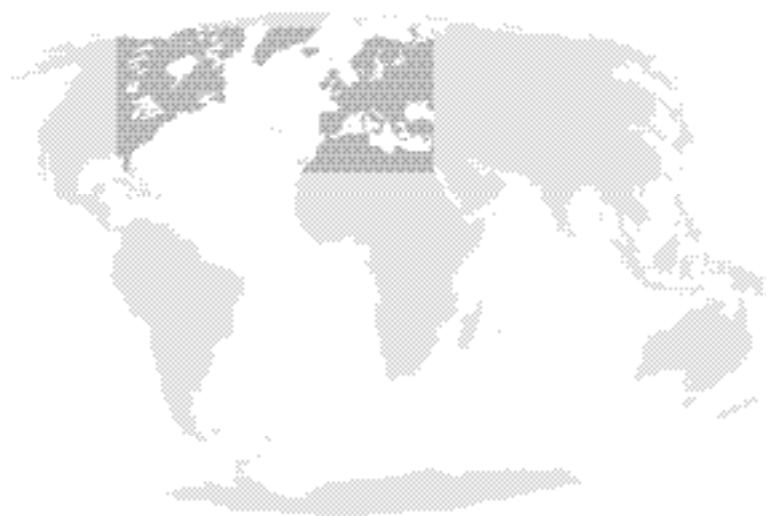


US Foreign Policy and Chechnya

**A Joint Project on
Domestic Politics and America's Russia Policy**

Michael McFaul



**A Paper by The Century Foundation
and The Stanley Foundation**

March 2003

Table of Contents

Forward by Morton Abramowitz	3
Introduction	4
I. The First Chechen War	6
II. The Second Chechen War	11
III. The Bush Response(s) to Chechnya	22
IV. Conclusion	29
Epilogue	31
Endnotes	32
About the Author	41
Euro-Atlantic Initiatives	42
The Century Foundation	43
The Stanley Foundation	44

Forward

Chechnya has been and remains one of the greatest stains in Russia's efforts to move toward a more open and democratic system. The Chechen wars, as Professor Michael McFaul of Stanford University reminds us in this important essay, "rank as the most serious scars of Russia's troubled transition." Since 1994 these wars, with their vast destruction and terrible human rights abuses, have also posed an enormous policy (and moral) problem for American administrations intent on trying to better integrate Russia into the Western community of nations. Dealing with Chechnya has aroused much debate in and out of the US government—a debate that over the years has sadly declined.

In 2001 the Stanley Foundation and the Century Foundation established a task force to look at the broad question of the impact of American domestic political forces on US-Russia relations. (A report was issued in October 2002.) The first subject the task force discussed was Chechnya, which we labeled "the dog that did not bark." Professor McFaul made an impressive oral presentation on US policy on Chechnya, which we asked him to expand and bring up to date. This essay is the result, a detailed analysis of US policy from the Clinton to Bush administrations and the impact on that policy from forces within Congress and from the NGO community who tried to generate greater public debate and secure a tougher American response toward Russia's actions in Chechnya.

McFaul's tale is a sad one. Its bottom line is that US policy has had little impact on Russia's behavior in Chechnya. Similarly, while many like Senator Jesse Helms fought very hard to toughen policy, domestic political forces had little impact on changing it.

Successive administrations were willing to offer up only rhetoric. As McFaul succinctly puts it "Clinton I was not very critical. Clinton II was very critical. Candidate Bush was very critical as well. President Bush has dropped the issue." In the end no administration was willing to take tougher measures against a huge country where we had so many other interests at stake and where policymakers felt they could not affect the conduct of the war. The war on terrorism struck the final nail into any serious American action on Chechnya, although I am told that senior administration officials at least bring it up regularly but quietly. Domestic politics produced some partisan debate over Chechnya, but it never went much beyond the Beltway. And, unfortunately for the Chechens, there are too few of them in the United States to effectively lobby the government to affect change. Over time dissenting voices have died down. "The terrible tragedy that is Chechnya," McFaul concludes from his study, "is a sobering reminder of the limits of American power."

Morton Abramowitz
Senior Fellow, The Century Foundation
December 27, 2002

Introduction

US Foreign Policy and Chechnya¹

Since the end of the Cold War, American foreign policymakers have made integration of Russia into the West a principal objective. Most, though not all, have assumed that Russian integration can take place only after Russia has successfully consolidated democratic and market institutions at home. Promoting the development of these institutions in Russia, therefore, has remained a central component of US policy toward Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Presidents and their staffs have defined the strategy of pursuing these objectives. President George H. W. Bush wanted to see Russia move closer to the West, but did not believe that the United States should get intimately involved with the transformation process in Russia. Soon after becoming president, William J. Clinton adopted a more activist strategy for guiding and influencing Russian reform. In his term of office, President George W. Bush has returned to a more hands-off approach to promoting internal Russian reform but has adopted a more aggressive policy of integrating Russia into Western institutions, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Although the accents of policy have varied among administrations, the basic goals have remained the same: promote democracy and capitalism in Russia and integrate Russia into the Western community of democratic states.

More than a decade after the Soviet collapse, the progress toward these goals is more striking than the setbacks. Ten years ago, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his newly minted government launched a set of changes on a revolutionary scale. Like earlier social revolutions, Yeltsin and his allies sought to transform the fundamental organization of the polity and economy in Russia. They aimed to destroy the Soviet command economy and replace it with a market economy. They also wanted to crush the Soviet dictatorship and replace it with a democratic polity. Unlike their counterparts in France in 1789 or Russia in 1917, Russia's anticommunist revolutionaries added an additional task: the dissolution of the Soviet empire. Yeltsin's agenda was also fundamentally different from that of the Jacobins or Bolsheviks in its approach to the other leading powers in the international system. Whereas these earlier revolutionaries sought to challenge the existing Western community of states, Yeltsin aspired to join this club.

A decade ago few predicted that "the reformers" would be successful in implementing their enormous agenda. At the time, Russia's elite and society were deeply divided on every issue of this agenda. As demonstrated by the overwhelming majority who voted in favor of preserving the Union in a March 1991 referendum, Soviet dissolution was very unpopular. The resistance to acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and his reforms in the Russian congress underscored the weak support for market reforms. If many post-Communist countries debated what market reforms to pursue after the fall of communism, Russia debated whether to pursue market reforms at all. In 1992 it seemed that the democratic reforms had been successful. Yeltsin and his allies believed that the political struggle was over and that the democratic side had won. In January 1992, therefore, the focus had to be on the other two agenda items—confirming Russia's new borders and creating new market institutions.

A decade later, one has to be impressed with the scale of change. Well into the 1990s, it remained unclear (1) if boundaries between new states would become permanent and peaceful, (2) if capitalism would ever take hold, (3) if Russia could integrate into the West, and (4) if democracy would ever consolidate. Russia has made some amazing progress.

The Soviet empire is gone and will never be reconstituted. Belarus may join Russia again, but the coercive subjugation of states and people adjacent to Russia's borders appears very unlikely. Though thousands of lives have been lost as a result of this empire's dissolution, Russian decolonization has been relatively peaceful when compared to the collapse of other empires.

The Soviet command economy is extinct. Russia today has a market economy. This market system is severely flawed, but the fundamental institutions of the Russian economy today look more like other capitalist economies around the world and less like the Soviet command economy. In addition, even former counterrevolutionaries such as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation now endorse the basic tenets of capitalism.

Also, Russia is much more connected to the West today than it was a decade ago. Russia still has not penetrated many important institutions, such as the WTO. Memberships into clubs such as the European Union still seem decades into the future, if not impossible. Yet Russia has moved decisively in a Western direction despite serious disagreements between Russia and the West over issues such as NATO expansion and the NATO war with Serbia over Kosovo. September 11 has helped to accelerate Russia's Westward leanings.

Russian democracy is the major agenda item still unresolved. The autocratic institutions of the Soviet *ancien regime* have collapsed. Yet it is still too early to declare that democratic institutions will permanently replace the old order. Post-Communist Russia most certainly has experimented with democratic practices. That every major political leader in post-Communist Russia has come to power through the ballot box is a real accomplishment for a country with a history of autocratic rule. That the constitution adopted in 1993 has remained the highest law in the land is also a good sign. In addition, every serious poll conducted in Russia within the last five years shows that a solid majority of Russian citizens support democratic ideas and practices.² Yet compared to the deeper roots of Russian independence and Russian capitalism, Russian democracy remains the unfinished agenda item of the revolution launched a decade ago.

The flaws of Russian democracy, as well as the impediments to democratic consolidation, are many.³ The Chechen wars, however, rank as the most serious scars of Russia's troubled transition. Other democracies fight wars and use force against their own citizens. For many observers in the West, however, the scale of human rights abuses observed in these two wars raise serious questions about Russia's commitment to democratic norms. Others have argued that the wars have served to undermine other already fragile democratic institutions, including a free press and free and fair elections. Within the American policy community, the Chechen war has ignited one of the most heated debates about Russia in the 1990s. While

some have compared the Chechen wars to the American Civil War—a necessary evil to preserve the integrity of the Russian Federation—others have labeled these Russian military interventions genocide.

How have US policymakers responded to Chechnya? How have the Chechen wars influenced the broader goals of Russian internal reform and Russian integration in the West? The bottom line answer is “not much.” The rhetoric about Chechnya has changed over time. The Clinton administration was apologetic in its references to the first Chechen war, but used much more critical language to describe the second Chechen war. Candidate and President Bush has also changed his language about Chechnya. As a presidential candidate, Bush was very critical of the second Chechen war and Clinton’s tepid criticism of the Russian intervention. After September 11, however, the discourse used by Bush to describe the conflict was much more sympathetic to the Russian cause.

