevail without much difficulty.

In addition to our own contacts with the European Union, we reached out to some of the other members of the Commission to encourage them to vote for this, and we were taken aback when, in fact, the motion failed.

We were particularly surprised by a number of Muslim countries which voted or abstained from the vote in cases where they had clearly voted for it the previous year.

However, it was a very close vote. I think the loss resulted from a number of Organization of Islamic Countries that abstained. Then some newer members on the committee, those that—how shall I put this?—do not have strong human rights records, sided with the Russians in voting no.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

You mentioned that as many as 2,000 persons have been reported missing since the beginning of the conflict. The Russian Federation's human rights group Memorial recently released a list with specific data on 370 persons who have disappeared. Realizing that the conflict is still going on, is there anything the U.S. Government can do to help locate these missing persons?

Amb. PIFER. I think it is extremely difficult, given the difficult security situation on the ground. What we have tried to do is to provide assistance—humanitarian assistance—and to work with the United Nations and the Red Cross so that they can get necessary access into the region, including Chechnya, for humanitarian deliveries.

But the situation there is still very chaotic. There are some very strong security concerns. There really is not much I can see that the U.S. Government can do at this time to begin to help identify what has happened to the missing.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Commissioner Hastings?

Mr. HASTINGS. Can you give us some insight—this is a little off the subject—about Abkhazia and what is happening there? Some of us, on a delegation from OSCE, actually tried to get in there, and the Russians were very helpful, I might add.

But what I want to know from you is whether or not, from your point of view, you consider it safe to even try to negotiate with the people in that area.

Amb. PIFER. The situation in Abkhazia has been very difficult, going back 10 years ago when the Abkhazians broke away from Georgia.

You do have a CIS, Commonwealth of Independent States, peacekeeping presence there, which is Russian, which patrols the line—the border between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. But there are various groups—the “Friends of Georgia,” which involves the United States, Germany, and several other countries working with Georgia—working with the United Nations to try to find a way to facilitate a negotiation that we hope would bring Abkhazia back into Georgia and allow the return of a significant number of displaced Georgians.

But the situation really has been one where the conflict is frozen, and we haven't seen much movement there.

Mr. HASTINGS. Now all I know is on the occasions that we have tried to intervene, we have been rebuffed. That's Russia, OSCE and everybody else. And it is one of the more isolated areas of the world that doesn't get a lot of attention.

But now this is not the area—and please, I ask for information, this is not the area where the air strikes were coming from by Chechnya. That's an entirely separate issue that Georgia and Russia have some concerns about, am I correct?

Amb. PIFER. There were several air strikes conducted, we believe, by Russian aircraft in October and November. The Russians said that these were somebody else's aircraft. But they took place in the Pankisi Gorge, and then there was one instance of air strikes in the Kodori Gorge, which is on the border between Abkhazia and Georgia. There were some suggestions that certain Chechen elements had been moving from the Pankisi Gorge towards the Kodori Gorge, and that that might have been the cause of the air strikes.

Mr. HASTINGS. All right. Thank you very much.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for coming behind you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. No, absolutely, thank you for your questions.

Just one closing question, in your opening statement or in the statements that you made, you did not mention the OSCE. Does the OSCE have a role?

Amb. PIFER. The OSCE has an Assistance Group which is linked to Chechnya. They have been playing a role in coordinating some of the humanitarian elements. They have had less success in carrying out two other parts of their mandate, one of which was to facilitate negotiations between the Russians and the Chechens. Of course, that dialogue is not happening. They have had some success, but I would say it is fairly limited, in terms of monitoring the human rights situation in Chechnya.

But that Assistance Group was deployed. It was something we pushed the Russians on very hard a year ago, and finally, in June or July of last year, they agreed that the assistance mission would be allowed to go in. But they do operate under some fairly tight security strictures by the Russians, in some case with good reason because of the situation on the ground in Chechnya.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Secretary Pifer, we appreciate your attendance here at this Commission meeting today. Good luck at the summit later on this month, and again we appreciate your time and the information you brought before the Commission. Thank you very much.

Amb. PIFER. Thank you very much for your interest.

Mr. ADERHOLT. I now would like to call up Panel Two.

Mr. JOHN FINERTY [Staff Advisor, CSCE]. On Panel Two we have Aset Chadayeva. She's a former resident of Chechnya and a pediatric nurse by profession. She worked from 1987 in the Grozny Children's Hospital until December 1994 when the hospital was destroyed by bombs at the onset of the 1996 war.

She was working in the Chechen town of Aldi in February 2000 when Russian troops conducted a cleansing operation in the town during which more than 40 Chechen civilians were killed. She cared for the wounded and took photographs of the victims. She moved to New York City in April 2001, where she currently works and resides.

Andrei Babitsky is a correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In 1996, he became RFE/RL special correspondent in Chechnya and was the only journalist from the Western mass media to stay on in Grozny after it was attacked by Russian forces. In January 2000, he was seized by Russian authorities and held incommunicado for 40 days in a detention facility outside Grozny.

Mr. Babitsky was awarded the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Prize for Journalism in 2000, as well as the year 2000 Knight International Press Fellowship Award by the International Center for Journalists. He describes his experiences in his book entitled, *Undesirable Witness*.

Anatol Lieven is senior associate for foreign and security policy in the Russia and Eurasia Center at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C. A frequently published commentator and author, Mr. Lieven covered the Chechen war of 1994-1996 for the Times of London. His latest book is *Chechnya, Tombstone of Russian Power*, published by Yale University Press in May 1998.

In 1988-'99, Mr. Lieven was the *Times* correspondent in Pakistan from where he covered the last stages of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the beginning of the Afghan civil wars. Since February 11, Mr. Lieven has visited Pakistan twice and spent most of February in Afghanistan. He has just returned from a fact-finding trip in Israel.

Panelists come forward please.

Thank you, all three of you, for being here.

I would like to start out first with Ms. Chadayeva and let you begin. Then we will proceed on with the rest of the panel.

**ASET CHADAYEVA,
PEDIATRIC NURSE, FORMER RESIDENT OF CHECHNYA**

MS. CHADAYEVA. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Aset Chadayeva. I was trained and worked in Grozny as a pediatric nurse. My human and professional duty is to help people who need medical assistance.

During the 1994–1996 Russian-Chechen war, and during the war that began in 1999, I worked as a nurse. I tried to help old people, women, children, people who had been brought to the extreme of moral and physical exhaustion. I treated wounded people, sick people, paralyzed people.

During both wars I have seen incredible, horrible things. I have seen men traumatized in so-called filtration camps. I have seen their bodies scarred by torture, with terrible physical injuries, with fractured limbs, with torn-out nails, with burns from electroshock torture. People come out of filtration camps in dreadful condition and they can't get sufficient medical and psychiatric help.

Young Chechen men living in Chechnya today have two choices: to wage war or to wait for Russian soldiers to arrest or kill them. All three of my brothers were illegally detained by Russian servicemen. One of my brothers, officially classified as disabled because of his eyesight, was severely beaten by Russian soldiers in my presence. When I asked them why they were arresting him, they told me, "He's a Chechen. That's reason enough."

I treated women who had been raped by Russian soldiers, and I have also seen the bodies of women who had been killed after being raped.

During both wars I buried many dead. Bodies were left lying in the streets. I, my brothers, and my neighbors collected them so they wouldn't be eaten by dogs.

On February 5, 2000, I was at home in Aldi. Aldi is a suburb of Grozny, 10 minutes by car from the city center. The day before, on February 4, after the earlier fighting, 700 civilians were still living in Aldi. They thought the war was over for them. Many had been wounded during the Russian bombardment of Aldi. There were sick people, old people, women, pregnant women, and children, all exhausted by the war. On February 5, 2000, more than 100 Russian contract soldiers entered Aldi and conducted a cleansing operation. They threw grenades into basements where people were hiding. They executed unarmed men,

women, old people and children. Sixty civilians were killed by Russian soldiers on February 5. The victims ranged in age from a 1-year-old baby boy to an 82-year-old woman. They killed a woman who was 8 months pregnant and her 1-year-old son.

All my patients, who had been wounded during the bombings, who were getting well, were killed and their bodies were burned. The Russian officer knew that I was a nurse. He took me by the sleeve and said that his soldiers had killed several Chechen men by mistake on the next street. He ordered me to organize their burial. Some men were wounded. I could save one, but another man who had been shot in the stomach died the next day. He was my classmate.

The soldiers set fire to many homes, leaving the survivors without shelter. A soldier pointed to the burning homes and said to me, "We will destroy all of Chechnya this way. You see your city? We will flatten Chechnya."

The Russian soldiers committed serious war crimes in Aldi on February 5, 2000, more than 2 years ago. No one in the Russian military has been arrested or held accountable. We have witnesses to the crimes, we have photographs of the murdered people, the killers can be identified, but no one has been arrested for these crimes. The case has been suspended or closed.

Recently, the Russian procurator's office informed those who inquired about its status that Russian troops weren't present in Aldi on February 5, 2000.

In 1995, I was a witness to an earlier crime. I was standing in line, with some 50 other people from my neighborhood, to get water from a spring. Russian tanks were moving past us. One tank intentionally crushed a car. Inside the car were my neighbors, Yakub Shamilyov and his daughter Marina Shamilyov, 67 and 33 years old. They were killed instantly. The Russian soldiers in the tank were drunk. They said, "If you move from here we will open fire." They weren't arrested, they weren't punished.

Seven years later, just this past April, 34-year-old Leche Shamilyov, Yakub's son, was shot and killed by Russian soldiers in front of his house. They were in a tank. They weren't arrested, and they weren't punished.

I know of dozens of incidents like this. A crime is committed. There are the bodies of the murdered people. There are witnesses to the crime. The perpetrators are known. They are soldiers and officers of the Russian army. But nobody prosecutes them.

The lives of people in Chechnya often depend on drunken soldiers who can do whatever they like, and no one will question their actions.

The people of Chechnya have been deprived of all their rights—first of all, the right to life. The killing of defenseless civilians, including the elderly, children, and invalids, is a crime. Rape, torture, illegal detention, and malicious humiliation are crimes. Depriving civilians of objects indispensable for their survival is a crime. Failure to take appropriate and effective action to end these atrocities is also a crime.

