Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We will

convene this hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee today. I

will announce at the outset that we are going to start before some

of my other colleagues arrive because at 11:20 we have to conclude

this hearing because of the swearing in of Lincoln Chafee. All Senators

are under command of the majority leader to be in their seats by 11:30.

So we will begin and be joined by other colleagues who will have

statements, but I will begin this morning by talking about our subject

today. We will take up the very pressing question of why the

United States should care about Russia’s recent military campaigns against Chechnya.

Let me first say that yesterday I had the opportunity to have

lunch with the Russian Ambassador to the United States. He is a

very nice man. He is a man with whom I believe we can do business,

to whom we should listen, and I appreciated that opportunity.

So our purpose this morning is not to discuss issues of Russian

sovereignty or to take unnecessary shots at Russia, but to gain a

better understanding of what exactly is happening in Chechnya

and how it affects the United States’ interests. It is a part of the

world far away. Many of our citizens do not understand the conflict,

the ethnicities, the hatreds that are in play there. But we want to learn.

I am particularly concerned, though, as all people who have examined

this conflict, by the catastrophic loss of life of innocent

Chechen civilians in this current military campaign and an earlier

one as well. Earlier in the year some radicalized elements in

Chechnya led incursions into neighboring Dagestan and allegedly

were behind the bombings of several apartment buildings in Moscow.

In the name of rooting out terrorists, Russia is using force

against Chechnya in an apparent effort to undo the military defeat

it suffered there some 4 years ago, a defeat which left the region

effectively autonomous from Russia.

Whether this latest struggle over who rules Chechnya is solved

by brute force or by negotiation, which Chechnya’s President

Maskhadov has called for, is certainly of great concern to the

United States. The events unfolding this autumn in Chechnya are

of interest to American policy in three respects. They have implications

for Chechnya itself, for Russia, and for the Caucasus region in general.

First and foremost, the bloodshed in and around Chechnya is appalling.

The shelling of civilians and the tens of thousands of refugees

who have fled Chechnya threaten to make this current military

campaign as devastating as the Russian onslaught between

1994 and 1996. Over 100,000 Chechens were killed during that period,

and I can only hope that we will not see history repeat itself

in the current operation.

Second, this military campaign raises a number of troubling

questions about Russia’s future. The apparent freedom with which

the Russian military has set about occupying the northern onethird

of Chechnya, bombing its capital city Grozny, and poising

itself to lay siege to that city prompts a question: Is Russia’s civilian

leadership really in control?

If President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Putin are not in control

of this military operation, then the United States should be

alarmed about what this means for our stability and our security.

If they are in control, then the United States should hold them responsible

for the brutality that has been unleashed.

Moreover, this military campaign is important to understand the

state of Russia’s civil society today. Almost a decade since the end

of the cold war, why is the campaign against the Chechens, a campaign

that has resulted in the death of hundreds of innocent civilians,

so popular among the Russian people, that is much more popular

than the war in Chechnya between 1994 and 1996? This could

be taken as a sign that tolerance and pluralism in Russia are on the decline.

Local leaders, like the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov, have

taken steps in the wake of urban bombings tied to narrow radical

groups to discriminate against those who look like Chechens, or

who look like Muslims. Ethnic hatred seems to be on the rise in Russia.

Finally, the Russian campaign in Chechnya has implications for

the Caucasus in general. Islamic fundamentalism obviously affects

the stability of the region as a whole. Yet suppression of Islamic

fundamentalist terrorists may be a very convenient pretext for Russia

to pursue its designs in the Caucasus.

I hope today to explore what Russia’s military designs are in that

republic, and in the republics of the former Soviet Union to its

south. In the Caucasus, the events unfolding in Chechnya are important

not just to areas from which refugees are fleeing. When

Russia masses tanks, armored personnel carriers, and artillery in

Chechnya, neighboring states certainly take note. The visibility of

the independence and democratization of nations like Georgia are

indeed at stake if Russia’s leaders and military have ambitions

throughout the Caucasus similar to those exhibited in Chechnya.

Today we have three witnesses extraordinarily well suited to explore

this humanitarian disaster at the hands of the Russian military

and its broader policy implications. Representing the administration,

Steven Sestanovich, Ambassador at Large and Special Advisor

to the Secretary of State on the New Independent States, will

testify in our first panel.

On our second panel, we are honored to have Elena Bonner, a

veritable heroine in the struggle to be free from the Soviet Union

and to free the Russian people from repression. Dr. Bonner now

chairs the foundation named after her late husband, the dissident

leader Andrei Sakharov. She is a prominent voice on human rights

in Russia and was an impassioned and eloquent critic of the first

military campaign to quash Chechnya’s ambition for autonomy.

Dr. Bonner, we consider it a special pleasure to have you here today.

Also on our second panel, we are pleased to have Paul Goble, the

Communications Director at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In

recent weeks Mr. Goble has raised the question about the state of

Russia’s democracy, given the abridgment of human rights in

Chechnya and throughout Russia.