Policy, however, never changed commensurately with rhetorical fluctuations. On the contrary, what is striking about the American response to the Chechen wars is continuity, not change. Throughout the 1990s, US officials have done little to affect the Chechen wars. Some argue that the United States had tools at its disposal that could have influenced the wars in a significant and positive way. US officials, they contend, were simply unwilling to use these tools.⁴ American unwillingness to use coercive policies against the Russians is part of the explanation, but only a part. The other major factor that promoted continuity in US policy was the lack of American power to influence the situation in Chechnya. Critics also recognize this limitation. Even if US policymakers wanted to be more interventionist, they had few tools to do so. Obviously, the United States emerged from the Cold War as the world’s only superpower. Yet this super-superpower proved unable to influence domestic policy in Russia and was certainly unwilling to try, given their dim expectations of success.

To explain the changing rhetoric about Chechnya as well as the unchanging policy toward Chechnya and the domestic political reaction in the United States, this paper proceeds in four parts. Section I looks at the Clinton administration’s response to the first war. Section II examines the different response from the Clinton administration to the second war. Section III focuses on the language and policies of candidate and President Bush regarding Chechnya, contrasting the tough stance of Bush the candidate with the softer language used in his first meeting with President Vladimir Putin in the summer of 2001—language that became even softer after September 11. Section IV concludes with some observations about US policy.

I. The First Chechen War

President Clinton believed the United States had a national security interest in promoting Russia’s political and economic transformation. If Russia consolidated a market economy at home, then Russia would be more cooperative with capitalist countries abroad as well as more likely to turn democratic. If Russia consolidated democracy, then Russia could become a partner and maybe even an ally of other democracies. To assist this transformation process, the Clinton administration followed a strategy of providing moral, economic, and some political

assistance to those in Russia they believed to be reformers. At the top of the list was Boris Yeltsin. From Clinton's perspective, Yeltsin was unequivocally Russia's chief reformer, the indispensable general of Russia's market and democratic revolution.⁵ If Yeltsin fell, Clinton believed, reform would fail as well.⁶

Already in the first year of Clinton's presidency, this hypothesis about the positive causal relationship between democracy and Yeltsin came into question. In September 1993, Yeltsin declared the Parliament disbanded, and then used armed force to oust the recalcitrant Parliament from power the following month. The invasion of Chechnya presented an even greater challenge. On December 2, 1994, Russian forces began what was to be a full-scale attack on the breakaway republic of Chechnya in the Northern Caucasus. Both in Washington and Moscow, one-time supporters of Yeltsin began to doubt their original assumptions about the man and his regime. Russian "reform" looked neither progressive nor stable.

The Chechen crisis had simmered for years. In August 1991, General Dzhokhar Dudayev and his government in Chechnya declared Chechnya's independence. For three years the Russian state was too weak to exercise sovereignty over the breakaway republic and Chechnya enjoyed de facto independence.⁷ After solidifying his power, Yeltsin committed to a military solution following a series of insults from Dudayev regarding Russian sovereignty during negotiations over the federal treaty in the spring and a spate of bus hijackings in the region that summer.⁸ A failed coup attempt orchestrated by Russia's Federal Security Service was followed by a full-scale air attack and ground invasion. On the eve of attack, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev predicted that the military action would be over within hours. By the time Russia finally sued for peace in the summer of 1996,⁹ an estimated 100,000 Russian citizens had lost their lives.¹⁰

The Clinton Administration's Response

Yeltsin's decision to invade Chechnya surprised Clinton's Russia team. Before the military intervention, the Clinton administration had no Chechnya policy. The only time senior Clinton officials had discussed Chechnya was in April 1993 when intelligence sources passed along Dudayev's claim of possessing a nuclear bomb. The boast turned out to be false, but the event confirmed for several Clinton officials that Dudayev was a dangerous, unstable leader. Clinton officials had begun to worry about Russia's projection of force in the Caucasus in 1994 when intelligence reports revealed a heavy Russian involvement in the Abkhaz independence movement in Georgia. The Clinton team, however, was totally surprised by Moscow's decision to launch a massive military operation against one of Russia's own republics.

Clinton's team on Russia, headed by Strobe Talbott, had no soft spot for Chechnya's national liberation struggle. Chechnya, in their view, was an anarchist's utopia that allowed for kidnapping, drug trafficking, and money laundering. The Chechen ruler (or nonruler) over this anarchy was considered especially unsavory and unstable. As Talbott reports in his memoir, "What little we did know about Chechnya and Dudayev inclined us to accept Moscow's version that it was dealing with an ugly mixture of secessionism and criminality."¹¹ In addition, US intelligence sources suggested that international supporters of Chechens were enemies of the United States.

Consequently, Clinton's administration did not rally to Dudayev's defense when Russian forces invaded. Unlike the near-unanimous support for Yeltsin's bombing of the Parliament in October 1993, internal debate on Chechnya within the Clinton administration was more pronounced. Everyone agreed that the United States had to respect Russia's territorial integrity; no one advocated recognition of Chechnya. But some wanted to send a signal of discontent about Yeltsin's methods for preserving the Russian Federation. Secretary of State Warren Christopher had become wary of Russia's reform process and articulated these views in a May 1995 speech in Bloomington, Indiana. But his caution was a general reaction to developments in Russia and not a response to Chechnya. Anthony Lake, Clinton's national security advisor, was the senior official in the administration most concerned about the conflict and least enamored with Yeltsin personally. After Chechnya, he became increasingly suspicious of his administration's pro-Yeltsin stance.

Treasury officials vehemently opposed the interruption of economic assistance because of Chechnya. Likewise, Department of Defense officials did not want their Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programs and military-to-military contacts to be altered in any way as a result of the war, even though these programs indirectly subsidized the Russian military. Bigger security issues, in their view, had to be addressed even if it made for awkward moments. The United States also was developing a larger foreign policy agenda with Russia that State Department officials did not want derailed by Chechnya. In January 1995, Christopher called US plans with the Russians "the most ambitious arms control agenda in our history."¹² Some US officials believed Chechnya actually enhanced American leverage in other issue areas—such as NATO enlargement, CTR, and Bosnia—because Yeltsin needed Clinton's support more than ever.

Talbott argued that they should not "zigzag" in their policy, since Russia's revolution would be long and difficult and full of ups and downs. US support for reform, therefore, had to act as a ballast to help keep Russia on track. No one liked what Russia was doing, but no one had a good idea for an alternative policy. Most believed that Chechnya should not interfere with other more important agenda items in the bilateral relationship. And even if these other issues were derailed for the sake of Chechnya, no one could make a coherent argument for how a more coercive response to the war could have a positive impact on the situation in Chechnya.

In addressing the Chechen problem, Clinton administration officials constructed their policy by first affirming US respect for Russia's territorial integrity. In his first reaction to the Russian military intervention, Clinton emphasized, "It is an internal Russian affair. And we hope that order can be restored with a minimum amount of bloodshed and violence. And that's what we have counseled and encouraged."¹³ Even after several months of fighting, Clinton accepted the definition of the "problem" as an "internal affair," which implied that the United States lacked the moral authority to try to influence either side.¹⁴

Clinton officials also accepted Yeltsin's "domino" argument. If Chechnya quit the federation, Yeltsin explained, other republics would follow. In explaining their lack of criticism of Yeltsin's

military action, US government officials echoed Russian fears about disintegration, an outcome that would not be in the security interests of the United States. As one anonymous senior official explained to *Washington Post* correspondent Jeffrey Smith, "I accept Yeltsin's argument that if Chechnya is able to break away from Moscow, other republics may be tempted to do the same."¹⁵

Clinton, however, did not confine his policy on Chechnya to respect for Russia's sovereignty. The American president went out of his way to rationalize and defend Yeltsin's military campaign, comparing Russia's struggles with Southern defectors to the American Civil War and thereby suggesting that Yeltsin's quest to keep the federation together was comparable to what Lincoln did in the United States when American territorial integrity was threatened. In January 1995, presidential spokesperson Mike McCurry made the first public allusion to the American Civil War: "We have a long history as a democracy that includes an episode in the history of our own country where we dealt with a secessionist movement through armed conflict called the Civil War."¹⁶ Having traveled to Moscow in April 1996 primarily to assist Yeltsin's reelection campaign, Clinton offered a short American history lesson to the journalists attending their joint press conference:

I would remind you that we once had a civil war in our country in which we lost, on a per capita basis, far more people than we lost in any of the wars of the 20th century, over the proposition that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for, that no state had a right to withdraw from our union.¹⁷

Some within the administration tried to counter their boss's endorsement of Yeltsin's Chechen war. Lake called on Russia to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict and generously praised Yeltsin when he announced a cease-fire in the spring of 1996, even while criticizing his conduct of the war. As he argued months before the Russian presidential vote, "We oppose terrorism in all forms. But we also oppose strongly the means the Russians have been using. Widespread and indiscriminate use of force has spilled far too much innocent blood and eroded support for Russia. The cycle of violence must end."¹⁸ Talbott also stated that the invasion violated international standards on human rights spelled out in the Helsinki Act and other Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and UN documents.¹⁹ Christopher noted that a prolonged conflict in the Caucasus would delay Russia's reform process at home and therefore its progress toward Western integration.