I can state with full responsibility that what has happened and what is happening now in Chechnya is genocide of the Chechen people. Is it really necessary to have millions of victims to call such behavior genocide? Isn't the death of 100,000 Chechens since 1994 in the two Russian-Chechen wars sufficient reason for effective international action to end the conflict and the agony of the Chechen people?

The destruction of a nation cannot be the internal affair of any state. I want to believe that human rights are more than words on paper. I want to believe that victims will actually be defended by the United States and other democratic governments when their rights to life and to security of person have been violated in Chechnya or elsewhere.

I urge the U.S. Congress to do what it can to make sure that the hundreds of thousands of Chechens forced from their homes and living as refugees in Ingushetia and in Chechnya itself will receive sufficient assistance from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other humanitarian agencies to survive until they can return to their homes, confident that their lives and property will be secure—excuse me, confident their lives will be secure. They do not have any property now.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Ms. CHADAYEVA. The most horrible thing that I have seen, it is our wounded children without legs, without arms, without any childhood, who have lost their parents. I also have seen bodies of murdered children.

Every day in Chechnya somebody dies. Since I left Chechnya, thousands of Chechens have been killed. People there need your help now. Next year, even next month, your help will be too late for somebody.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you for your testimony. Now I'd like to call on Mr. Babitsky for his comments, please.

**ANDREI BABITSKY,
CORRESPONDENT, RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY**

Mr. BABITSKY [through translator]. Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and to offer my views on the war in Chechnya. My testimony is limited to a specific but very important aspect of this issue, namely the situation of journalists. I will be glad to address other issues during the question-and-answer session.

Early in the morning of November 2, 1999, two cars left the Chechen village of Samashki, moving towards Katyr-Yurt. The road went through the regional center of Achkoi-Martan, with its Russian guard post nearby. Without any warning, Russian soldiers in the guard post opened fire with automatic weapons on the approaching cars.

There were three young men in one car and two women in the second. The three men were seriously wounded right away, but one managed to get out of the car and hide in the nearby brush. The women were not hurt, and the soldiers let them pass, but only on foot.

The soldiers pulled the two wounded men from the car and tied them up with barbed wire. After a brief consultation, the soldiers poured fuel on the wounded men and set them on fire. Already engulfed in flames, the Chechens managed to shout to the women, who were waiting nearby, to tell their relatives in Samashki that they had been killed by Russian soldiers.

There have been many such episodes in the second Chechen war, but no one knows about most of them. I learned about this incident only because, at that time, I was located illegally in Achkoi-Martan.

Today, after the snows have melted in Chechnya, many burial sites have been found of people who were killed after mopping-up operations or after detentions at guard posts. No one knows why these people were killed—either those whose corpses were found recently, or in the more distant past.

In most cases, the corpses bear marks of torture while the victims were still alive. In other cases, the corpses were mutilated after the victim was dead.

But one can say that these people were not put to death by court order or as a result of military action. They were killed as part of the anarchy and arbitrary rule which is now the order of the day in Chechnya.

According to the Russian human rights organization Memorial, every month there are from 30 to 50 cases of extrajudicial killings of civilians who are taken from villages and cities during special operations or so-called mopping-up operations.

I also think that in many cases the military's arbitrary acts are possible because of the successful official campaign to silence reporting on Chechnya. From the outset of the second Chechen campaign, the Russian military and political authorities succeeded in establishing a censorship institution that immediately screened out journalists whose reports on the war were not in accord with the official position.

At the start of the war, both voluntarily and after official pressure, most Russian media outlets began to reflect the official position which excluded reports on the massive human rights violations committed by military personnel against the civilian population.

Some Russian media outlets continued to publicly report on the crimes committed by the military against civilians. These include four Moscow-based relatively small circulation newspapers, "*Novaya Gazeta*," "*Novaya Izvestiya*," "*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*" and "*Kommersant*," as well as various Internet sites.

The issue is not so much how Russian journalists assess the general situation in Chechnya. Most reporters are in agreement with the official Russian position that this is an anti-terrorist and anti-separatist war. This does not mean, however, that the Russian journalists would not report on crimes conducted by the military against a civilian population. The main issue is that the Russian military and the Kremlin have banned reports on killing, torture, and kidnapping of civilians by the Russian military.

The lack of information about Chechnya is one of the most effective ways to create a situation in which killers and kidnapers in epaulets can operate without legal accountability. In the first months of the military operations, one could manage to get into the territory of Chechnya with great difficulty, but using informal channels. This was the only way foreign journalists could carry out their work, after Russian officials, without any explanation, had denied them their right to be in the conflict zone.

Several foreign journalists who remained in Chechnya or in Ingushetia without the necessary official permission have been deprived of their accreditation or denied Russian visas. Last year, the Russian Government denied my acquaintance, the Czech journalist Petra Prokhazkova, entry into Russia for the next 5 years, although her husband is a Russian citizen and a permanent resident of Ingushetia.

I also know of another eight foreign journalists who covered the war in Chechnya who have been put on the visa blacklist by the Russian security forces and the Russian Foreign Ministry. They will not be allowed to enter Russian territory for 5 years.

Today, the Russian authorities have virtually resolved the problem of reporting on human rights violations in Chechnya. Television was the first target of the Kremlin campaign to suppress such information, even during the days of such independent TV stations as NTV and TV6.

Direct TV broadcasts from Chechnya are totally under control of the Russian military, since the only satellite relay dish is located in the main Russian military base in Khankala. The Khankala base is the command center for the Unified Group of the Russian Federation Armed Forces of the Northern Caucasus, which oversees the activities of the Russian army, the Russian Security Services (the FSB), and the Ministry of the Internal Affairs (MVD), troops.

It is also where the unified group has its press center and its daily press releases serve as the basis for all information from the conflict zone.

Access to Chechnya is, in fact, limited to those journalists who are willing to agree to 20 pages of extremely strict rules of accreditation which are in violation of Russian law. I can go into further detail on these regulations at a later point.

The press center of the Russian Federal Group of the Russian Forces in the Northern Caucasus carefully monitors the reports of journalists who have been in Chechnya. It also denies entry to those journalists whose reports, in the opinion of the military censors, contain defamatory material about Russian military personnel.

On the territory of Chechnya, journalists are required to restrict themselves to the territory of the Khankala military base; they may leave Khankala only if they are accompanied by press center officers. There are a few journalists who continue to work in Chechnya, but only after they have made incredible efforts and ignore official regulations. They do so, in fact, at the risk of their lives.

During her last assignment in Chechnya about one month ago, "Novaya Gazeta" reporter Anna Politkovskaya was forced to illegally escape from Chechnya after FSB officers made threats against her life. She was collecting material about the killing of civilians by members of a special detachment of the Russian Federation armed forces main espionage directorate, the GRU, in the Shatoi region.

Having resolved their assigned tasks in the conflict zone, the Russian authorities and the FSB are starting to bring under their control those regions that neighbor Chechnya—first of all, Ingushetia, which shelters over 150,000 Chechen refugees. In the last few months, and without any explanation, the FSB has expelled several groups of foreign reporters from Ingushetia. Journalists have been detained, held for hours of interrogation, and threatened with physical reprisals.

The FSB in Ingushetia told one of my acquaintances—a foreign reporter whose name I cannot reveal for obvious reasons—that they would break her hands if she did not leave the republic. The FSB officers told the journalists that they had to operate this way because they had no formal reason to expel her from Ingushetia.

The Russian authorities want to convince the public of the need to conduct this war, but they are also convinced that the Russian troops and the FSB are justified in using brutal methods against the civilian population in Chechnya.

I do not believe that President Vladimir Putin is not informed about the Chechen war. Due to his previous KGB career, Putin knows well that the security services and the Russian army operate without public or judicial control. Even if Putin is not aware of operational details, he is well informed of the nature of the Chechen war.

President Putin is also the ideological and operational center of a politically planned military operation. From the very start, this military and political campaign has aimed at making a ghetto of the war zone. This ghetto is shut off from the sight and influence of the outside world.

Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Mr. Lieven?

**ANATOL LIEVEN,
SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

Mr. LIEVEN. Thank you for your invitation.

The attacks of September 11 and the consequent U.S. war against terrorism has created a certain new understanding in the United States of the threats that Russia is facing in Chechnya and the North Caucasus region. This was emphasized today by the terrorist bombing in the Russian town of Kaspiysk, which killed a considerable number of people.

It has led to a new focus on the presence of international Islamic militants in Chechnya with links to Al Qaeda and other international terrorist networks. Most notably, of course, that already mentioned led by the Saudi Arabian, Khattab, who was apparently recently killed as a result of Russian action.

It has also led, or at least in my view should lead, to a new awareness of another issue. This is that from the point of view of U.S. vital interests, it is extremely important not to allow the creation of more lawless quasi-states or out-of-control areas, which can become havens for international terrorism. This was the kind of situation which unfortunately, existed in Chechnya after the Russian military withdrawal of 1996.

As mentioned by Secretary Pifer, this included not just terrorist and extremist threats, but also a very major explosion of criminality, kidnaping, and banditry against Russians, against other citizens of the Caucasus and against Western visitors to the region.

Now at the same time, as already emphasized, we must recognize that the Russian army has indeed carried out numerous severe abuses and even atrocities during its campaigns in Chechnya, including numerous extra-judicial executions, torture, massive looting, and rape. This has, in recent times especially, happened in the course of search operations for Chechen militants and weapons.

Many of these crimes appear to be the result of indiscipline and demoralization on the part of Russian soldiers, rather than Russian state policy. However, there is also ample evidence of senior officers turning a blind eye to these abuses and trying to shield the people responsible, with the result that very few of these crimes have, in fact, been seriously investigated or brought to justice.

These crimes by Russian troops are both obviously evil in themselves and are completely contrary to Russian state goals in the region. They fuel the war by alienating the massive Chechen population and, as is usual in these cases, creating more recruits for the Chechen separatist side.

The United States, therefore, needs to go on putting very heavy pressure on Russia over these abuses.

However, if Russia is to be treated by the United States as a partner in the war against terrorism, then the U.S. will have to approach this campaign in the same or similar way to its approach to similar abuses

by Turkey, by India, and other states in their campaigns against separatist forces; in other words, states which the United States regards as partners and allies.

Of course a key aspect of this is emphasizing the territorial integrity and the vital national security interests of the states concerned.

