Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing

and for inviting me to appear after Elena Bonner. The two of us

appeared before another congressional committee 41⁄2 years ago

when Russia was earlier attacking the Chechen people. The situation

now is worse and I am very grateful that you are holding these

hearings.

Moscow’s latest military campaign against Chechnya has not

only killed hundreds, wounded thousands, and driven almost a

quarter of a million people from their homes; it has created a humanitarian

and political crisis beyond the capacity of the current

Russian Government to cope. Moreover and still more disturbingly,

the Russian authorities’ continuing police actions and media attacks

against ethnic Chechens and other North Caucasians living

across the Russian Federation not only has led to the physical expulsion

of many of these people from Russian cities, it has also—

and this is important for us—broken the taboo against governmentsponsored

attacks on individuals in Russia because of their ethnic

ties, thus opening the door to attacks against other minority groups

in that country.

Neither the Russian military campaign against Chechnya nor police

actions against Chechens as a group, however, has broken the

will of the Chechen people or lessened their resolve to live in an

independent country of their own. If anything, the current Russian

assaults against civilians in Chechnya itself and the portrayal of

the Chechen nation as a whole as uniquely criminal or terrorist

has only redoubled the resolve of the Chechens to escape from Russian

domination. Consequently, the Chechens are certain to redouble

their centuries-old struggle for freedom, whatever victories

Moscow and its supporters there or elsewhere may report or claim.

But this prospect of continuing Chechen resistance is hardly the

only feature of the future that Moscow’s own policies have made

more likely. The Russian Government’s recent actions have simultaneously

undermined the likelihood that Russia will move in a

democratic direction any time soon, threatened the prospects for

stability between Russia and her neighbors, and reduced the

chances for the development of the kind of cooperative relationship

between Russia and ourselves that we had hoped so much for. That

spreading collateral damage is to be my subject.

Moscow’s actions against Chechnya and the Chechens have seriously

reduced the chances that the Russian Federation will continue

to move in a democratic direction. First of all, Prime Minister

Vladimir Putin’s decision to use military force rather than political

means to deal with Chechnya and the Chechens and, even more,

the popularity he has so obviously won by doing so combine to

make it more, rather than less, likely that he and his successors

will continue to employ that tactic, thus subverting the possibility

of democracy.

If the Russian authorities had used police power to track down

those individuals they suspected of engaging in terrorist actions, no

one would have objected. And if Moscow had argued that it wanted

to reassert control over Chechnya as a territory, it is unfortunately

the case that many in the West might have said that was a reasonable,

if not especially attractive, step.

But Moscow’s use of force was not only disproportionate to either

of these goals, but involved the demonization of an entire nation

in ways that will make it more difficult, if not impossible, for the

Russian authorities to establish a legitimate and democratic form

of rule over their country. This demonization of an ethnic community

and again the enormous popularity that that demonization

now enjoys among Russians forms a second threat to democracy in

Russia.

Although the Chechens number only a million and are thus a

tiny fraction of Russia’s population, the percentage of Russian Federation

citizens who are Muslims or who are at least not ethnically

Russian is large and growing. Demonizing those groups increases

splits in that society that democracy will find it very difficult to

take root in.

To give but one example, the government of the predominantly

Turkic and Muslim Republic of Tatarstan has denounced what

Moscow is doing in Chechnya and ordered that no Tatars should

serve in Russian forces there.

But it is the destruction of the taboo against demonizing and attacking

an ethnic community as a whole that is the most serious

problem. In the past, Russian Governments, in Soviet times as

well, exploited popular xenophobic sentiments to win support for

themselves. The anti-Chechen campaign and especially the Putin

government’s open support of the actions of Moscow Mayor

Luzhkov and other regional leaders interested in expelling ‘‘persons

of Caucasian nationality’’ raise the specter that that will continue.

Despite what was suggested earlier, the efforts to expel persons

of North Caucasian and Chechen origin from Russian cities did not

begin 2 months ago. It began on October 5, 1993, with the decree

by Mayor Luzhkov that was backed up by President Yeltsin.

Worse, we are seeing the people who are involved in attacks on

Chechens now thinking about attacking other groups. In Krasnodar

there are suggestions that attacks on Chechens should be followed

by attacks on Jews, and in Nizhny Novgorod, one of the more reformist

centers of Russia, there are suggestions that the attacks on

Chechens should be followed by attacks on Kurds.