At the same time, US officials, including Christopher and Talbott, argued that the Chechen conflict did not signal the end of reform in Russia:

We believe that Russia must end the violence and killing, urgently seek a peaceful solution, and reach out for reconciliation with people of Chechnya. At the same time, we believe it is premature to interpret the debacle in Chechnya as the death of democracy, freedom, and reform all across Russia.²⁰

In the early stages of the war, Christopher even praised the Russian armed forces for showing restraint.²¹ Above all else, the Clinton team remained determined to not let Chechnya define their Russia policy or derail the linchpin of their policy in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin. Chechnya was a hiccup in a difficult and long transition, but the transition was still moving in the right direction. Spokesperson McCurry also underscored that “[Chechnya] by no means defines this very important bilateral relationship. It is a broad, expansive relationship that has many elements on the agenda, of which this is no doubt one but is by no means the most significant.”²²

Clinton followed up his rhetorical support for Yeltsin’s military campaign with policy support. When the Russians violated the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe by moving more military equipment near the conflict in the Caucasus, the United States did not complain. And despite Talbott’s citation of possible human rights atrocities that might violate international treaties, the Clinton administration never called on the international community to hold Russia accountable. Clinton officials also rejected the idea of expelling Russia from international organizations as punishment for the Chechen war. Instead, Clinton’s administration pushed forward with plans for transforming the Group of Seven (G-7) into the Group of Eight (G-8). Nor did the Clinton administration cut assistance to Russia at any point during the first Chechen war or propose that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of the World Bank cut their funding. The American response to the first Chechen war was much more muted in its criticisms of Russia than European countries and the Council of Europe in particular.

The Greater Foreign Policy Community

Voices outside the administration were quite critical of Clinton’s support for Yeltsin’s war in Chechnya. Republican critics on the Hill, including most vocally Congressman Frank Wolf, threatened to cut aid to Russia.²³ Some Democratic voices joined the chorus. Tim Roemer (D-IN), for instance, urged Clinton to boycott his trip to Moscow in May 1995 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the collapse of Nazi Germany: “We think that it is bad policy, symbolically and substantively, for the president to meet and be seen in Moscow with the Russian military at a time when the Russians are brutally killing Chechens in their terrible war.”²⁴ Not surprisingly, Senate Majority Leader and presidential candidate Robert Dole repeatedly criticized Clinton’s response to the Chechen war, saying that he would not have extended IMF assistance to Russia in the spring of 1996 and would not have compared the conflict between Russia and Chechnya to the American Civil War.²⁵ Nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Physicians for Human Rights, and Doctors Without Borders also were animated by the Chechen war. Opponents of the war in Russia bolstered the voice of these American-based critics. During the first war, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former national security advisor to President Carter, emerged as the most vocal critic of Clinton inaction on Chechnya. Yet even Brzezinski, while underscoring the need to criticize the Russian atrocities, also emphasized the importance of supporting Yeltsin:

I do feel that the administration, while correct in helping him and supporting him, has been too timid in not criticizing him when he does things which he shouldn’t have done. I have particularly in mind the massive killings of the Chechens. That’s inexcusable. It’s immoral. It’s politically bad because it weakens the forces of democracy in Russia.²⁶

The first Chechen war never became a major foreign policy problem for the Clinton administration. Clinton officials admit that congressional pressure helped change their language about Chechnya and moved the issue higher up the list during public briefings. But this was the extent of domestic influences on policy. The Chechens had no important backers in Washington. There is only a miniscule Chechen diaspora in the United States. Chechnya did not have oil or diamonds or some major economic interest that might attract American business support. On the contrary, the American business community supported Russia in this conflict.

Several NGOs took an interest in the war, but they never articulated a united policy alternative to the Clinton administration's approach or argued for strong concrete measures. Human Rights Watch focused primarily on gathering data on atrocities in Chechnya and did not lobby directly to change policy. Other democracy promoting organizations working in Russia did not focus on Chechnya. They wanted to continue their work in other areas such party building, rule of law, trade union development, and promotion of civil society more generally. To stay in business, these groups needed to maintain a friendly relationship with the Yeltsin government and continue to receive funds from Capitol Hill.²⁷ Congressional threats to cut aid to Russia never gained steam since most members of Congress accepted Clinton's argument that the US-Russia relationship was too big and important to be held hostage to one issue. Chechnya never became a campaign issue in the 1996 presidential election despite Dole's criticisms. International press access to the conflict was limited, and Dole never was able to make the Clinton foreign policy record a major campaign topic. At this stage in US-Russia relations, keeping the Communists out of the Kremlin trumped other concerns. Even Clinton's critics accepted this set of priorities.

II. The Second Chechen War

Clinton officials celebrated the peace accord negotiated by Yeltsin's envoy, General Alexander Lebed, in the summer of 1996. The accord did not offer a permanent solution to the territorial conflict, but instead pushed that problem five years into the future. Nonetheless, the end of the war, coming soon after Yeltsin's 1996 reelection victory, fueled optimism in Washington that Russia might be consolidating a more stable, predictable, and democratic polity.

This optimism was misplaced. On June 17, 1999, Chechen rebels crossed into the Russian republic of Dagestan with the stated purpose of liberating the republic from the Russian empire. Less than two months later, on August 10, 1999, Russian armed forces launched a major counteroffensive against the Chechen and Arab units in Dagestan.²⁸ Officials in the United States, as in most countries, condemned the attacks against Russian sovereignty. By the end of the month, they had pushed Shamil Basayev—a terrorist from Saudi Arabia with ties to Osama bin Laden—back into Chechnya. On August 27, 1999, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Dagestan and pledged 300 million rubles for rehabilitation work. Many hoped that this might be the end of the conflict.

It was not. The following week, on September 1, the war came to Moscow when an explosion in downtown Moscow wounded 41 people.²⁹ Further attacks in Moscow and elsewhere killed more than 300 Russian civilians in one month. Russians believed the terrorist attacks to be acts

of war committed by Chechnya and its foreign supporters. Society demanded a response and the Russian government responded.³⁰ In September 1999 Putin emphasized that the new conflict “is not a civil war, but a war declared against Russia by international terrorism with the aim to seize some territories with rich natural resources...[the] terrorists are prepared, financed, and sent abroad.”³¹ Putin and official government news sources emphasized in particular the role of Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia in these latest attacks.

In October Russian troops crossed into Chechen territory for the second time in a decade.³² Some had hoped the Russian armed forces might occupy the northern half of Chechnya, stopping at the Terek River. Putin, however, pursued a maximalist strategy using maximum force. Chechnya was to be liberated from the rebels by any means necessary. More than 100,000 troops were sent to the theater to accomplish this objective, more than double the amount deployed in the first war.

Russian armed forces initially appeared to be more successful in this second war.³³ More methodical and relying to a greater extent on air power, Russian forces eventually recaptured Grozny and most of Chechnya’s cities by the beginning of 2000, while the Chechen fighters remained in the mountains. The severity and extent of human rights violations against non-combatants in this second war also increased dramatically (or were better documented). Human Rights Watch titled its report on the war *Welcome To Hell*.³⁴ Western experts estimate that 400,000 people have been displaced.³⁵ But final victory has proved elusive. Three years later, at the time of this writing, Russian troops are still in Chechnya fighting Chechen rebels.

The Clinton Administration’s Response

The veterans of Clinton’s Russia team could not recover from “Chechnya Two.” Russia’s financial crisis in August 1998 followed by the Bank of New York scandal and the ensuing “who lost Russia” debate combined to dampen optimism about Russia’s prospects of becoming a normal country and stable partner of the United States. Just months after the financial meltdown and what seemed then to be the end of market reform in Russia, Clinton officials had to muster all their diplomatic talents to avoid a major blowup in US-Russia relations as a consequence of the NATO campaign against Serbia. They were exhausted by the feat and troubled by Russia’s erratic behavior, but still hoped that the positive results of cooperation on Kosovo might give the bilateral relationship a jump-start.³⁶ Above all else, Clinton officials wanted to use their final two years in office to secure a major arms control agreement with Russia, an objective that had eluded them their first six years in power.

Russia’s invasion of Chechnya in the summer of 1999 extinguished any optimism about a START III accord or a deal on the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The way the Russians fought the second war was especially frustrating to US officials, who might have otherwise been more sympathetic to Russia’s defense of the homeland. As one senior State Department official lamented, “Instead of fighting the war in a smart way, the Red Army went in like a sledgehammer.” This extreme disappointment colored the American response to the second Chechen war.

Complementing these changes in attitude were other changes in the Clinton administration that shaped the policy response to Chechnya. In 1999 aiding the transformation of Russia was no longer the top foreign policy agenda item it had been in 1994. Clinton was fully engaged in his Russia policy during his first term. He was not during his second term. Monica Lewinsky and impeachment proceedings had pushed all other concerns to the sidelines. Both Clinton and Yeltsin were at the end of their long tenures in power. In contrast to 1994, they needed each other less in 1999. Investments in Russia policy seemed unlikely to produce dividends.

The personnel working on Russia issues also had changed between wars. Madeleine Albright, the new secretary of state, had a reputation for being much more concerned about human rights than her predecessor. The ambassador-at-large for the Newly Independent States during the second war, Stephen Sestanovich, also adopted a much more critical view of the Russian intervention than did his predecessors. Sestanovich's reputation as a Russia expert sympathetic to Russia's reformers amplified his voice within the administration. This "pro-Russia guy" was nonetheless critical of Russia's new military mission. In addition, those groups in the administration that had opposed a tough line on Chechnya during the first war were now weakened or absent. The departure of Secretary of Defense William Perry meant that the Pentagon's views on Russia were much less relevant. Likewise, Treasury's voice on Russia was vastly weakened after the August 1998 debacle. They had been burned by their Russian counterparts, saw no prospects for reform in the immediate future, and therefore played no role in muting criticism of Russia on Chechnya.

Finally, there was learning. Some on the Clinton team had deep regrets about their soft response to the first Chechen war. They did not want to make the same mistake twice. Even if their tools to influence Russian behavior were as limited in 1999 as they were in 1994, those Clinton officials still in the government for the second Chechen war were determined to at least say the right things. They believed that words matter.