At the same time, the United States should also go on drawing a line between the international militants in Chechnya, the Chechen radicals, on the one side, and the followers of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov on the other. At the same time, the United States must however recognize that in practice, this line is often very difficult to draw if only because Maskhadov unfortunately does not, in fact, control most of the Chechens during the actual fighting, let alone, of course, the international militants.

The United States should therefore encourage, strongly encourage talks between the Russian Government and representatives of President Maskhadov. However, these talks should also include representatives of the pro-Russian authorities in Chechnya, who also do have a certain real support in that republic.

The goal should be free elections, a withdrawal of most of the Russian troops and a restoration of Chechen autonomy within the Russian Federation, which at the moment does exist, but for obvious reasons exists largely on paper.

In doing this, however, we should recognize, as already mentioned by Secretary Pifer, that given the record of 1996 to '99, which Chechnya possessed a kind of *de facto* independence under the presidency of Maskhadov, Russia has good reasons to doubt whether Maskhadov in future left to himself would be any more capable of controlling the situation in Chechnya than he was in those years.

For the same reason, in my view, hopes for full Chechen independence, as demanded by Maskhadov and his followers, will probably have to be shelved for a long time to come, quite apart from the continually important question of Russian territorial integrity.

The condition of Chechnya when it was in effect independent between '96 and '99 was simply too dangerous, not only to Russia and the Caucasus region, but to ordinary Chechens and in the long run to the United States as well.

Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you for your testimony.

I would like to open it up for questions, and I will start with Ms. Chadayeva. One question I would like to ask—in your testimony, you described the brutal acts by Russian contract soldiers in Aldi in February of 2000. Could you explain who these contract soldiers are and how they differ, if they do differ, from the regular Russian military forces?

Ms. Chadayeva. Excuse me, my English not good enough. I need a translator. I have only studied English for 10 months.

[through translator]. The contract soldiers are volunteers, hired specifically to kill people. They receive wages and are older than the drafted soldiers. Therefore, they are called contract soldiers.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Would any other panelists like to comment on that?

Mr. BABITSKY [through translator]. The contract soldiers work by contract, which has a certain time limit.

Many of these people have criminal backgrounds and have even been in prison. Most of these people are from Russian provinces who could not find work either in the cities or villages they come from.

I believe that the contract soldiers are one of the main causes of difficulties for the officers, since they do not follow military discipline or military orders and often act on their own. More than half the soldiers currently serving in Chechnya are contract soldiers.

Mr. ADERHOLT. You say that during the attack on Aldi the Russian forces executed unarmed men, women, old people and children, and the victims range in age from a 1-year-old baby to an 82-year-old woman. Were these children and older persons killed by random grenades or did the contract soldiers know who they were killing?

Ms. CHADAYEVA [through translator]. These people were killed by being shot in the head. People knew exactly whom they were killing. The soldiers knew exactly whom they were killing.

The soldiers were demanding money and valuables from the people they killed. In some cases, gold teeth were extracted from the corpses.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Any other panelists would care to comment?

Ms. CHADAYEVA [through translator]. One woman who was killed on that day—it was her 51st birthday. She was killed in front of her 8-year-old daughter. She was a widow already at that point, and she was bringing up eight children.

During this incident, my 27-year-old friend was killed. I picked up the pieces of her body and buried them myself so that her relatives would not see them. She was a beautiful and intelligent and kind woman who could have had children. She was killed by a Russian shell.

My task consisted of picking up and preparing for burial the bodies of the women who had been killed, because according to Muslim tradition men cannot do this task.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Let me stop you right there. We are going to have to take a break. They have called votes on the floor of the House.

But, Mr. Hastings, would you like to go ahead and...

Mr. HASTINGS. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all of the witnesses.

I particularly appreciate your compelling testimony, Ms. Chadayeva. Mr. Babitsky—if you will be kind enough to tell him that I am pleased to have been one of the people that voted for him to receive the journalism award. It makes me proud. I had no idea in life that I would get an opportunity to see him. I work actively with the German journalist that I'm sure you have come to know, Professor Duve.

Nevertheless, I would ask of you questions that I do not think time will permit, Mr. Chairman, but I would be interested in Mr. Babitsky's and Mr. Lieven's views as to where—I know where the Russian military apparatus comes from; they manufacture it.

But where do the Chechens—what limited materiel they may have, where does it come from?

If you would, Mr. Lieven, if you would go ahead and then maybe Mr. Babitsky.

Mr. LIEVEN. You want the answer now?

Mr. HASTINGS. Yes, if you would please. But can you be brief, because we got to go vote?

Mr. LIEVEN. Well, the answer is that a great deal of it comes originally from the Russian army, which is leaking weapons in all directions as a result of the corruption of the demoralization which I mentioned. It does not, on the whole, go directly to the Chechens, but it feeds into the general arms market of the former Soviet Union. Then it reaches them by various channels, including via Georgia.

Mr. HASTINGS. I understand.

Mr. Babitsky? Very brief.

Mr. LIEVEN. [inaudible] and by money from the wider Muslim world, including international...

Mr. HASTINGS. That was what I was after. OK. I get the picture.

Mr. LIEVEN. That is where the money comes from.

Mr. BABITSKY [through translator]. I can only add that there were already a lot of weapons in Chechnya. Even before the first Chechen war, when the Russians withdrew from Chechnya, they left behind a lot of weapons.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Because of a vote on the floor of the House, we are going to take a recess for about 15 minutes. Then we will reconvene about 15 minutes from now. Panelists, feel free to take a break

Thank you.

[Recess.]

Mr. PITTS. Ladies and gentlemen, time for recess having expired, we will reconvene the hearing. I am Congressman Joe Pitts, a member of the Helsinki Commission. If we can have our witnesses take the stand, we will continue with the questions and answers.

So the first question I think I would like to throw out to the panel is, in your observations of the Russian military operating in Chechnya, is it your impression that the soldiers are operating according to orders, or are they just out of control? Did you see high-ranking Russian officers condoning the atrocities that you describe? Did you see any instances of Russian military personnel trying to maintain order and respect for civilian lives?

Mr. PITTS. Ms. Chadayeva?

Ms. CHADAYEVA [through translator]. Unfortunately, I cannot say that I saw examples of positive behavior. On the contrary, soldiers said that they had specific instructions to kill people in that village and in other areas of Chechnya.

When I gave testimony to the FSB officers, one FSB officer said, "Forget about it. It was all an evil dream. You better think about your family. No one will defend them. If you do not keep quiet, you will get a bullet in your forehead."

I have received threats against my life. That's why I was forced to leave Chechnya.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you.

Mr. Babitsky, could you elaborate on that question as well? Is it your impression that the soldiers are operating according to orders, or are they just out of control? Did you see instances of Russian military personnel trying to maintain order and respect for civilian lives, or high-ranking officers condoning the atrocities?

Mr. BABITSKY [through translator]. As far as I know, there were no direct orders to the military to act against the civilian population. These actions arose in a spontaneous fashion. But as far as I know, the official policy is to create conditions for this.

In Chechnya today there are no functioning courts or procuracy, and the only journalists who are present are those who represent the official press—one can actually view them as government bureaucrats. So under these conditions, the army and the FSB, which is supposed to supervise the situation, can act in any way they want.

When I say that I do not believe that Putin is not informed about the war in Chechnya, I have something very specific in mind. One of the people here in the hearing room today, one of my American colleagues, spoke about a meeting he had with a parliament deputy, Aslakhonov.

Aslakhonov was present at a meeting with President Putin where the ministers of MVD and the FSB and the Minister of Defense were also present. And Aslakhonov told President Putin then about the daily tortures, disappearances and killings of the civilian population by the military.

Putin then turned to the ministers present and asked them to react to this statement. These three ministers, of course, all denied this remark. Then Putin said to Deputy Aslakhonov, "Well, now you have an answer to your observation about the behavior of the Russian military in Chechnya."

Mr. PITTS. Thank you.

Mr. Lieven, would you like to elaborate—comment on this?

Mr. LIEVEN. Yes. I would say that it is a mixed picture. There are obviously abuses that cannot but be known to senior Russian officers. This applies above all to torture and extrajudicial executions taking place in Russian detention camps. The mass graves that have been discovered are clear evidence of this.

There are other crimes, however, which I think are very clearly happening without orders. A classic case of this, for example, which is, it seems, pretty common, is soldiers arresting Chechens during sweeps or at checkpoints and then essentially holding them for ransom, releasing them again when their families pay a greater or lesser sum of money.

Now, obviously, this is not the result of Russian state policy or commands from above. It goes completely against any kind of military or Russian state interest. The same would be true of rapes, for example.

So I think both things are present. There is undoubtedly deliberate atrocities by the Russian military command. On the other hand, there is also a great deal of freelance abuses stemming from lack of discipline and demoralization of the Russian troops.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you.

There are reports that the Russian military in Chechnya is contemptuous of its own leadership in Moscow. Do you think, Mr. Lieven, that there is a rift between the military on the ground and the military leadership in Moscow?

Mr. LIEVEN. Well, I know from my own experiences in the first Chechen war, and indeed other theaters of conflict in the former Soviet Union, that there is tremendous contempt and anger on the part of many ordinary Russian soldiers and junior officers for their commanders. Very largely, of course, because of the great corruption of the Russian military since the fall of the Soviet Union and the way in which certain senior commanders, including former defense ministers, have become very rich essentially by stealing money and equipment from the Russian military.

This has contributed enormously to the demoralization of the Russian armed forces and to the resentment of ordinary soldiers and junior officers at receiving any kind of attempts at control, at criticism, at justice from above.

So I think this feeling is very strongly present. It brings home a point about the Russian military and the Russian state in general, which is that bringing an end to these abuses, or at least bringing them under control, has to be a critical part of Russian military reform in general. That also has to involve a crackdown on corruption.

But in the sense of a general alienation between the Russian military as a whole and the Russian state of the kind that we have seen in other countries and that has led ultimately to military coups, no, I would not say that that is present. I think on the whole, Putin, as a former security officer himself, enjoys in general the respect and confidence of the Russian military. Not on all issues, of course, including, perhaps relations with America, but on most issues.

Mr. PITTS. Would either of the other two witnesses like to comment on that issue? Mr. Babitsky or Ms. Chadayeva?

Mr. BABITSKY [through translator]. Honestly, I do not understand what prevents the central authorities from imposing better discipline over their troops. The military has all the instruments that it needs to improve discipline in Chechnya because, after all, the military procuracy functions there. There is a special military judicial system and court system as well.