Third, under the cover of the bombing of Grozny and the attacks

on Chechens in Russian cities, Moscow has moved to reinstitute

the kind of controls over the media that remind one of the late Soviet

period. That is one of the reasons that Russians now appear

to support their government, because the Russian people are not

given access to much information. There has been an extremely

tough media policy instituted, controlling news, hacking Internet

sites, threatening journalists, and so forth.

That has offended some Russians and, as one of the leaders of

the Russian Soldiers Mothers Committee put it 2 days ago: ‘‘All official

statements about Chechnya are lies.’’ But unfortunately, not

all Russians have the access to the kind of information which allows

them to make that judgment and that is a big problem.

I am very proud that the organization I work for, Radio Free Europe/

Radio Liberty, has had reporters on the ground to cover what

is going on in the North Caucasus and elsewhere and to give the

Russian people a more accurate picture of what is going on. It is

a measure of the times and something I personally think we can

take pride in that Russian media outlets now are attacking RFE–

RL and its Russian language service in precisely the ways those

services were attacked in Soviet times. I believe many Russians

will come to see what is going on as very frightening.

The second major threat of Russia’s behavior is that Russia’s

campaigns against Chechnya and the Chechens are having an impact

far beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, because

Moscow is now in violation of internationally agreed to CFE limitations.

It is nice that they admitted it, but they are still in violation

even if they have.

The Russian authorities have put enormous pressure on Georgia

and its neighbors to yield some of their equipment quotas to Moscow

so that Moscow will not be held accountable for breaking the

limits. To date, Tbilisi and other capitals have resisted doing that,

but, as Moscow has demonstrated in the past, it has a variety of

means at its disposal to put pressure on the leaders of these very

weak countries.

Moreover, Russia’s neighbors cannot help but be nervous that

Moscow’s latest turn to the use of violence presages a greater willingness

to employ force implicitly or directly against them. That is

a concern across this entire region and can be found by reading the

press, if not talking to the foreign ministers of these countries.

Such feelings are especially likely to become strong in those

countries which are either Turkic or Muslim and who may see Russian

policy about the Chechens as ultimately applying to them.

That will make at least some of these states think about distancing

themselves from Moscow still further, possibly leading to a new crisis

if Russian authorities try to prevent them from doing that.

But it is for us perhaps the most concerning that this Russian

retreat from democracy and the likelihood of greater instability in

the post-Soviet region as a whole has an impact, a serious impact,

on the United States and its interests in developing a more cooperative

relationship with the Russian Federation. Because hopes for

such a relationship were so high, many counseled against criticizing

Moscow either for its attacks on Chechnya in 1994–96 or for

the October 1993 introduction by Mayor Luzhkov of his order to

expel Chechens from the Russian capital.

During the first Chechen war, if I may use the periodization

Elena Bonner has employed, most Western leaders were either silent

or supportive, in the hopes that President Boris Yeltsin would

soon turn again toward democracy. But the events of recent

months suggest that that hope was misplaced. Indeed, some have

suggested that the reason Moscow has acted in the way it has

against Chechnya and against the Chechens is precisely because in

the past the West appeared to be so willing not to object.

It is difficult to know for sure that that is the correct analysis.

But the absence of vigorous criticism the last time certainly encouraged

some in Moscow to think that they could do something like

this again and at little or no cost. Consequently, we can only welcome

the much tougher statements that have recently emanated

from Washington, from the EU, from the United Nations, from the

Holy Father, from the OSCE, and from particular governments and

human rights organizations.

Putting ourselves on record against evil is always the right thing

to do. Putting ourselves on record against an evil that will ultimately

threaten our own society and its interests is an imperative.

Unfortunately, Putin and other Russian leaders have made it clear,

at least in public, that they think they can safely ignore such criticism

and may even benefit at home and abroad from being seen to

ignore it.

That unfortunate attitude raises the stakes. Western governments

in general and the United States in particular naturally and

justifiably have been reluctant to impose real penalties on Russia

by restricting aid, loans, and other assistance, lest such a cutback

lead Moscow to turn away from reform elsewhere. But Moscow’s recent

actions and especially its recent reactions to Western and

American criticism, something we have not talked about before,

suggest that the United States and other Western governments

will soon have to revisit this issue, possibly reducing or at least

making contingent any future assistance to Russia on better behavior

toward Russian citizens and the principles of democracy. Failure

to do that will not only further lower our moral influence in

Russia and that region, but it could very well encourage Moscow

to behave even worse in the future as the absence of criticism in

1994 and 1995 and 1996 did now.

Should that happen, and I very much hope that hearings like

that will make it impossible, those who now argue against any

tough penalties would eventually face, along with the rest of us, a

Russia with which most Western countries would find it difficult if

not impossible to cooperate at all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.