Russia also had changed between wars. Most importantly, Yeltsin was not fighting for his political life during this second invasion. The threat of a communist comeback ended with the 1996 presidential election.³⁷ In power after the August 1998 financial meltdown, Communist leaders had demonstrated that they had no intention of trying to resurrect Soviet-style communism. Second, Russian reform was not tied to Yeltsin's survival. This was true partly because economic reform at the time was stalled and partly because the threat of a real reversal was no longer credible. Russia at the time was not lobbying for new IMF loans or increased bilateral assistance, thus limiting US leverage. Third, the threat of federal dissolution, if ever real, had seriously faded by 1999. Fourth, in contrast to 1994, this military action was popular. Russian society saw the second intervention as self-defense. Until the end of the Clinton administration, solid majorities supported the war effort. Even some of America's closest friends in Russia, including Anatoly Chubais and his new coalition of liberals, the Union of Right Forces, supported the war.³⁸ Only liberal Grigory Yavlinsky and his Yabloko party publicly criticized the second war, a stance for which he paid dearly at the polls in December 1999. This new set of circumstances in Russia made devising a policy response to the Chechen war even more difficult.

Despite these changes in both Moscow and Washington, the US policy response to the second war changed only in the margins. The Clinton administration continued to respect the territorial integrity of Russia. As Talbott explained, “Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia—these are all republics on the territory of the Russian Federation. We recognize Russia’s international boundaries and its obligations to protect all of its citizens against separatism and attacks on lawful authorities. We also acknowledge that the current outbreak of violence began when insurgents, based in Chechnya, launched an offensive in Dagestan. Russia also has been rocked by lethal bombings of apartment buildings deep in the Russian heartland, including in Moscow itself.”³⁹ The Chechen invasion of Dagestan made it impossible for the United States or any other country to adopt a different position regarding sovereignty. Russian territory had been invaded; Russia had the right to defend its borders.⁴⁰

Once again the Chechens had no friends in the administration. To be sure, those that followed the conflict closely recognized that different Chechen fighters had different agendas. Some had sympathy for Aslan Maskhadov, the elected president of Chechnya, while everyone in the administration despised Shamil Basayev and his allies. Publicly for the Clinton administration, however, Basayev’s nefarious activities tainted the entire Chechen cause. Even Maskhadov’s statements and actions complicated support. For instance, Maskhadov’s government had condemned the US counterattacks against bin Laden camps in Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998, while Chechen Deputy Prime Minister Vaha Arsanov declared war against the United States in response to the United States counterattacks.⁴¹ In testimony before Congress, Sestanovich asserted that “Chechen rebels are receiving help from radical groups in other countries, including Osama bin Laden’s network and others who have attacked or threatened Americans and American interests.”⁴² Such allies—coupled with the alleged attacks against Russian civilians in Dagestan, Moscow, and elsewhere—made it difficult for anyone in the administration to champion the Chechen cause.

Rhetorical Changes. In affirming Russia’s sovereignty in Chechnya, Clinton officials reversed their previous policy and refrained from calling the Chechen war an “internal affair.” Clinton undermined the premise about “internal affairs” most dramatically in a speech at the OSCE meeting in Istanbul in November 1999. Speaking to Yeltsin directly across the table in front of dozens of European leaders, Clinton argued that he would not have wanted the international community to sit by idly if Yeltsin had been arrested in August 1991.⁴³ Yeltsin hated the analogy, but Clinton made clear his intention of internationalizing the discussion about Chechnya. More bluntly, Albright also affirmed, “Russia could not consider this war simply an internal affair.”⁴⁴ While attending a multilateral conference on the Middle East peace process in Moscow, Albright hinted at a similar kind of multilateral intervention in Chechnya: “Conflicts within states, as well as those between states, threaten our common security... I believe there is a very important role that the OSCE can play in helping to resolve a variety of conflicts within countries.”⁴⁵ In his initial dealings with Putin, Clinton also emphasized the international consequences of the Chechen war, a framing of the problem that Putin categorically rejected. When Clinton brought up Chechnya, the Russian president’s manner became extremely annoyed. Putin was unwilling to listen to Clinton’s criticisms. In part because of Chechnya, the two men never hit it off and endured a frosty relationship until the end of Clinton’s second term.

Rhetorically, Clinton officials were also more critical of Russia's conduct during the second war even though its tactics were not that different from the first war.⁴⁶ Officials highlighted continually that the "indiscriminate use of force" was a big problem that invited international attention and action. As Sestanovich described, "A relentless bombing and artillery campaign has been carried out in nearly all parts of the republic. This use of indiscriminate use of force against innocent civilians is indefensible, and we condemn it."⁴⁷ In real contrast to his statements about the first Chechen war, Talbott was also much more critical of Russia's behavior this time:

We don't dispute Russia's rights, or indeed its responsibility, to fight terrorism on its soil. But none of that begins to justify the Russian government's decision to use massive force against civilians inside Chechnya. The numbers speak for themselves: 285,000 people displaced, thousands of innocent civilians dead or wounded, and thousands of homes and businesses destroyed since last September.⁴⁸

Such language was never used to describe the first war. As an alternative, Clinton officials said "there must be a vigorous and conscientious effort to engage regional leaders in a political dialogue."⁴⁹ The pleas for negotiations were aimed at both Russian and Chechen leaders.⁵⁰

Clinton officials also developed a new theory about the relationship between Chechnya and democracy. Some cited debate in Russia on the first war as a sign that democracy was working. But too much criticism of Yeltsin was considered detrimental to democracy's long-term prospects. Now the argument was the opposite: the war in Chechnya threatened to undermine democracy.⁵¹ Clinton officials also emphasized that the war damaged Russia's international reputation and threatened Russian integration into the West. As Talbott concluded in congressional testimony, "no other development in the nine years since the collapse of the Soviet Union has raised such serious questions about Russia's commitments to international norms as the war in Chechnya."⁵² Allusions to Lincoln and the American Civil War ceased. Rather than preserving democracy in the spirit of Lincoln, Yeltsin was charged with undermining it.

Despite the new critical edge to American statements, the Clinton administration still did not want to go too far.⁵³ They did not want to make Chechnya the only issue in US-Russia relations. Albright argued "The last thing that we should be doing is trying to turn Russia back into an enemy."⁵⁴ And the one official who hated discussing Chechnya was Clinton himself. He obliged his staff by adding Chechnya to the talking points during phone calls and meetings with Yeltsin and then Putin, and Clinton was prepared to confront Yeltsin about Chechnya, as he did in Istanbul. But Clinton disliked the issue because he did not think it was a major problem and because his leverage for changing Russian behavior was extremely limited. In Clinton's mind, however, harping over a "small" issue like Chechnya should not be the central focus of US foreign policy toward Russia. In his farewell ode to Yeltsin published soon after the Russian president resigned, Clinton used the phrase "to liberate Grozny" as a euphemism for Yeltsin's war against Chechnya.⁵⁵ After years of discussing Chechnya, Clinton's phraseology revealed that his sympathies laid with Moscow all along.

Policy Changes. In response to the second Chechen war, the Clinton administration did make some policy changes, exercising what little leverage the United States believed it had. In the first war, the Clinton administration worked hard to keep Chechnya from dominating discussion at international forums. This time around the United States pushed to have Chechnya at the top of the agenda. The United States, not Europe, wanted Chechnya to be the focus of the OSCE meeting in Istanbul.⁵⁶ More generally, State Department officials repeatedly sent out talking points to American allies in Europe in hopes that the West could adopt a common approach to the conflict. Putin worked hard to develop special relationships with European leaders and pull them away from the US position on Chechnya. In the end, State Department officials conceded that Putin achieved partial success. At the OSCE meeting, for instance, a joint communiqué on Chechnya was not released.

The Clinton administration refrained once again from cutting bilateral assistance programs to Russia in the second war. The Nunn-Lugar Act remained a national security interest no matter what the recipients of this program—the Russian military—did in other arenas. Nor was the US Agency for International Development eager to cut its programs. By the fall of 1999, most other forms of American assistance to Russia did not go to the Russian federal government, but were channeled instead to nongovernmental organizations and regional governments. Clinton officials argued that cutting this assistance would therefore only punish those not directly responsible for the war.

Two aid programs, however, did suffer: IMF assistance to Russia and Export-Import Bank projects with Russian companies. Treasury officials opposed any public linkage between Chechnya and IMF programs, as formal and public linkage would set a dangerous precedent and destroy the integrity of the IMF. But Clinton officials made it known to the fund that they wanted to see the IMF's program with Russia receive much greater scrutiny after Russia invaded Chechnya. At the same time, Deputy Secretary of Treasury Lawrence Summers opposed any new IMF money to Russia for both economic and moral reasons. Summers had become so disappointed with Russia that he had become a major anti-Russia voice in the administration after 1998. Subsequently, the IMF delayed a second tranche in 1999 and did not initiate any new discussions on a bigger program. When the Russians complained that the IMF was linking its financial decisions to Chechnya, no one in the administration denied it.⁵⁷

The postponement of Ex-Im Bank loans was overtly linked to Chechnya. After months of delay and negotiation, the Ex-Im Bank was preparing to make a \$500 million loan to the Tyumen Oil Company. They hoped that the Tyumen Oil loan might help to instill renewed confidence among American investors after August 1998 and the Bank of New York scandal. Secretary of State Albright, however, had a different set of concerns. Most importantly, she wanted to do something to respond to the Russian invasion in Chechnya, and delaying this loan was something she could do. When the Ex-Im Bank board refused to delay the loan, Albright sent a letter to them outlining why it was “in the national interest” to postpone the loan.⁵⁸ According to a rarely invoked law, such a letter from the secretary of state

overrode any Ex-Im board decision. Harmon was furious, arguing with some merit that Tyumen Oil was not fighting the war in Chechnya. Over time Harmon convinced others and the loans were allowed to move forward in March 2000.