Two years ago, when Colonel Budanov was arrested, people began to think, well, perhaps finally Moscow is moving toward imposing some real discipline. In 2 years, of the 18 cases which the military procuracy has investigated and brought to trial, only eight are concerned about violations against individuals.

During the three-year conflict, if the Kremlin really wanted to control military behavior I would think that this could be done. But I think that one cannot even notice an intention to improve discipline.

Mr. PITTS. Ms. Chadayeva?

Ms. CHADAYEVA [through translator]. Unless extraordinary measures are undertaken, the Chechen war will continue for another few years. We have been told for 2 years that the war will finish in 3 months.

People have been reduced to such a position that all they can do is join the resistance.

Every family in Chechnya has lost a relative to the war. I have seen lines of hundreds of women, each of them carrying a photograph of a daughter or a son they have lost. The only question they ask is, "Have you seen my son or my daughter?"

I know dozens, in fact hundreds of cases in which people have simply disappeared without a trace.

On February 5, 2000, two young men were detained, and for 2 years their parents have not been able to find them. They were taken by military in the full view of their relatives. Their hands were tied with barbed wire. After that, they have simply disappeared.

I often ask myself, can anyone in cold blood simply shoot an old man or a woman? What can a young man do especially if all that awaits him is either being shot or disappearing?

On December 21 in the year 2000, my younger brother was detained.

We were told that he would be released if we could pay \$2,000 for him. I wanted to turn to Memorial or to Human Rights Watch. I was told if I do this and make this information public, I will not even get his corpse. Twenty-seven days later he came back to us, but he had been tortured and undergone various humiliations.

All power in Chechnya is controlled by the military. When weapons abound, the law is silent. The only solution is to end the war and withdraw the military forces. The army long ago has lost control of itself, and it is very dangerous for Russia as a whole to have such an army.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you.

The chair would like to note the presence of Mr. Weisskirchen, the Chairman of the OSCE parliamentary Assembly Human Rights Committee. Thank you for attending this hearing and welcome.

Mr. Babitsky, during the presentation of your recently published book in Paris, you stated that while you were in Afghanistan earlier this year you found no Chechen fighters, but that “all Russian journalists in Afghanistan received instructions to find Chechens.” Could you elaborate on this? Did any journalist identify Chechens among the Taliban fighters?

Mr. BABITSKY [through translator]. I was in Afghanistan for 3 months, and no journalist managed to find a Chechen in Afghanistan, either dead or alive.

I spent some time in Afghanistan sharing a room with correspondents from RTR and the program “Vesti”—with official Russian journalists who work for official news sources. They were searching for Chechen prisoners in the prisons. They searched for Chechens through the field commanders, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through various officials. They were given this task by their editors, and other Russian journalists had a similar mission. Of course, since it was an interesting issue, many of the 2,500 foreign journalists also tried to find Chechens in Afghanistan.

I often heard from Afghans that Chechens were fighting in their midst, but there never was any concrete proof of this.

I think it is possible that there were some Chechen volunteers who were fighting in Afghanistan.

I would also like to add that I think one also has to bear in mind Chechen mentality: If there is a war close at hand, then that is the one they should be involved with, rather than being involved in a distant war, one which they do not understand very well.

I also do not exclude the possibility that there is a radical wing among the Chechen fighters who are connected to international terrorism. But I think that the view that there is a strong connection between Al Qaeda and the fighters in Chechnya is very much exaggerated.

I also ask myself the question that if terrorism were foremost in the minds of the Chechen fighters, why are there not more instances—or in fact, why are there almost no instances—of terrorist acts being conducted in other parts of Russia in accordance with usual terrorist practices?

Mr. PITTS. We are being called to a vote.

Very quickly, Ms. Chadayeva, did you want to comment?

Ms. CHADAYEVA. Starting with the year 1994, what has been going on in Chechnya, the war, has only had different names. It began as a war to establish constitutional order. There were no terrorists in Chechnya at that point. Now it is called an anti-terrorist operation. I do not know what label the war will carry in the future unless very urgent action is taken now. We should not forget that more than 50 years ago, the entire Chechen nation was deported.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you.

Mr. Lieven, you got the last word and wrap up.

Mr. LIEVEN. Thank you.

Yes, like Mr. Babitsky, I looked into the question of Chechens in Afghanistan. I didn't find any. Though I did find, or hear of, radicals from other former Soviet republics.

But there is much evidence, I am afraid, for the presence of Arab and Afghan and other radicals in Chechnya coming in the other direction. Their influence on sections of the Chechen resistance is clear. This was indeed published, in English, on the Internet as part of their propaganda.

That is not true of the Chechen resistance as a whole.

Nevertheless, I am afraid the influence of these people grew very much. It was not present at all when I first went to Chechnya in the early 1990s, after their revolt against Russian rule, but it did become very much stronger thereafter.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you very much. I thank each of the witnesses for your testimony—very sobering testimony. The Commission will continue to monitor this situation. We will urge the administration to raise the issue at every opportunity. Hopefully, the two sides will be able to come to some kind of compromise so that the hostilities will cease.

Still, thank you very much. Since we are being called to a vote, the time of the hearing now having expired, we will adjourn the meeting.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:00 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF
HON. BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL,
CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

The ongoing war in Chechnya, the second in the past ten years, has resulted in the most egregious human rights violations in the OSCE region today. Hundreds of thousands of persons have been forced to leave their homes and settle in refugee camps or find shelter wherever they can. The capital city of Grozny has been bombed to the point where World War II veterans compare it to Stalingrad. Hundreds of individuals in Chechnya have been killed, or have disappeared into so-called "filtration camps" from which they emerge beaten and tortured, or not at all. Others cling to the wreckage of their homes as they struggle for their very existence daily. Russian soldiers die in fewer numbers, but their deaths are no less sorrowful to parents and loved ones. The recently released State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices documents a pattern of clear, gross and uncorrected violations of basic human rights in Chechnya. While there appear to be credible linkages between some elements of the Chechen insurgency and outside terrorists groups, this does not diminish the responsibility of the Russian authorities to uphold the rights of civilians in Chechnya—those who have by far borne the brunt of the Russian military campaign to root out separatists in the region.

The failure of the Russian leadership to investigate and hold members of the military and other responsible for gross human rights violations in Chechnya accountable for their crimes is particularly disturbing.

Two and a half years after the Istanbul OSCE summit, the Russian Federation has yet to earnestly pursue a political solution to the conflict in Chechnya.

Left to fester further, the Chechen war will only lead to more hardship and suffering for the people of the region. As Secretary Powell concluded at the Bucharest OSCE Ministerial in December, "Peace in this region will not only end a bloody conflict, it would deny political cover to terrorists in Chechnya."

As President Bush prepares to hold his first summit in Russia later this month, I urge him to raise developments in Chechnya with President Putin, urging the Russian leader to pursue a path that will bring peace to that war torn part of Russia.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF
HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CO-CHAIRMAN,
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman, fellow Commission members. Today the Helsinki Commission is holding a hearing that I had truly hoped would not need to be held. In 1996, after more than two years of bloody conflict, the Russian Government and representatives of the Chechen Republic signed a treaty which stipulated that the status of Chechnya would be determined "in accordance with generally recognized norms of international law" before December 31, 2001.

Sixteen months have passed, and that treaty has been cast aside in a maelstrom of bloodshed and barbarity.

As is known, the armed invasion of neighboring Dagestan in August 1999 by supposed "Wahabbi" guerrilla forces led to renewed hostilities between Russia and *de facto* independent Chechnya. Some sources maintain that elements in or near the Russian Government had been waiting, even conspiring, to produce such a provocation. In any event, President Putin initiated his "anti-terrorist operation" and promised to wipe out alleged terrorists "even in the outhouse."

Brutality and violations of human rights have characterized the war on both sides, especially on the part of the Russian military with its overwhelming firepower.

According to a May 2001 report by the organization Physicians for Human Rights, thousands of civilians have been killed during bombings and artillery shelling. Hundreds more, especially males of military age, have been killed or have disappeared into so-called "detention centers" during military "sweeps."

The army will surround a populated area for the alleged purpose of checking residents' documents, or seeking out combatants, or identifying sources for weapons and ammunition. These "sweeps" have become synonymous with terrorizing the local population. In addition, an estimated 150,000-200,000 persons have been forced to relocate to refugee camps in neighboring areas.

Domestic human rights activists in Russia have sought a peaceful solution to the conflict and an end to human rights violations. Preliminary contacts between the sides last year did not lead to substantive discussions, and Moscow now appears committed to complete military victory. President Maskhadov of Chechnya, who was elected to his post through internationally-observed elections sanctioned by the Russian Government, has said that the Chechen side will meet Russian representatives without any pre-conditions.

Moscow contends that the war in Chechnya is an integral part of the war against international terrorism, although President Putin himself has noted the "historical roots" to the conflict, as opposed to the presence of foreign terrorist elements. It must be noted that the U.S. Government has confirmed links between some insurgents in Chechnya and "various terrorist organizations and mujahidin." In the wake of the September 11th attacks, the U.S. Government has called upon Chechnya's leadership to "immediately and unconditionally cut all contacts with international terrorist groups, such as Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda organization." At the same time, we have called for accountability for human rights violations on all sides and a political solution to the conflict.

Let me be clear. I understand completely the concern of the Russian Government, or any government, for the security of its borders, its domestic tranquility, and its territorial integrity. But, this does not give the Russian military a blank check to kill or torture any young man capable of fighting or other citizens young and old, or to rape and steal, or to bomb hospitals and humanitarian convoys. Occasionally, the Russian Government announces that criminal charges have been filed

against certain military personnel for egregious human violations in Chechnya. However, the record indicates that most of these cases eventually melt like snow in the noonday sun.

Meanwhile, the consequences of the war have slipped over the Caucasus Mountains into Georgia, where there appears to be a nexus of foreign terrorists linked with the Chechen conflict. The United States Government is sending about 200 military advisors to Georgia to help deal with suspected terrorists in the Pankisi Gorge on the Chechen border. Further afield, there have been press reports of Chechens serving with Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan. However, upon close inspection, these Chechen fighters seem to be few and far between. Maybe we'll have some elucidation on that subject today.