Now, when Senator Biden joins us we will hear from him. But

Ambassador Sestanovich, we are honored to have you here and we

turn the mike to you.

Steve, do you expect that Russia will occupy

Grozny or do you think it will just surround it and strangle it,

bomb it? What do you think the intention is of this military operation?

I think it is clear from all I have seen and read

that the Russian people do support this action, whereas they did

not support as much what happened between 1994 and 1996. I

wonder, what is that telling us? What can we learn from that?

That is by directive of the government?

Do the Russian people generally, have they seen

pictures of the square, the market square that was bombed and the

100 people dead?

Steve, I wonder if President Clinton—I do not

know that you can speak for him here, but this issue, this conflict,

in the United States really has not resonated yet, as did the action

of Mr. Milosevic against the people of Albania, the Kosovar Albanians.

That resonated to some degree, but at least in this instance

I recall President Clinton comparing Russia’s actions there as no

different than Abraham Lincoln’s efforts to keep the southern

States in the Union.

I wonder if he regrets that comparison or if he has changed his

mind on that, or if that statement has caused the American people

to just sort of shrug it off and say, well, you know, this really is

internal affairs. Are there some differences there that he would

pick a different analogy now?

Do you know whether or not the Russian Government,

though, has seized upon that comparison in an undue fashion,

so that that still is the currency of their perception of American

policy? I wonder. In this country this conflict barely rates a

mention. I mean, 100,000 people were killed, Chechens were killed,

between 1994 and 1996. That is not Yugoslavia. That is something

much larger, much more difficult to understand.

I am glad to hear that. I do think, whether they

see the Civil War analogy as apt, I do think that President Clinton

would have trouble making the case of American interests in the

area now if Americans remember his comments. I mean, nothing

is more ‘‘apple pie’’ in America than the Union victory of Abraham

Lincoln that preserved this country, and I think there are, obviously,

some very real differences in the two circumstances.

But I think one of my—as you know, myself, Senator Brownback,

and others have tried to bring attention to this whole region as

America having an interest in it. We call it the Silk Road strategy.

If this area of the world is ever going to develop, the rest of the

world needs to take an interest in it. Yet, if I were living in

Moldova or Georgia I guess I would wonder, based upon our rhetorical

efforts as to Chechnya, really how serious the United States

was about doing business there, fostering democracy there, if in

any way we are facilitating the carnage that is going on there.

I wonder if you can tell me what the Georgians and the

Moldovans are feeling, the Azeris and the Armenians? How are

they viewing this conflict and America’s reaction to it? Then I want

to ask you about the flank agreement because that will lead to a

different discussion.

Let me welcome my colleagues Senator Wellstone

and Senator Lugar who are here. As I turn the mike to Senator

Wellstone, I would like to make one comment about the CFE treaty.

You might realize I am one of the few Republicans who voted

for the test ban treaty, and many of my colleagues point out to me

that these arms control agreements are often—well, they are of no

more value than the signatory nations and are violated routinely

when one of the signatories does not feel like they are of interest,

and that we should ergo never put arms control ahead of arms.

I do not think—there is no way you can read the CFE treaty and

say that Russia is in compliance with that. So I am kind of twisting

in the wind here, if you will, based on this. I wonder if the CFE

treaty, if you expect it to be complied with, or is this just an international

agreement to be discarded as inconvenient?

Thank you.

I would note to my colleagues that we are supposed to be in our

seats on the floor of the Senate at 11:30, so we have another panel.

I welcome you. I am grateful you are here. It is a very important issue.

Senator Wellstone, we will turn to you.

Senator Lugar.

Absolutely.

We thank you, Mr. Secretary, for coming.

We are honored now to call our second panel: Dr. Elena Bonner,

chairman of the Andrei Sakharov Foundation; and Mr. Paul Goble,

the Director of Communications, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Thank you.

In the interest of accommodating time and translation,

I think what we will do is hear from Dr. Bonner and then

question her. Would that be acceptable to you, Senator Wellstone?

Dr. Bonner.

That will be fine.

Thank you very much.

We are going to turn now to Mr. Goble. But Dr. Bonner, as he

gives his testimony, I wonder if you could be prepared to answer

a question: What specifically should the United States do to bring

this war to a close? Mr. Goble.

Thank you very much, Mr. Goble. It was an excellent

statement. You have already laid out many of the answers

to the question I have posed to Dr. Bonner.

Dr. Bonner, what can the United States do to help bring this conflict

to an end?

How about cooperating on restructuring of past

loans?

I hate to bring this hearing to a close because

you have been so helpful and so valuable, but we are under direction

of the majority leader to shut this hearing down and go to the

Senate floor for an important Senate ceremony.

You have both been so helpful. Mr. Goble, thank you; excellent

testimony. I am going to leave this record open because there may

be yet more questions and we would like to get a few more answers

from you. So with that, the record will remain open.

With that, this hearing is adjourned.