Clinton administration officials also did more to help alter conditions in Chechnya. The United States provided \$10 million to help address the needs of displaced persons.⁵⁹ Clinton officials also pushed incessantly for international monitors to be allowed into Chechnya.⁶⁰ At the OSCE summit in Istanbul, Prime Minister Putin agreed to allow the chairman of the OSCE, Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek, to visit Chechnya. Putin also agreed to meet with UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson, though the results of the encounter were inconclusive. Sestanovich summed up the successes of these lobbying efforts: "In response to persistent pressure from the United States and other Western nations, Russia has agreed to grant ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] access to detainees, agreed to establish an OSCE assistance group in Chechnya, and agreed to add Council of Europe experts to the staff of Russia's new human rights ombudsman for Chechnya."⁶¹

The Clinton administration also increased its assistance program to Georgia aimed at beefing up security at the Georgian-Russian border in order to deny Russia an excuse to intervene in Georgia in "hot pursuit of terrorists."⁶²

When all these policies are added up, the effort was still a minimal one. The rhetorical rebukes were sharper and IMF and Ex-Im loans were delayed, but little else changed. Clinton did not postpone planned bilateral meetings with his Russian counterpart, Russia was not kicked out of any major international club, and business in other arenas continued without interruption. Like they had during the first war, Clinton administration officials felt helpless, believing that they lacked the tools to influence positive change. Unlike they had done during the first war, however, they confessed to a greater sense of frustration with their impotence and with the stupidity of both the Russians and Chechens for allowing this war to rekindle. This time around, they actually wanted to do more to try to stop the war, but still did not have the means to do so. As Talbott lamented:

...The West had neither the desire nor the means to engage diplomatically in the Chechen conflict, much less intervene militarily. The US and its allies had no leverage on the real leaders, nor did we have sympathy either with their goal of independence or the raids in Dagestan that had precipitated the conflict. They had indisputably—and, it seemed, deliberately—brought down the wrath of the Russian armed forces on their people. That meant there was little we could do but cite Russia's obligations under various international covenants to protect civilian life and call on Moscow to let representatives of the OSCE into Chechnya to help deal with the refugee crisis or monitor the behavior of Russian troops.⁶³

Voices Outside of the Administration

Critics of Clinton's Chechnya policy were much more active and vocal during the second war. The rationale for Russia's second military intervention was arguably more plausible than the reasons for the first move against Chechnya. Moscow launched the first war with little or no prodding from the Chechen leadership, whereas Basayev's invasion of Dagestan cast Russia as the victim, at least in the beginning stages of the conflict. It was the brutality of Russia's military campaign in the second war, however, not *who* precipitated it, that critics of the war highlighted. By 1999 general disdain for both Clinton and Yeltsin fueled the fires of criticism. For Republicans the 2000 presidential election added an additional incentive to attack the policy.

Republicans in Congress led the charge. Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and his staff were the most focused, dogged, and outspoken critics on Capitol Hill.⁶⁴ Helms convened dozens of hearings on the issue. He ridiculed the administration for its implicit support of genocide in Chechnya. He called on the United States to push for Russia's expulsion from the G-8. He tied up ambassadorial confirmations to punish the Clinton administration for inaction. Clinton officials believed that Helms and his staff had a romanticized view of the freedom struggle in Chechnya. It was odd, they thought, that a conservative senator should be sympathetic to a movement allied with bin Laden. Nonetheless, they dreaded the prospect of appearing before his committee and did all they could to appease Helms.

Helms did not work alone. Senator Mitch McConnell, an influential Republican from Kentucky, shared Helms's disdain for Clinton's Chechnya policy. His documented dislike of Clinton amplified his virulent indictment of the administration's response to the second Chechen war. Senator McConnell bluntly said to Talbott:

Now you [Talbott] and I can spend the next hour parsing syntax over the real intent behind US policy pronouncements. Let's just stipulate that we disagree: you believe the administration has been clear in objecting to the course Russia has pursued in Chechnya. I believe your message has been muddled, at best. At its worst, your failure to take decisive action invited contempt and a war against the Chechen people, which reminded many local witnesses of the round-ups and forced deportations, famine, and devastation of the Stalin era. Frankly, it reminds me of what Milošević did to Kosova, only with more firepower and speed. What I can't understand is why we supported war crimes indictments for ethnic cleansing in Kosova, yet turn a blind eye to identical savagery against civilians in Chechnya.⁶⁵

House Republicans tried to bring even greater attention to Clinton's failures on Chechnya by framing the problem in terms of a general policy failure regarding Russia. Speaker Dennis Hastert commissioned a study of US policy toward Russia chaired by Republican Congressman Christopher Cox. The Cox Report looked like a campaign document—slick,

lots of pictures, a provocative title—and was published just before the November election.⁶⁶ Though funded by Congress and distributed as a congressional study, the commission included no Democrats. These factors combined to limit the attention given to the study. The conclusions were damning:

The conduct of the first and second wars in Chechnya and the US administration's long quiescence concerning it reveal the tragic cost of the overpersonalized Clinton Russia policy. Rather than acting forcefully to advance US values and interests, the Clinton administration tacitly accepted Russia's agenda in Chechnya.⁶⁷

Like McConnell, the Cox Report blamed the Clinton administration for the war itself.

Democrats never went this far, but they too criticized the Clinton policy as weak, ineffective, and immoral. In February 2000, the Senate passed a resolution calling upon the president to “promote peace negotiations between the Government of the Russian Federation and the leadership of the Chechnya Government, including President Aslan Maskhadov, through third party mediations by the OSCE, United Nations, or other appropriate parties.”⁶⁸ The same resolution also urged Clinton to endorse the recommendation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which called for an investigation into alleged war crimes. The resolution also denounced the detention of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) correspondent Andrei Babitsky, who was being held by Russian military authorities because of his alleged sympathetic reporting about the plight of the Chechens. The late liberal Democratic Senator Paul Wellstone introduced this resolution, which in February 2000 won a majority in the Senate. Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) was the author of the House resolution that called for Russia's expulsion from the G-8.⁶⁹

Congressional leaders backed up these rhetorical flurries and nonbinding resolutions with concrete actions. In the 2000 appropriations bill, US legislators cut 30 percent from the president's Freedom Support Act budget. Talbott claimed that this was one of the many reasons why Clinton vetoed the bill: “The funding levels proposed by the Congress would force us to make unacceptable trade-offs between our core economic and democracy programs and programs that prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The president believes such cuts would be dangerously short-sighted, because the purposes of this assistance—from building an independent media to promoting small business—are fundamentally in our interests.”⁷⁰

Chechnya even emerged, however briefly and marginally, as a presidential election campaign issue. During the Democratic primaries, candidate Bill Bradley called for delays in Ex-Im Bank loans (a policy the Clinton administration eventually pursued) saying that “it is inappropriate to give assistance to Russia while it is engaged in the brutal war in Chechnya.”⁷¹ Republican candidate George W. Bush went even further, calling for an end to both the Ex-Im Bank loans and IMF assistance to Russia.⁷² Of course, other issues dominated the 2000 presidential campaign and allowed Clinton critics a bye in defining an alternative policy. What was clear, however, was how little enthusiasm there was for his Chechnya policy. This criticism of his Chechen policy negatively shaped assessments of his Russia policy as a whole.

Bush, Bradley, Helms, McConnell, Wellstone, Cox, and Lantos made for a strange alliance. The coalition of critics in the policy community was even more strange. Brzezinski, the former national security advisor to President Carter, constituted the most important lobby for the Chechen cause in and of himself. Although retired for almost 20 years, Brzezinski has remained one of Washington's most important voices on foreign policy. He put the full force of his reputation, intellect, and acerbic tongue behind a campaign of pressure and ridicule of Clinton over Chechnya. He defended the Chechens as freedom fighters and lambasted the Clinton administration for accepting the Russian interpretation of events in Chechnya:

What should be done? To start with, the US should not fall for Russia's entreaty that "we are allies against Osama bin Laden." Reminiscent of the earlier Russian pitch that "Yeltsin, like Lincoln, is saving the union," which the Clinton administration bought hook, line, and sinker, this is a marginal issue intended as a distraction. Terrorism is neither the central geopolitical nor moral challenge here.⁷³

Brzezinski suggested that Clinton and his foreign policy team were guilty of supporting genocide. As he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "It is tragically the case that the administration's indifference to what has been happening in Chechnya has probably contributed to the scale of the genocide inflicted on the Chechens."⁷⁴ Brzezinski also argued that Clinton had the wrong priorities in dealing with Russia:

The administration's one-sided approach reflects not only a continuing misreading of the Russian situation but, above all, a politically driven desire to strike some sort of spectacular agreement with the Russians regarding ratification of START and some compromise regarding the ABM Treaty, thereby enabling the administration to claim that it has obtained a green light from Russia for the deployment of the national missile defense system.⁷⁵

To increase attention to the Chechen cause, Brzezinski formed the American Committee for Chechnya, which he cochaired with Alexander Haig and Max Kampelman. In its founding declaration, the committee echoed the characterization of the war as "genocide" and argued, "There is no excuse for inaction. The United States should immediately announce a comprehensive plan to deter Russian aggression, provide humanitarian relief to the Chechen people, and begin a process of bringing the war to a negotiated end."⁷⁶ Unlike many others, Brzezinski suggested a set of policy alternatives, including a discontinuation of high-level contacts between Russian and American officials and an elevation of American-Chechen interactions.⁷⁷ The American Committee for Chechnya also made specific policy recommendations: oppose the release of World Bank and IMF loans to Russia, initiate talks on Russian G-8 suspension, call on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to appoint a special envoy on Chechnya, take the lead in providing humanitarian relief, and call upon the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya to "act upon its mandate...to negotiate a political solution to the present crisis."⁷⁸ Brzezinski also promoted direct American development assistance to Chechnya and the region.⁷⁹ Finally, Brzezinski helped establish and finance Chechen representation in Washington.