Our witnesses today are uniquely qualified to inform us about the situation in Chechnya and its reverberations throughout Russia and the world. I look forward to their testimony.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMB. STEVEN PIFER,
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR EUROPEAN AND
EURASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Chairman Nighthorse Campbell, Co-Chairman Smith and CSCE commissioners, thank you for the invitation to speak today on Chechnya. The Administration welcomes this opportunity to discuss U.S. policy on Chechnya and the events of the past several months.

As you all know, the current conflict in Chechnya in a few months will begin its third year. Coming on the heels of the first conflict in Chechnya from 1994-1996, this latest conflict has dragged on nearly twice as long but with a similarly tragic price in human lives, people's homes, and Chechen society. The casualties mount every day—for both sides, Chechen and Russian alike—and the pain and suffering of innocent civilians resulting from the fighting see no end in sight. There are few places in the world that have borne such devastation as Chechnya. Continuation of the conflict not only constitutes a drain on Russian development and a living nightmare for innocent Chechens, but it poses a threat to the entire Caucasus region.

Sadly, this tragic situation shows no signs of ending soon. The fighting goes on. Russian forces conduct sweeps, sealing towns and villages and searching house to house for fighters. Often these sweeps are subsequently followed by reports of the beatings and torture of civilians, of extortion, or the disappearances of young men. Russian convoys are ambushed daily by Chechen fighters using landmines, and Russian blockposts or administrative buildings are often attacked in hit-and-run raids. Pro-Moscow Chechen administrators are assassinated. The economy is in shambles. Housing and infrastructure are destroyed, especially in Grozny where thousands still live, struggling from day to day in the most difficult conditions.

The United States Government is committed to doing all that we can to bring about an end to this conflict and to relieve the suffering of the civilian population. Through our humanitarian assistance programs and our diplomatic efforts, the United States remains engaged on Chechnya.

Our objectives for Chechnya today are the same as they have been in the past. We seek a political settlement that will end the fighting, promote reconciliation, and recognize the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. We also seek accountability for human rights abuses committed by all sides, and unimpeded access to the displaced by humanitarian organizations. As we have always done, we are working toward these objectives in our on-going discussions with the Russian Government, in concert with our friends and allies, and in partnership with international and non-governmental organizations.

A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

On September 24, 2001 President Putin made a speech describing Russian readiness to assist the United States in the war on terrorism in the aftermath of September 11. But he went further on Chechnya, drawing a distinction between the "historic roots" of the conflict in Chechnya and the presence of foreign terrorists. We saw in this distinction the basis for the possibility that talks could begin. We were thus pleased when on September 25 Chechen leader Maskhadov welcomed President Putin's speech and opened the door for a political dialogue.

After weeks of jockeying and phone contacts, a face-to-face meeting between a Russian Government official and a Chechen representative took place in late November. Unfortunately, there have been no meetings to follow up on that, and we understand that contacts have been suspended. But as have said repeatedly, a political settlement is the only way that this conflict can be ended, peace and stability can be returned to Chechnya and the process of rebuilding can be started. Russian Government officials have noted progress in re-establishing government structures and say they are working toward "normalizing" the situation. Without some settlement with those forces engaged in the fighting, however, we do not believe this will be enough to end the fighting.

Clearly, the causes and motivations of Chechens fighting the Russians differ. There are those who see this as a struggle to protect their homeland. And there are others in Chechnya who have been linked to international terrorist circles.

We do not ask the Russian Government to try to reach accord with terrorists. But we do believe that there are those with whom discussions can be undertaken, such as Mr. Maskhadov—a leader who has sufficient credibility with the broader Chechen population to speak for them in a political dialogue with Moscow. We intend to continue to make this point to the Russian Government, as we have consistently in the past, and we encourage our allies to do so as well. We hope that contacts will be resumed in the near future. However, while we see some indications of interest on the Russian side in launching a dialogue, we are not able to offer a reliable prediction as to when Russian-Chechen political contacts might be resumed.

At the same time, we have called on Mr. Maskhadov and other moderate Chechens to disassociate themselves with terrorists. Contrary to some media reporting, we have not seen evidence of extensive ties between Chechens and Al-Qaida in Chechnya, but we have seen evidence of individuals or certain factions linked to terrorist elements. A clear demonstration by Mr. Maskhadov that he does not maintain such ties is appropriate as a gesture to show he is a credible interlocutor for the Russians. And we intend to continue to make that point to the Chechens as well.

We have taken action on this point. Some Chechen forces with links to international terrorists are supported through groups operating in the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, which borders Chechnya. Last fall, Russian aircraft conducted several air strikes against the Pankisi Gorge. While we agree that the Russians have a legitimate concern, we have urged them not to take action themselves. Instead, we are working with President Shevardnadze and the Georgian Government to train and equip Georgian military units, so that Georgia will have the capacity to deal with this problem itself.

Despite the death of field commander Khattab, an Arab linked to terrorists and commander of the foreign mujahidin in Chechnya, and the rumored death of field commander Shamil Basayev, another of those linked to terrorists, the conflict is likely to continue at its present level. We believe that more than one thousand Chechen fighters remain. The Chechens' ability to recruit new fighters is aided in part by the animosity created by the harsh tactics of Russian security forces. As we have said repeatedly and continue to believe, there is no military solution to this conflict.

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

An estimated 300,000 Chechens have been displaced by the fighting. More than half of the displaced—160,000—remain in Chechnya. The displaced account for more a third of Chechnya's estimated population of 440,000. Of the rest, the largest concentration is in Ingushetiya, with others in Dagestan and other areas of Russia, or in Georgia, Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan. The United Nations estimates that 140,000 Chechens are in Ingushetiya now, and 65 percent of them are living in private homes, with relatives or others who would take them in. The rest live in camps or spontaneous settlements. These people are largely dependent on aid provided by the international community.

The United States has been the largest single provider of humanitarian aid to the North Caucasus. Since 1999 we have contributed more than 30 million dollars, an amount that is roughly a quarter of all aid given under the United Nation's consolidated humanitarian appeals. In FY2001, the United States contributed a total of 22.1 million dollars to the United Nations and its agencies, to the International Committee of the Red Cross, and non-governmental organizations. Included in that sum is 9.6 million dollars of monies earmarked by Congress for American non-governmental organizations to carry out projects in the region.

Much of contribution has been in the form of food aid, such as wheat, flour and cooking oil. In FY2001, our funds helped feed 335,000 people. Our contributions also have funded much needed emergency health care, water and sanitation projects, education and shelter, as well as mine awareness programs. All of our contributions, except earmarked funds, are provided directly to the UN and the Red Cross for distribution through their agencies and implementing partners.

Beyond our contributions, we have assigned a refugee coordinator to our Embassy in Moscow who works with the international community and Russian officials in the delivery of our humanitarian assistance and reporting on further needs. The coordinator is a liaison with international and non-governmental organizations working in the field and federal and local governments. The coordinator also serves to monitor the situation on the ground, to observe the plight of the displaced and to identify where U.S. assistance programs should best be targeted.

In the North Caucasus, the security situation makes access to the region difficult. As you may know, there is a ban on U.S. Government personnel traveling to the region without the specific permission of the U.S. Ambassador to Russia. But the priority we place on the humanitarian situation has required that we send our refugee coordinator to the region on several trips.

Our policy has emphasized that humanitarian organizations be given the necessary, unimpeded access to the region to reach the displaced. The Russian Government has generally provided this access for the delivery of relief, but there have been occasional problems with changing administrative requirements and lack of coordination by Russian federal authorities and the local Chechen administration. The security situation in Chechnya makes delivery of humanitarian assistance particularly difficult, however.

We have also stressed in our discussions with the Russian Government that the return of the displaced to Chechnya be voluntary. Russian authorities have assured us that is the case, but the local pro-Moscow Chechen administration has undertaken a campaign to convince the displaced to return. As long as the security situation shows no im-

provement, however, most will not. In addition, Moscow has cut payments to the government of Ingushetiya that had been used to support benefits to displaced Chechens. The cuts in food and other programs in Ingushetiya create pressure on Chechens to return despite the risky security situation. Finally, the Russian government has suspended registration of new displaced persons in Ingushetiya since February 2001, making new arrivals ineligible for social benefits – food, housing, even education for their children.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The danger to civilians in Chechnya remains our greatest concern. The human rights situation is poor, with a history of abuses by all sides and little or no accountability by either. As we discuss in detail in our most recent human rights report, and as both Russian and international human rights NGOs have reported, civilians in Grozny and other towns and villages in areas where there is rebel activity are subject to security sweeps, or *zachistki*, by Russian forces.

These sweeps may be planned or occur spontaneously if Russian troops in the area are attacked. The result is that the village is sealed off and troops conduct house to house searches, checking identity documents. Usually, these sweeps are swiftly followed by new reports of serious human rights abuses, such as summary execution, arbitrary detention, torture, beatings, or extortion. Frequently, some of those taken into detention disappear, and sometimes their bodies are found days later. There are reports of rape. According to the Russian human rights group Memorial, at least 600 people have disappeared since the conflict began, although Russian official statistics put the total reports of disappearances between 1,200 and 2,000.

Russian officials have acknowledged that Russian soldiers have committed crimes against civilians, but investigations and prosecutions have not kept pace with the scope of the human rights violations that have been reported. Russian commanders in Chechnya have issued orders intended to prevent these abuses. Under these orders, sweeps may only be conducted with the permission of the Russian commander in Chechnya, General Moltenskoi. Vehicles are to be clearly marked, and troops are to identify themselves before entering homes. Masks are not to be worn. Lists of detainees are to be circulated to local civilian administrators. But it appears that these orders have not been effectively implemented. Much more needs to be done to instill discipline in Russian security forces, to prevent abuses, and to prosecute those who commit them.

Publicly and privately, we have made this point to the Russian Government at all levels. As the Secretary said in his recent testimony before House and Senate, "We have not forgotten about Russian abuses of human rights. We raise Chechnya at every opportunity." The conduct of Russian forces in Chechnya must be improved. That is why we again supported the resolution on Chechnya before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights this year. The rights of the civilian population must be respected. In his recent State of the Federation speech, President Putin said that "Everyone resident in Chechnya or originally from there must feel they are full citizens of the Russian Federation."

The Chechen fighters are not without blame. There have been repeated attacks on local officials who work for the pro-Moscow Chechen Administration. The landmines and other explosives fighters have used

against convoys have also wounded, maimed or killed innocent civilians. There are other reports of kidnapping and execution of Russian prisoners held hostage. Chechen fighters must also be held to account.

CHECHNYA AND U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Russia is cooperating with us in the war on terrorism, and we are embarked on building a new, more cooperative bilateral relationship. President Putin has made clear that he sees a partnership with the United States and the West as the best course for Russia. President Bush has made clear that partnership with Russia is in our interest.

In just two weeks, Presidents Bush and Putin will meet in Moscow to discuss how to further strengthen relations between our two countries. We hope that they will be able to record concrete progress on a number of parts of the bilateral agenda, including security issues, economic relations and people-to-people exchanges.

As part of this new relationship, however, there remain issues on which we disagree. Chechnya is one of those issues, and it is an issue that we have raised regularly and candidly with the Russians. President Bush discussed it with President Putin in November, as did Secretary Powell with President Putin in Moscow in December. In the last two weeks, Chechnya has figured prominently on the agenda during Deputy Secretary Armitage's discussions in Moscow with Deputy Foreign Minister Trubnikov and during the meeting last Friday between Secretary Powell and Foreign Minister Ivanov. As we embrace this opportunity we now have to build a stronger relationship with Russia, we do so without compromising our principles and commitments to promote peace and the strengthening of human rights in Chechnya.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF ASET CHADAEVA,
PEDIATRIC NURSE, FORMER RESIDENT OF CHECHNYA**

My name is Aset Chadayeva. I was trained and worked in Grozny as a pediatric nurse. My human and professional duty is to help people who need medical assistance. During the 1994-1996 Russian-Chechen war and during the war that began in 1999, I worked as a nurse. I tried to help old people, women, children – people who had been brought to the extreme of moral and physical exhaustion. I treated wounded people, sick people, paralyzed people.

I've seen incredible, horrible things. I've seen men traumatized in so-called "filtration camps." I've seen their bodies scarred by torture, with terrible physical injuries, with fractured limbs, with torn-out nails, with burns from electro-shock torture. People come out of the "filtration camps" in dreadful condition, and they can't get sufficient medical and psychiatric help.

Young Chechen men living in Chechnya today have two choices: to wage war or to wait for Russian soldiers to arrest or kill them. All three of my brothers were illegally detained by Russian servicemen. One of my brothers—officially classified as disabled because of his poor eyesight—was severely beaten by Russian soldiers in my presence. When I asked the soldiers why they were arresting him, they told me: "He's a Chechen! That's reason enough!" I treated women who had been raped by Russian soldiers, and I've also seen the bodies of women who had been killed after being raped. During both wars, I buried many dead. Bodies were left lying in the streets. I, my brothers, and my neighbors collected them so they wouldn't be eaten by dogs.

On February 5, 2000, I was at home in Aldi. (Aldi is a suburb of Grozny, ten minutes by car from the city center.) The day before, on February 4, after the earlier fighting, seven hundred civilians were still living in Aldi; they thought the war was over for them. Many had been wounded during the Russian bombardment of Aldi. There were sick people, old people, women and children, all exhausted by the war. On February 5, 2000, more than 100 Russian contract soldiers entered Aldi and conducted a "cleansing operation." They threw grenades into basements where people were hiding. They executed unarmed men, women, old people and children. Sixty civilians were killed by Russian soldiers on February 5. The victims ranged in age from a one-year-old baby to an eighty-two-year-old woman. They killed a woman who was eight months pregnant and her one-year-old son. All my patients who had been wounded during the bombings, who were getting well, were killed and their bodies burned.

The Russian officer knew I was a nurse. He took me by the sleeve and said that his soldiers had killed several Chechen men by mistake on the next street; he ordered me to organize their burial. Some men were wounded. I saved one, but another man who had been shot in the stomach died the next day.

The soldiers set fire to many homes, leaving the survivors without shelter. A soldier pointed to the burning homes and said to me: "We'll destroy all of Chechnya this way. You see your city? We'll flatten Chechnya!"

The Russian soldiers committed serious war crimes in Aldi on February 5, 2000, more than two years ago. No one in the Russian military has been arrested or held accountable. We have witnesses to the crimes, we have photographs of the murdered persons, the killers can be identi-

fied. But no one has been arrested for these crimes. The case has been suspended or closed. Recently, the Russian Procurator's Office informed those who inquired about its status: "Russian troops were not present in Aldi on February 5, 2000." In 1995 I was a witness to an earlier crime. I was standing in line together with some fifty people from Aldi to get water from a spring. Russian tanks were moving past us. One tank intentionally crushed a car. Inside the car were my neighbors, Yakub Shamilyov and his daughter. They were killed instantly. The Russian soldiers in the tank were drunk. They said: "If you move from here, we'll open fire." They weren't arrested. They weren't punished.

Seven years later, just this past April, 34-year-old Leche Shamilyov, Yakub's son, was shot and killed by Russian soldiers in front of his home. They were in a tank. They weren't arrested. They weren't punished.

I know of dozens of incidents like this. A crime is committed. There are the bodies of the murdered people. There are witnesses to the crime. The perpetrators are known: they are soldiers and officers of the Russian army. But nobody prosecutes them.

The lives of people in Chechnya often depend on drunken soldiers, who can do whatever they like and no one will question their actions. The people of Chechnya have been deprived of all their rights, first of all, their right to life. The killing of defenseless civilians, including the elderly, children, and invalids, is a crime. Rape, torture, illegal detention, malicious humiliation are crimes. Depriving civilians of objects indispensable for their survival is a crime.

And failure to take appropriate and effective action to end these atrocities is also a crime. I can state with full responsibility that what has happened and what is happening now in Chechnya is genocide of the Chechen people. Is it really necessary to have millions of victims to call such behavior genocide? Isn't the death of 100,000 Chechens since 1994 in the two Russian-Chechen wars sufficient reason for effective international action to end the conflict and the agony of the Chechen people. The destruction of a nation cannot be the internal affair of any state. I want to believe that human rights are more than words on paper. I want to believe that the victims will actually be defended by the United States and other democratic governments when their rights to life and to security of the person have been violated in Chechnya or elsewhere.

I hope that President Bush during his forthcoming visit to Russia will persuade President Putin that both Russia and Chechnya will benefit from negotiation of a prompt and just settlement of their costly conflict.

I urge the United States Congress to do what it can to make sure that the hundreds of thousands of Chechens forced from their homes and living as refugees in Ingushetia and in Chechnya itself will receive sufficient assistance from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other humanitarian agencies to survive until they can return to their homes, confident that their lives and property will be secure.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANDREI BABITSKY,
CORRESPONDENT, RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and to offer my views on the war in Chechnya. My testimony is limited to a specific but very important aspect of the issue, namely, the situation of journalists. I will be glad to address other issues during the question and answer session.

Early in the morning of November 2, 1999, two cars left the Chechen village of Semashki, moving towards Katyr-Yurt. The road went through the regional center of Achkoi-Martan; with its Russian guard post nearby. Without any warning, Russian soldiers in the guard post opened fire with automatic weapons on the approaching cars. There were three young men in one car and two women in the second. The three men were seriously wounded right away, but one managed to get out of the car and hide in the nearby brush. The women were not hurt and the soldiers let them pass—but only on foot. The soldiers pulled the two wounded men from the car and tied them up with barbed wire. After a brief consultation, the soldiers poured fuel on the wounded men and set them on fire. Already engulfed in flames, the Chechens managed to shout to the women, who were waiting nearby, to tell their relatives in Semashki that they had been killed by Russian soldiers. There have been many such episodes in the second Chechen war, but no one knows about most of them. I learned about this incident only because at that time I was located illegally in Achkoi-Martan.

Today, after the snows have melted in Chechnya, many burial sites have been found where people are buried who were killed after "mopping-up operations" or after detentions at guard posts. No one knows why these people were killed—either those whose corpses were found recently or in the more distant past. In most cases, the corpses bear marks of torture while the victims were still alive. In other cases, the corpses were mutilated after the victim was dead. But one can say that these people were not put to death by court order. They were killed as part of the anarchy and arbitrary rule which is now the order of the day in Chechnya. According to the Russian human rights organization Memorial, every month there are from 30 to 50 cases of extra-judicial killings of civilians who are taken from villages and cities during special or so-called "mopping up operations." I also think that in many cases the military's arbitrary acts are possible because of the successful official campaign to silence reporting on Chechnya.

From the onset of the second Chechen campaign, the Russian military and political authorities succeeded in establishing a censorship regime that immediately screened out journalists whose reports on the war were not in accord with the official position. At the start of the war—both voluntarily and after official pressure—most Russian media outlets began to reflect the official position which excluded reports on the massive human rights violations committed by military personnel against the civilian population. Some Russian media outlets continued to publically report on the crimes committed by the military against civilians. These include four Moscow-based, relatively small circulation newspapers—"Novaya Gazeta," "Novaya Izvestiya," "Nezavisimaya Gazeta," and "Kommersant"—and various Internet sites. The issue is not so much how Russian journalists assess the general situation in Chechnya. Most reporters are in agreement with the official Russian position that it is an anti-terrorist and anti-separatist war. This does not mean, however, that Russian journalists would not report on crimes conducted by the military against the civilian population. The main

issue is that the Russian military and the Kremlin have banned reports on killings, torture and kidnappings of civilians by the Russian military. The lack of information about Chechnya is one of the most effective ways to create a situation in which killers and kidnappers in epaulets can operate without legal accountability.

In the first months of the military operations, one could manage to get into the territory of Chechnya via informal channels. This was the only way foreign journalists could carry out their work after Russian officials—without any explanation—had denied them their right to be in the conflict zone. Several foreign journalists who remained in Chechnya or Ingushetia without the necessary official permission have been deprived of their accreditation or denied Russian visas. Last year, the Russian government denied my acquaintance, the Czech journalist Petra Prokhazkova, entry into Russia for the next five years, although her husband is a Russian citizen and a permanent resident of Ingushetia. I also know of another eight foreign journalists who covered the war in Chechnya who have been put on a visa blacklist by the Russian security forces and the Russian Foreign Ministry. They will not be allowed to enter Russian territory for five years.