No one devoted energy and resources to the Chechen issue like Brzezinski. Yet many shared his view on the war. Human Rights Watch once again devoted serious attention to documenting human rights violations inside Chechnya. The title of its report *Welcome to Hell*, summarized their perspective.⁸⁰ The National Endowment for Democracy by law could not adopt a policy position on the war, but the foundation went out of its way to financially support critics of the war in Russia, including Lev Ponomarev, Sergei Grigoryants, and Elena Bonner. The Jamestown Foundation also tried to attract attention to the conflict by publishing a weekly digest of events in Chechnya written and edited by Hoover Institution Senior Fellow John Dunlop, one of the closest followers of the first war. The Web site *kavkaz.org* propagated the Chechen perspective in the English language. Under the leadership of Fred Hiatt, *The Washington Post* editorial page gave sustained attention to the war. Hiatt himself and editorial page deputy editor Jackson Diehl made the war one of their signature issues. Such editorial focus did not exist in any newspaper during the first Chechen war. Even analysts sympathetic to the objectives of Clinton's Russia policy questioned the muted response to Chechnya.⁸¹ American silence, some of these critics asserted, was not only morally reprehensible but also weakened civil society leaders in Russia who sought a peaceful solution.⁸²

The chattering class was not unanimous in its condemnation of Russia and Clinton's support of Russia. Anatol Lieven, a former journalist who had covered the first war and wrote a book about it, adopted a very different perspective on the second war, calling the Russian response justified and American moralizing about the intervention unwarranted.⁸³ Similarly, Dimitri Simes, president of the Nixon Center, called Clinton's criticism of Russia unjustified:

Clinton should get an award for hypocrisy. In 1994/96, he talked about Russian "civil war" and he compared Yeltsin to Lincoln. It was ridiculous and preposterous. Now he is talking about the Russian war in Chechnya after the Russians were attacked by the Chechens and he tells them how they should [not] kill innocent civilians. Do we remember Kosovo? Do we remember the Branch Davidians? Can you imagine a major nation which allows a territory with fifty or sixty thousand people, unarmed, no control, no central government.... And the truth is that the Russians are learning from what the United States and NATO have done in Kosovo, but they do not have precision-guided munitions.⁸⁴

The impact of these forces on Capitol Hill and outside government is difficult to measure. Without question, the Clinton administration felt under siege on its Russia policy during the second Chechen war. They were defending a policy that they no longer believed in with the same level of conviction that they held when entering government in 1993. After countless hearings, op-ed pieces, and threats of further actions, the policy changed only in the margins. The policy changed so slightly because Clinton officials believed there were no more obvious policy alternatives that would be effective. Unlike some other issues, the Clinton team had diagnosed this problem correctly. They understood the situation and sympathized with the arguments advanced by some of the critics. Their own rhetoric about the war began to resemble the opinion pieces of their greatest detractors.

Beyond deploying the right words, the Clinton team believed it had few other policy options that might influence the war in a positive direction. Clinton administration officials rejected full-scale sanctions, which in their view might make people in the United States feel better but would not help the plight of the Chechens at all. Russia, in their estimation, was too big to be influenced by sanctions from the outside. Even in its seventh year in power, the Clinton team remained proponents of engagement. They were unwilling to return to a confrontational policy on Russia. Clinton himself was the most vocal advocate of staying the course. By 1999, however, the United States had few carrots left to influence change through incentives rather than punishment. The Clinton team's inability to change Russia's behavior in Chechnya stood as an unfortunate example of how difficult it was to promote internal change from outside a country as large and complex as Russia.

There were policy alternatives. Brzezinski, as outlined above, offered some. Others might have included cutting all assistance to the state (including Nunn-Lugar) and providing more financial support to human rights activists inside Russia. If the United States had adopted all of the alternative measures together—changing aid policy, supporting development in Chechnya, and excluding Russia from the G-8—would Russia have adopted a different policy? Probably not. At the end of the day, Russian leaders believed they were fighting to defend their security and preserve their territorial integrity. All other interests, including positive relations with the United States, were vastly subordinate. The United States had the opposite problem: the Chechen war was considered a less important issue compared to other agenda items in US-Russia relations. These asymmetries of interests, combined with a nearly empty American tool kit for influencing internal politics in Russia, produced policy inertia which satisfied no one—not the Clinton team, not the Russians, and not the outsiders watching and trying to influence the policy.

III. The Bush Response(s) to Chechnya

The group of foreign policy officials that advised Governor George W. Bush during the 2000 presidential campaign declared the Clinton-Gore approach to Russia a total failure. Their central criticism, especially expressed privately, was not that Clinton had done too little to stop the war in Chechnya. Rather, their central charge was that Clinton and his team had devoted too much time and too many resources in trying to change Russia internally.⁸⁵ Bush's foreign policy team, headed by Stanford provost Condoleezza Rice and called the "Vulcans," believed that the best way to repair US-Russia relations was to treat Russia like an international power. They advocated greater focus on the great powers in the world, such as Russia and China, and less attention to "humanitarian concerns" such as Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.⁸⁶ Greater attention did not mean a softer line. On the contrary, in reference to both Russia and China, Bush campaign officials promised to depart from the Clinton soft-line strategy and adhere to a more confrontational approach.⁸⁷ With Russia, Bush advisors promised to end the "happy talk" and discontinue the overpersonalized approach that they claimed Clinton practiced with Yeltsin.

Because the Bush foreign policy team were "realists," they tended to downplay the importance of regime type generally and instead focused on the external behavior of states, which they believed were influenced first and foremost by the balance of power in the international system. Generally,

they pledged a similar approach to Russia. This said, two internal problems in Russia—corruption and Chechnya—were simply too juicy politically to ignore. Candidate Bush and his advisors repeatedly referenced these issues of Russian domestic politics and blamed the Clinton administration for not doing enough in response to these transgressions. As the following exchange between candidate Bush and news anchor Jim Lehrer in February 2000 demonstrated, Bush promised to do more.

LEHRER: On Chechnya and Russia, the US and the rest of the Western world had been raising Cain with Russia from the beginning, saying ‘You are killing innocent civilians.’ The Russians have said essentially “We’re fighting terrorism, and, by the way, mind your own business.” What else—what else, if anything, could be done by the United States?

BUSH: Well, we could cut off IMF aid and Export-Import loans to Russia until they heard the message loud and clear, and we should do that. It’s going to be a very interesting issue to see how Russia merges [*sic*], Jim. This guy, Putin, who is now the temporary president, has come to power as a result of Chechnya. He kind of rode the great wave of popularity as the Russian military looked like they were gaining strength in kind of handling the Chechnya situation in a way that’s not acceptable to peaceful nations....

LEHRER: But on Chechnya, specifically, you think we should not—we should hold up International Monetary Fund aid. Anything else we should do?

BUSH: Export-Import loans.

LEHRER: And just cut them off?

BUSH: Yes, sir, I think we should.

LEHRER: Until they do what?

BUSH: Until they understand they need to resolve the dispute peacefully and not be bombing women and children and causing huge numbers of refugees to flee Chechnya.

LEHRER: And do you think that would work?

BUSH: Well, it certainly worked better than what the Clinton administration has tried.

LEHRER: You mean, just using words, you mean?

BUSH: Yes.⁸⁸

In the first weeks of his administration, President Bush and his new foreign policy team signaled their intent to maintain a tough line on Russia and Chechnya in particular. After being named national security advisor but before taking office, Condoleezza Rice wrote a hard-hitting opinion piece for the *Chicago Tribune* warning the Russians of things to come. In this essay, Rice emphasized again that “the United States needs to recognize that Russia is a great power,” and therefore “US policy must concentrate on the important security agenda with Russia.”⁸⁹ At the same time, she also reiterated many of Russia’s domestic ills, including weak democratic institutions, halfhearted economic reforms, and corruption. She devoted special attention to the ill effects of the Chechen war and Putin’s role in it:

As prime minister, Vladimir Putin used the Chechnya war to stir nationalism at home while fueling his political fortunes. The Russian military has been uncharacteristically blunt and vocal in asserting its duty to defend the integrity of the Russian Federation—an unwelcome development in civil-military relations. The long-term effect of the war on Russia’s political culture should not be underestimated. This war has affected the relations between Russia and its neighbors in the Caucasus, as the Kremlin has been hurling charges of harboring and abetting Chechen terrorists against states as diverse as Saudi Arabia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. The war is a reminder of the vulnerability of the small, new states around Russia and of America’s interest in their independence.⁹⁰

Rice hoped that this blunt statement about Russia’s problems and its impact on US interests would stand in contrast to the sugarcoated rhetoric of the Clinton years, which, in her opinion, did great damage to US national security:

The United States should not be faulted for trying to help [with Russian reform]. But, as the Russian reformer Grigory Yavlinsky has said, the United States should have “told the truth” about what was happening. We now have a dual credibility problem—with Russians and with Americans.... There is no longer a consensus in America or Europe on what to do next with Russia. Frustrated expectations and “Russia fatigue” are direct consequences of the “happy talk” in which the Clinton administration engaged.⁹¹