Today, the Russian authorities have virtually resolved the problem of reporting on human rights violations in Chechnya. Television was the first target of the Kremlin campaign to suppress such information, even during the days of such independent TV stations as NTV and TV6. Direct TV broadcasts from Chechnya are totally under the control of the Russian military, since the only TV satellite relay dish is located in the main Russian military base in Khankala. The Khankala base is the command center for the Unified Group of the Russian Federation Armed Forces of the Northern Caucasus which oversees the activities of the Russian army, the Russian Security Services (FSB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) troops. It is also where the Unified Group has its Press Center and its daily press releases serve as the basis of all information from the conflict zone. Access to Chechnya is in effect limited to those journalists who are willing to agree to twenty pages of extremely strict rules of accreditation which violate Russian law. (I can go into further detail on accreditation at a later point.) The Press Center of the Russian Federal group of the Russian Forces in the Northern Caucasus carefully monitors the reports of journalists who have been in Chechnya. It also denies entry to those journalists whose reports—in the opinion of the military censors—contain defamatory material about Russian military personnel. On the territory of Chechnya, journalists are required to restrict themselves to the territory of the Khankala military base. They may leave Khankala only if they are accompanied by Press Center officers. There are a few journalists who continue to work in Chechnya, but only after they have made incredible efforts and ignore official regulations. They do so at the risk of their lives. During her last assignment in Chechnya about one month ago, "Novaya Gazeta" reporter Anna Politkovskaya was forced to illegally escape from Chechnya after FSB officers made threats against her life. She was collecting material about the killing of civilians by members of a special detachment of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Main Espionage Directorate (GRU) in the Shatoi region.

Having resolved their assigned tasks in the conflict zone, the Russian authorities and the FSB are starting to bring under their control those regions which neighbor Chechnya, first of all Ingushetia, which shel-

ters over 150,000 Chechen refugees. In the last few months, and without any explanation, the FSB has expelled several groups of foreign reporters from Ingushetia. Journalists have been detained, held for hours of interrogation, and threatened with physical reprisals. The FSB in Ingushetia told one of my acquaintances—a foreign reporter whose name I cannot reveal for obvious reasons—that they would break her hands if she did not leave the republic. The FSB officers told the journalist that they had to operate this way because they had no formal reason to expel her from Ingushetia.

The Russian authorities want to convince the public of the need to conduct this war. But they are also convinced that the Russian troops and the FSB are justified in using brutal methods against the civilian population in Chechnya. I do not believe that President Vladimir Putin is not informed about the Chechen war. Due to his previous KGB career, Putin knows that the security services and the Russian army operate without public or judicial control. Even if Putin is not aware of operational details, he is well informed of the nature of the Chechen war. President Putin is also the ideological and operational center of a politically planned military operation. From the very start, this military and political campaign has aimed at making a ghetto of the war zone. This ghetto is shut off from the sight and influence of the outside world.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANATOL LIEVEN
SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT,
FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

CHECHNYA AFTER SEPTEMBER 11TH

The terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, and the consequent US “war against terrorism”, have led to considerable changes in US approaches to the war in Chechnya, and indeed to general US policy towards Russia. The strong support given by Russian President Vladimir Putin to the US campaign, his acceptance of US military deployments on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and very useful Russian help in Afghanistan and in intelligence sharing have all created a new belief in the US that a co-operative relationship with Russia is possible and desirable. Both Russia and the US have a very strong interest in co-operating against Sunni islamist extremism and terrorism, and in preventing the kind of regional instability and upheaval in Central Asia and the Caucasus which tend to breed and harbour such pathologies.

However, considerable problems still remain, of which the Chechen War is one. The US administration has a new sympathy for the extremist threats that Russia has faced in this region. The presence of international islamist militant forces in Chechnya and Georgia is now fully recognized, whereas previously this was downplayed or even ignored altogether by wide sections of US officialdom, the media and public opinion. This was despite abundant evidence—notably from the militants’ own English-language propaganda—both of the presence of these forces and of their links to international extremist networks, including Al Qaida.

The group of international Muslim radicals (so-called “Wahabis”, though this term is highly inexact) in Chechnya were headed by the late Habib Abdurrahman Khattab, a Saudi Arab who like many of his men had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The international Mujahedin were drawn to Chechnya by the war of resistance against the Russian infidel, as they had previously been drawn to Afghanistan, Bosnia and elsewhere. The declared intention of this force and its Chechen allies was to drive Russia out of the rest of the north Caucasus and unite other regions with Chechnya in a new islamic republic. It was in the name of this program that the international militants and their local allies invaded the Russian republic of Daghestan in August 1999.

This force has received support from Al Qaida and other radical networks in the Middle East. This was confirmed by one of Osama’s aides, Abu Daud, by the English-language website of the Chechen Mujahedin, Qoqaz.net, and by the Egyptian security forces, who in July 2001 carried out a major operation against Egyptian islamist radicals who were raising funds and recruits from Chechnya. Khattab and his allies also received support from the Taleban in Afghanistan, the only state to have recognised Chechnya’s independence. Knowledge of the connections of parts of the Chechen separatist forces to terrorist groups in the wider Muslim world was therefore anything but a secret. It was known both to Western officials and to many Western journalists working both in the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan, but for a variety of reasons it was not widely publicized in the West.

The prevention or elimination of lawless areas and quasi-states in the Muslim world—of which Chechnya between 1996 and 1999 was one—is now recognized as a vital US national interest, since such areas can all too easily become safe havens for Al Qaida or allied groups. If Chechnya had remained a quasi-independent state, as it was in those years, there is little doubt that today we would be speaking of this region, like Somalia, as an extremely likely place of refuge for Al Qaida elements fleeing Afghanistan. This recognition has created a new awareness of the importance of maintaining Russian sovereignty over the North Caucasus. Finally, the experience of war in Afghanistan, and other episodes like the recent fighting in Jenin, have reminded us that anti-partisan warfare is an ugly business in which some civilian casualties are inevitable.

That said, however, it must also be clearly stated that—as in Kashmir or Palestine—while extremists and terrorists have established a strong presence in Chechnya, they have been able to do so because of the legitimate grievances and the great suffering of the Chechen people. The initial appearance of these forces—as in Afghanistan—was due to the brutal Russian military intervention of 1994-96; and the way in which they were able to carve out a powerful position for themselves in 1996-99 owed an enormous amount to the destruction, brutalization, and radicalization left behind by that war.

Whatever Russian propaganda may argue, the war in Chechnya is therefore certainly by no means simply a war against “terrorists”. Mass Chechen national resentment and aspirations play a critical role. Moreover, a line must be drawn between the Chechen and international radicals on the one hand and the much more moderate followers of General Aslan Maskhadov on the other, if only because these two elements have clashed bitterly in the past. Whatever his past faults and failures, Maskhadov was elected President of Chechnya in February 1997 with 65 per cent of the popular vote, in elections accepted by the then Russian government and recognized by Western observers as free and fair. It is difficult to imagine any stable peace settlement for Chechnya that does not involve his participation—whereas with the militants no compromise is possible. Moreover, US and Western public opinion remains rightly repelled by certain aspects of the Russian campaign, and especially by the overwhelming evidence of very widespread abuses against Chechen civilians by Russian soldiers. These include kidnap for ransom under the guise of “arrest”; torture and beating—both to extract information and out of sheer sadism; numerous extra-judicial executions and “disappearances”; very extensive looting; and rape. Many of these abuses are the work of the soldiery themselves rather than of the Russian state; but there is also ample evidence that senior Russian officers have at the very least turned a blind eye to such behavior, which has claimed thousands of Chechen victims. In recent months, there appear to have been moves by the Russian government and high command to limit such atrocities, which are especially common during “sweeps” by Russian troops searching for militants in Chechen villages, and at Russian checkpoints. An order by the Russian commander, General Moltenskoy, attempting to control military actions on these occasions has led to familiar complaints from officers in the field that their “hands are being tied” and successful operations prevented. In fact, however, so great is the demoralization and indiscipline of the Russian forces fighting in the region that it seems very likely that many orders to this

effect will simply go on being ignored, and that severe abuses will continue. These abuses are not only deeply evil in themselves, but also fatally damaging to Russia's own goals in Chechnya—as Russia's own Chechen allies have repeatedly and publicly argued. The leader of the pro-Russian administration, Ahmad Kadyrov, and his followers have denounced them in public and called for Russian tactics in the war to be changed. Tragically, however, Chechnya is trapped in a familiar vicious circle whereby as long as attacks by Chechen militants on Russian forces continue, those forces will continue searches and reprisals—and vice versa. It is therefore very important that US condemnation of Russian military atrocities should continue. This condemnation, together with criticism from pro-Russian Chechens, and the objective evidence of the Russian military's failure to pacify and stabilize Chechnya, does seem to have had a real effect in pushing the Russian government and high command to try—at least to some extent—to diminish abuses. But clearly very much more needs to be done in this regard, and it needs to be done not only for the sake of the Chechen people, for peace in Chechnya, and for the wider struggle against Islamist terrorism and extremism. For getting a grip on military abuses is also an essential part of bringing discipline, reform and modernization to the Russian armed forces. It is closely tied to the need to crack down on corruption in the armed forces, which among other things ensures an indirect supply of Russian weapons and ammunition to the Chechen rebels themselves! Such changes are therefore extremely important to Russia's own vital state interests, and this is a point which the US and other Western states should be making very forcibly to the Russian government. However, in formulating its criticisms of Russian behavior in Chechnya, the US needs to pay close attention to two related questions: the spirit in which this criticism is offered, and US goals and interests in this region. For it should be obvious that US approaches to human rights abuses and military atrocities by the forces of other states inevitably differ very greatly depending on whether these states are seen as enemies of the US or—like Turkey and to an increasing extent India— allies and partners. In the latter cases, US concerns are raised in a spirit of what might be called constructive criticism, and are accompanied by credible assurances that the US unconditionally supports the territorial integrity of these states and is committed to the protection of their vital interests. If the US wishes Russia to develop into a truly reliable partner in the struggle against terrorism, it obviously cannot afford to give the impression that it is indifferent to vital Russian concerns and interests in this region.

This must also involve a recognition that it is emphatically not in the interests of the USA, the West, or the Caucasus that the Russians should simply withdraw and Chechnya return to its condition of 1996-99. The banditry which flourished in those years was a threat to the region and to western visitors to it. The establishment of a new base for international Muslim radicalism (and perhaps terrorism) posed a threat not just to the region, but to Western interests across the world, and to US allies in the Middle East. This is a point which was fully recognized by the Israeli government long before September 11th, but which for a long time was not fully understood by the US foreign policy elite—to the genuine bewilderment and frustration of Russian officials. Before September 11th at least, few in the USA stopped to think what the US

reaction would be to the establishment of a powerful group of heavily armed international Muslim radicals on America's borders—and yet the answer is not difficult to find.