In the spring of 2001, Bush and his foreign policy team did seem determined to end the “happy talk.” In March 2001, his administration ordered the expulsion of nearly 50 Russian diplomats from the United States who were accused of being spies.⁹² Bush personally did not make any statements about Chechnya during his first months in power, but his State Department did send a loud signal of support for the Chechen cause by arranging a meeting between the Chechen foreign minister in exile, Ilyas Akhmadov, and the acting deputy assistant secretary of state, John Beyrle—the highest-level meeting ever with a Chechen government official.⁹³ In this early period, Bush officials also seemed poised to maintain a tough line on Russia’s relations with rogue states. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called

Russia “an active proliferator”⁹⁴ while his deputy, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, described the Russians as immoral proliferators who “seem to be willing to sell anything to anyone for money.”⁹⁵ Leaks from the White House suggested that assistance to Russia would be cut, including even \$100 million from Nunn-Lugar, a program that some Bush officials viewed as a subsidy for Russia’s military-industrial complex.⁹⁶ A new, more confrontational approach to relations with Russia seemed to be emerging. As *New York Times* reporter Jane Perlez concluded in her review of Russia policy at the time, “The Bush administration has not articulated a broad policy toward Russia, but in thoughts and deeds it has taken a sharp departure from the engagement policies of its predecessor, moving toward isolating Russia and its president, Vladimir V. Putin.”⁹⁷

Only after American allies in Europe insisted did Bush agree to schedule a meeting with Putin as a final stop on his first trip to Europe in the summer of 2001. As the meeting with Putin in Slovenia approached, Bush began to get personally involved with his Russia policy for the first time. That spring, he made a strategic decision not to confront Putin with a laundry list of American concerns in their first meeting. Instead, he wanted to establish a personal rapport with the Russian leader as a necessary first step in developing a partnership with his Russian counterpart. It was a businessman’s approach to foreign policy. In making this decision, Bush especially wanted to avoid any long discussion or argument about internal Russian politics such as Chechnya. In a sense, now that the presidential campaign was over, Bush was returning to the realist proclivities of his closest foreign policy advisors—proclivities also shared by his father.

At their first meeting in Slovenia in June 2001, Bush went out of his way to praise Putin. Instead of depersonalizing relations with Russia, Bush deliberately tried to forge a personal bond with his Russian counterpart during their very first encounter. At this meeting Bush reported, “I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy.... I was able to get a sense of his soul,” and he liked what he saw and sensed.⁹⁸ According to White House staffers, Bush and Putin did discuss Chechnya privately, but there was almost no mention of the issue publicly.

The bond between Bush and Putin grew stronger after September 11. Putin was one of the first foreign leaders to call Bush that day to communicate his full support for the United States and the American people. Putin expressed sympathy as a leader of a country that had also suffered from acts of terrorism against civilians in the capital. Eventually, Putin followed his words of support with policies of assistance. On September 24, Putin announced a five-point plan to support the American war against terrorism. He pledged that his government would (1) share intelligence, (2) open Russian air space for flights providing humanitarian assistance, (3) cooperate with Russia’s Central Asian allies to provide air space access to American flights, (4) participate in international search and rescue efforts, and (5) increase direct assistance—both humanitarian and military—to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Putin’s agreement to an American military presence in Central Asia represented a historic change in Russian foreign policy.

Bush immediately rewarded Putin's supportive turn by changing the way he spoke about Russia's "war against terrorism." On September 26, White House press spokesperson Ari Fleischer communicated Bush's appreciation for Putin's statement. Fleischer also stated that "Chechnya leadership, like all responsible political leaders in the world, must immediately and conditionally cut all contacts with international terrorist groups, such as Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda organization."⁹⁹ The Clinton administration had previously connected some Chechen fighters to bin Laden's network; the Bush administration had not. Subsequent meetings between the Bush administration and the Chechen government in exile were fewer and at lower levels. President Bush's statement did not give Putin a green light to do what he wanted in Chechnya. Throughout the second war, the Russian armed forces had already done whatever they wanted in Chechnya with little or no regard to American opinions.

The statement of support, however, did underscore the notion that the United States and Russia faced a common enemy. Putin had been pushing this theme for two years with his American counterparts. Putin was pleased to hear that President Bush finally recognized publicly their common cause. In subsequent meetings between Bush and Putin, the war in Chechnya has not been a major agenda item. As one journalist summed up, "Bush has shown remarkable discipline in ignoring Russia's increasingly brutal campaign against separatists in the rebel republic—a campaign dubbed by Yelena Bonner, widow of Nobel Prize-winning human rights activist Andrei Sakharov, as the "political genocide of the Chechen people."¹⁰⁰

Bush administration officials had repeatedly stressed that the issue of Chechnya was covered at length behind closed doors in previous meetings between the Russian and American presidents.¹⁰¹ When Bush has alluded to the Chechen situation publicly, however, he and the senior officials in his government have often adopted Putin's portrayal of the Russian military operation as part of the war on terrorism.¹⁰² As he reaffirmed at the G-8 meeting in Canada in the summer of 2002, "President Putin has been a stalwart in the fight against terror. He understands the threat of terror, because he has lived through terror. He's seen terror firsthand and he knows the threat of terrorism.... He understands what I understand, that there won't be peace if terrorists are allowed to kill and take innocent life. And, therefore, I view President Putin as an ally—a strong ally—in the war against terrorism."¹⁰³ Even Secretary of State Colin Powell changed his description of the Chechen conflict, stating bluntly soon after the Moscow 2002 summit that "Russia is fighting terrorists in Chechnya, there is no question about that, and we understand that."¹⁰⁴ Such utterances suggest that the references to Chechnya behind closed doors may not have been as hard-hitting as US officials have claimed.

The Bush administration has not always spoken with a unified voice about Chechnya. Although the president himself has not spoken critically about the Chechen war since the 2000 presidential campaign, members of his administration have condemned the conduct of the Russian military campaign. When pressed to talk about Chechnya, Condoleezza Rice has continued to express a more complex view of the war:

...We clearly have differences with the Russian government about Chechnya. We've said to them that we fully agree that the Chechen leadership should not involve itself with terrorist elements in the region, and there are terrorist elements in the region. But that not every Chechen is a terrorist and that the Chechens' legitimate aspiration for political solution should be pursued by the Russian government. And we have been very actively pressing the Russian government to move on the political front with Chechnya.¹⁰⁵

The US ambassador to Russia, Alexander Vershbow, has been particularly vocal in condemning the methods of the campaign, urging a political solution and distinguishing between international terrorists fighting in Chechnya and local Chechen fighters whose aim is independence.¹⁰⁶ In public statements, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Steven Pifer also has stressed the need to distinguish between freedom fighters and international terrorists and has called on Maskhadov and other moderate Chechens to disassociate themselves with terrorists.¹⁰⁷ Pifer also has stated bluntly that "the danger to civilians in Chechnya remains our greatest concern. The human rights situation is poor, with a history of abuses by all sides...."¹⁰⁸

If the rhetoric of the Bush administration has changed considerably over its first years in office—from the very critical to the very supportive, but with dissident voices continuing to highlight the negative—actual policy has changed very little from the Clinton era. When asked during his confirmation hearings how the Bush approach to Chechnya would differ from the Clinton policy, Powell answered, "I don't know that I can answer that...."¹⁰⁹ Subsequent statements by Bush administration officials suggest that the actual policy on Chechnya has changed very little.¹¹⁰ On the basic issues concerning Chechnya, State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher said, "To reiterate, our policy has not changed. We recognize Chechnya as part of Russia."¹¹¹ He also added, "they need to take steps to bring the violence to an end, that there is no military solution to the problem, and they need—both sides need—to find ways to begin a dialogue and reach a political settlement."¹¹² Under Bush, the United States has continued to provide humanitarian assistance to the region. Importantly, the Bush administration also has increased technical assistance to the Georgian military to help President Shevardnadze control his country's border with Chechnya so as to prevent a Russian military operation against alleged Chechen rebel camps based in Georgia.¹¹³ At the same time, Bush administration officials have refrained from pursuing new policy initiatives regarding Chechnya. They have not embraced a more activist role in the region such as those proposed by Brzezinski nor offered American mediating services to the Russians and Chechens.

Though little in the conduct of the war has changed since candidate Bush pledged to sanction Russia until they stop bombing "women and children" and causing "huge numbers of refugees to flee Chechnya," no sanctions have been applied. The only significant policy change is rhetorical. If Clinton begrudgingly added statements critical of the Chechen war to his talking points on Russia, Bush has eliminated them.

Outside Voices

Since the change of administrations in Washington, concern about Chechnya has quieted considerably on Capitol Hill. In 1999 senior Republican senators accused the Clinton administration of supporting genocide. Since 1999 the methods of war used by the Russian armed forces in Chechnya have not changed, yet no one is accusing President Bush of aiding genocide through his warm embrace of Putin. Former congressional critics such as McConnell and Cox have become noticeably quiet on Chechnya.

There are notable exceptions. Senator Helms has remained true to his earlier concerns by raising the issue of Chechnya during confirmation hearings for Secretary of State Powell. Helms continued to express caution about Bush's unqualified embrace of Putin. Three days before the G-8 summit in Genoa, Italy, in July 2001, Helms called on G-8 leaders not to forget to raise the Chechnya issue with Putin and to remember that "Mr. Putin's unjustified war against the Chechen people has been far more savage and devastating than the destruction Milošević has wreaked upon Kosovo." Helms urged that the United States "should apply all the political and economic leverage that can be mustered to encourage, and if necessary leverage, President Putin to peacefully and immediately end the war in Chechnya."¹¹⁴ Helms and his staff also pushed for passage of Senate Resolution 60 submitted concurrently by Senators Helms, Smith, Lott, and Allen on July 17, 2001, which called for the expulsion of Russia from the G-8.