This leads to the question of the prospects for peace in Chechnya, and what if anything the US can do to help in this regard. These prospects have increased in recent weeks with the death of the chief international radical leader in Chechnya, Khattab. Russian sources are also claiming that the most famous leader of the Chechen radicals, Shamil Basayev, has also died of his wounds, but this is unconfirmed. Supplies of international radical men and money to the Chechen struggle appear to have been badly affected by the US struggle against Al Qaida and its allies, and more immediately by the new willingness of neighboring Georgia (backed by US military aid and a military training mission) to crack down on international supply routes to Chechnya. These are positive developments, since it is impossible even to imagine a peace settlement between Russia and the radical forces in Chechnya. At the same time, the fighting in Chechnya continues, and continues to claim numerous Russian and Chechen lives. And while Russia may be able to reduce and even to some extent contain this violence, it is also impossible to imagine any stable peace in Chechnya which depends in the end only on Russian military control. Indeed, the end of the large-scale guerrilla struggle in Chechnya might only encourage a shift towards terrorism, with terrible consequences. It is therefore extremely desirable that Russia should seek real negotiations with President Aslan Maskhadov. While the dreadful experience of Chechnya in 1996-99 means that full independence for Chechnya must now be excluded for the foreseeable future, these talks should have as their goal the creation of a democratically elected, legitimate Chechen administration and the restoration of full and genuine Chechen autonomy within the Russian Federation (something which Moscow has always offered in principle). But as so often in these cases (Israel-Palestine being a classic example), a key problem in this regard is mutual lack of trust; and as so often, this lack of trust is entirely understandable and even justified. Leaving aside the question of formal independence, from the point of view both of Maskhadov and of most ordinary Chechens, they cannot feel secure while Russian soldiers remain heavily present in Chechnya and retain the right and ability to undertake raids and reprisals. Given the present condition of the Russian armed forces, such operations are bound to lead to abuses against the Chechen civilian population. From their point of view, therefore, even an interim settlement therefore has to involve Russian military withdrawal and Chechen responsibility for security in the republic. From a Russian point of view, however, the experience of Chechnya under Maskhadov's presidency after the Russian military withdrawal of 1996 makes this unacceptable. His utter failure to control the criminals and radicals during these years (a failure which included the kidnap and murder of senior Russian officials who were under Maskhadov's personal protection at the time) has desperately compromised him in Russian eyes—although Maskhadov's followers may well reply that Moscow never gave him sufficient help in this regard. Moscow is absolutely determined not to go back to a situation in which Chechen kidnap gangs can raid neighboring Russian regions at will (a situation which between 1996 and 1999 produced something in the order of 1,600 kidnaps, including numerous Westerners); and in which Chechen and

international radicals can use it as a base to spread islamic revolution. For the Russian government, the only guarantee against this is a continued and large-scale Russian military presence.

It is indeed true that as the years 1996-99 demonstrate, before it can become a stable independent state, Chechnya needs to develop the social, cultural and political foundations for such a state, including an organised political nationalist movement capable of mobilising the population behind a state-building programme. These foundations proved mainly lacking in 1991-94, and wholly lacking in 1996-99, with disastrous consequences. Even in optimal circumstances, they will take years to develop. To do so, they will also require great help from Russia—because for all its fine words, it is very unlikely that the West would ever give serious help in this regard, even if it were permitted to do so by Russia. As seen from 1996-99, the only other international financial help for Chechnya is likely to come from radical islamist groups, with terrible results. The US should therefore do its best to help facilitate talks between Maskhadov's representatives and the Russian government. One possible starting-point are the tentative contacts between different Chechen and Russian figures being sponsored by Lord Judd and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which the US might well consider informally supporting. US goals should be the destruction or exclusion of the radicals followed by a sharp reduction of the Russian military presence, free elections for a Chechen administration, and the restoration of autonomy. However, before it can embark on any such path the US needs to think very seriously about the correct balance between sympathy for Chechen suffering, respect for Russian security and sovereignty, and America's own vital interests in this region, in the context of the wider war against terrorism.

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**“CHECHEN REFUGEES FACE FORCED RETURN”
BY CATHERINE A. FITZPATRICK**

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This week, international humanitarian agencies and human rights groups began to share the widespread fears of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia that they would soon be forced to return to Chechnya, where Russian federal troops have been sweeping through villages and arresting young Chechen men suspected of armed resistance, committing numerous atrocities against civilians along the way. An estimated 180,000-200,000 Chechens still remain in Ingushetia, having fled their homes since the outbreak of the second war in 1999.

Under the former president of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev, internally displaced persons (IDPs), as they are officially designated, received only bare essentials as they suffered through three harsh winters, many in tents, but were not unwelcome. Those who ventured home to scout the opportunities for resettlement found not only ruins but active combat areas and continuous threats from Russian federal soldiers. So they stayed in impoverished Ingushetia, already straining from a refugee load from previous regional conflicts.

While letting the displaced find safe haven in his republic, President Aushev also kept out Russian troops, except for the frontier forces on the border with Georgia. Because he resisted orders to return refugees home, even when they were bused to areas in Chechnya that turned out to be inhabitable and then backtracked to Ingushetia, Aushev is credited with saving many lives, prompting a number of NGOs and public figures in the region to nominate him for the Nobel Prize.

Now all that has changed, since Moscow’s engineering of the election of Murat Zyazikov as the new president of Ingushetia. Zyazikov, a former KGB general, is generally perceived as more compliant with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s wish to keep up appearances that the war has ended, and to bring home Chechen IDPs and place them under the control of pro-Moscow Chechen authorities. Kremlin envoy Viktor Kazantsev, Chechen administration chief Ahmed Kadyrov, and Zyazikov signed a memorandum on 29 May, according to which all refugees had to return to their homeland by the end of September, reported nns.ru and other Russian wire services.

The plans have been brewing for some time, and not without some protest. “If Russian authorities force the refugees to go home, we will be participating in the worst violation of human rights in the history of Russia,” said Ombudsman for Human Rights Oleg Mironov, AFP reported on 19 May citing Interfax. Mironov joined the assessment of foreign humanitarians who felt it was too premature to plan return without adequate housing and jobs and far better security—elusive as conflict continues unabated. President Putin keeps declaring that the war is over—but then having to send more armed forces and police because it isn’t. On 13 May, Chechen fighters attacked 18 Russian posts, killed three Interior Ministry soldiers and two Chechen police. Meanwhile, human rights groups reported that federal troops, disobeying orders to curb excessive force, continued sweeps in the villages of Alhan-Kala and Kirov between 25 April and 3 May, after which at least 12 persons were missing and 8 were murdered.

Such violence accounts for why most refugees won't budge. The government of Russia sees it differently. The official news agency RIA-Novosti reports that 8,000 refugees have registered to return, and their way is ostensibly eased now because of improved relations between Ingushetia and Chechnya. Russian Minister for Chechnya Vladimir Yelagin told the agency, "It is an open secret that the relations between Ahmad Kadyrov and Ruslan Aushev were not good enough; the sides accused each other and did not work constructively in solving the problems of the refugees." Yelagin also claimed Chechens were paid to come to Ingushetia and pose as refugees.

The official policy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, voiced on many similar refugee situations around the world, is not to force people to return against their will, and only to facilitate their return based on an informed decision. Until now, UNHCR has resisted Russia's calls to forcibly return the refugees, a practice in violation of international law, and talks continue to attempt to mitigate the situation. The situation is exacerbated by refugees' claims that agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and local authorities have been deliberately withholding electricity and even bread under pressure from Moscow to compel Chechens to leave.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian groups and officials claim lack of funding and logistical difficulties in the high-risk area. According to UNICEF, refugees are spread amongst host families (65 percent), organized camps (15 percent), and spontaneous settlements (20 percent). With 65 percent of their funding appeals still unmet, UN agencies have said to "agree on the need to halt any further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Ingushetia and intensify humanitarian efforts in Chechnya," reported reliefweb.int on 29 May. Some 10,000 children are dropouts, too traumatized to attend school, which in any event consists in many areas of tattered tents without supplies.

NGOs report that troops moved into the area in recent weeks are for the first time attacking refugees. Local observers say Russian authorities are telling international agencies that the deployment is related to continued disturbances in nearby Georgia, where U.S. troops are now also stationed, and that troops are merely engaged in exercises. Prague Watchdog, a Czech online news service about the North Caucasus (<http://www.watchdog.cz>), reported night raids have begun on the camps. On 28 May, at about 4 a.m., armed men wearing masks and camouflage uniforms burst into the Satsita refugee camp in the periphery of the Ordzhonikidzevskaya settlement, terrorizing residents, and arresting one young man.

Lebhan Basaeva from Memorial Human Rights Center in Nazran, capital of Ingushetia, believes that the authorities want to press the refugees out of the tent camps first, "thus removing the visible top of the iceberg: the part that shows to the world that the war continues in Chechnya, that the people are fleeing, and that they are in a bad condition," reported "Frankfurter Rundschau" on 3 June. "The Chechens now must consider where they want to risk their lives—in their own house or in a refugee camp."

Those already in Chechnya will not have a choice. Additionally, under the new agreement between Moscow and the regional leaders, motorized Rifle Regiment No. 503 under Colonel Roman Shadrin will be blocking the border from now on and keep the Chechens fleeing the terror from passing into Ingushetia, "Frankfurter Rundschau" reported,

citing “Vremya novostei.” Speaking to reporters in Moscow , Yelagin said there would be no such forced return, and admitted some 40,000, or one in three persons, would not wish to go back, reported AFP on 3 June.

Last month, Stanislav Ilyasov, the head of Chechnya’s pro-Moscow government, said all refugees now sheltering on Ingush territory would return to Chechnya later this year. Such conflicting comments from officials—coupled by claims that many want to return even as conditions in the camps are deteriorating—are likely to create a climate of confusion and desperation, where the UN and other international agencies could well find themselves unable to withstand Russia’s pressures, and forced to assist people fleeing between a rock and a hard place to an even more uncertain destiny.

Compiled by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick





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