On the House side, Congressman Tom Lantos has continued to call attention to the Chechen war. He submitted his own resolution (HR 128) calling for the expulsion of Russia from the G-8. Lantos also has introduced legislation aimed at providing more assistance to grassroots democracy groups in Russia, which in October 2002 passed through both houses of Congress. These legislative initiatives, however, have had only a marginal impact on the administration's policy toward Russia.

In the wider policy community, the issue of Chechnya has faded as a secondary or tertiary concern. NGOs such as Human Rights Watch continue to publish reports about human rights violations in Chechnya, but the new attention on the "war on terrorism" has limited the receptivity for this kind of information. *The Washington Post* editorial page also has kept a vigilant focus on Chechnya and democratic backsliding in Russia more generally. By contrast, the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya has adopted a less critical stance toward the Bush administration regarding its policy on Chechnya. The committee has refrained from accusing Bush of supporting genocide and instead has cautiously prodded the new administration to push for a political settlement.¹¹⁵ After September 11, Brzezinski also recognized the presence of terrorist elements in Chechnya and applauded the Bush administration for "urging Mr. Putin to seek a political solution. And I think we'll probably move towards it..."¹¹⁶ Replacing the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya as the most vocal proponents for a greater focus on Chechnya are former Clinton administration officials. Former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has become one of the more vocal critics of the Bush administration for not doing enough about Chechnya. Reflecting change and continuity in policy between administrations, Talbott wrote, "One of my concerns about our successors in the executive branch is

that, while they've come around to a lot of continuity with us on the external agenda, they seem to have downgraded the internal one considerably by comparison with us. They've let Chechnya (especially since 9/11) become largely a nonissue, while I think it should have remained front and center from Inauguration Day forward."¹¹⁷

IV. Conclusion

US policy regarding Chechnya exposes the limits of American power even in an age of unbridled US power. Russia's military interventions in Chechnya were policies that US foreign policy leaders would have liked to stop. In the end, however, policies pursued by both the Clinton and Bush administrations have had little impact on the course of the war in Chechnya.

There were and are policy alternatives. Clinton and Bush could have sanctioned Russia by cutting off direct assistance to the Russian government. They could have suspended Russia from membership in the G-8. They could have postponed presidential summits. They could have offered more humanitarian assistance to the region. Even more dramatically, they could have offered their services as a mediator. Theoretically, Chechen and Russian officials could have met at Camp David in 1995 or 2001 to hammer out a political settlement. Hypothetically, they even could have recognized the legitimacy of the elected government of Chechnya and provided direct assistance to the government in exile.

The Clinton and Bush administrations failed to pursue these more ambitious interventions for several reasons. First, every senior foreign policy official in the first and second Clinton administrations, as well as the Bush administration, believed that other issues in US-Russia relations were more important than Chechnya and could not be sacrificed or jeopardized for Chechnya. For Clinton in 1994, it was keeping Yeltsin in power. For Bush in 2001, it was obtaining Russian acquiescence to American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. After September 11, of course, Bush's new foreign policy focus made cooperation with Russia even more important.

Second, even while deploring Russia's methods, every major foreign policy official supported Russia's war aims. No one in either the Clinton or Bush administrations ever recommended that the United States should recognize Chechnya as an independent state. And no other country in the world, including in the Muslim world, recognized Chechen independence.¹¹⁸ Especially after the military incursion into Dagestan in 1999 by Chechen rebel forces, US officials recognized Russia's right to defend its territorial integrity. Expressing sympathy for Russia's objectives made it difficult for American officials to make credible criticisms of the Russian means for achieving these objectives.

Third, US leaders believed they had few policy tools at their disposal to affect the conduct of the war in Chechnya. They believed that the alternative policies outlined above would not have been effective. Whether they were right in that assessment is debatable. That this assessment shaped their policy toward Chechnya is clear.

Over the course of three presidential terms (Clinton I, Clinton II, and Bush), the one policy on Chechnya that did change dramatically was the language used to describe the war. Clinton I was not very critical. Clinton II was extremely critical. Candidate Bush was very critical as well. President Bush has dropped the issue. The causes of these rhetorical zigzags were American domestic politics and changes in the overall US-Russia relationship and had very little to do with changes in the conduct of the wars themselves.

Did these zigzags matter? Do words play any meaningful role in foreign policy? In the margins and over time, they can. Even when US officials do not have the means to stop injustices, they can at least speak clearly, honestly, and consistently about them. Most directly, the US failure to speak critically about the war—during the first Clinton term and now again—has undermined the legitimacy of Russian opponents of the war. More indirectly, inconsistent rhetoric undermines American credibility when speaking about human rights issues. The suffering of the people of Chechnya has remained consistent while American rhetoric about their plight had fluctuated. The disconnect between facts on the ground and American portrayals of these facts suggests that US leaders have ulterior motives for expressing outrage. People in Russia and elsewhere become cynical and dismissive of American moral claims. Rice was correct when she wrote that the “United States should have ‘told the truth’ about what was happening” and what is happening in Russia.¹¹⁹ By failing to acknowledge the truth when it is inconvenient, US policymakers undermine the moral power of their words and their country.

The domestic debate about US policy regarding Chechnya also exposes the limits of efforts to influence administration policy from without in the absence of a strong and electorally important constituency. Partisan politics did help draw attention to the Chechen issue. Republican control of the Senate and House with a Democrat in the White House created the permissive conditions for stimulating criticism of the Clinton administration’s policy on Chechnya. The debate never moved beyond an elite circle of people within the Beltway, however, because no voters gave money to candidates or formed electoral preferences because of Chechnya. There is no major Chechen diaspora in the United States. Nor does any major economic interest group in the United States have a stake in Chechnya. Some human rights organizations have devoted serious attention to the Chechen cause, but most of these organizations are nonpartisan and do not take positions on or make contributions to electoral candidates. Because the Chechen issue has almost no connection to electoral politics, talk about Chechnya is cheap. Politicians and policymakers can adopt and abandon positions on the issue without facing electoral sanction. At the same time, there is no electoral reward for championing the Chechen cause, especially after September 11.

The combination of weak tools for influencing the situation in Chechnya, an ill-defined proposal for “solving” the conflict, and the absence of a constituency of electoral importance championing the Chechen cause has produced an ineffective and inactive US policy toward Chechnya. In an era when the United States is unequivocally the most powerful country in the world, and maybe the most powerful country of all time, US policymakers have proven unable to resolve or even positively influence this protracted conflict. The terrible tragedy that is Chechnya is a sobering reminder of the limits of American power.

Epilogue

On October 23, 2002, dozens of Chechen terrorists seized several hundred hostages in downtown Moscow. They had one demand: the end of the Chechen war. After a prolonged standoff, Putin decided to end the crisis by authorizing the use of gas to kill the terrorists—a move which left 118 of the hostages dead. While many commentators criticized Putin's method, President Bush defended his "good friend" in the fight against terrorists. As Bush explained, "People tried to blame Vladimir. They ought to blame the terrorists.... Eight hundred people were going to lose their lives. These people were killers, just like the killers that came to America."¹²⁰ After the hostage crisis, American officials even began to express disdain for Maskhadov, disparaging him as a spent force (not unlike their new negative view of Arafat in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). US officials still called for a political solution to the conflict, but without stating more exactly who was supposed to be invited to the negotiating table.

Of course, Bush was right to label the Chechens who seized the Moscow theater terrorists. They used the same means as those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. The aims of their actions, however, were very different. They did not call for the destruction of Western civilization. Rather, they called for the end of the war in Chechnya. In deploying illegitimate means to seek legitimate ends, however, the Chechen attackers further postponed the likelihood of peaceful settlement and further alienated those in the West supportive of their cause. Most dramatically, Bush unambiguously framed his "war on terrorism" and Putin's "war in Chechnya" as part of one common struggle. The real losers of this united front are the people of Chechnya.

Endnotes

¹This report is adapted from a forthcoming book on US policy toward Russia by James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul to be published by Brookings Institution Press next year.

²Timothy Colton and McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 2, April-June 2002, pp. 91-121.

³They are cataloged in Chap. 9 of McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁴These voices, including most importantly the arguments expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, are discussed below. See also Sarah E. Mendelson, "Russians' Rights Imperiled: Has Anybody Noticed?" *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (spring 2002), pp. 39-69.

⁵Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Personal Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002).

⁶There were some on the team suspicious of Yeltsin's true orientation. Among the top policy-makers in Clinton's first term, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was most suspicious of the Russian president and especially his democratic proclivities.

⁷On the near anarchic condition of Chechnya under Dudayev during the period of de facto independence, see Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 74-84, and John Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chap. 4.

⁸For a fuller discussion of the decision to intervene, see Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, and Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*.

⁹After his electoral victory, Yeltsin appointed General Alexander Lebed to negotiate a formal peace settlement with Chechnya, as Lebed placed a strong third in the first round of the presidential election as an antiwar candidate. Although Lebed eventually clashed with Yeltsin and was removed from office, he successfully completed his negotiations with the Chechens on August 31, 1996, buoyed by his electoral mandate of 11 million voters to end the war.

¹⁰The number 100,000 comes from Grigory Yavlinsky, "Where Is Russia Headed? An Uncertain Prognosis," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January 1997, p. 4.

¹¹Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 149.

¹²Secretary of State Warren Christopher, "The United States and Russia: A Maturing Partnership," *US Department of State Dispatch*, January 23, 1995.

¹³President Clinton, final press conference at the Summit of the Americas, Florida, December 11, 1994.

¹⁴CNN, May 11, 1995, Transcript No. 1020-3.

¹⁵Jeffrey Smith, "U.S. Interests Seen Allied with Russian in Chechnya," *The Washington Post*, December 25, 1994, p. A27.

¹⁶Mike McCurry, State Department Briefing, January 3, 1995.

¹⁷Quoted in David Hoffman and John Harris, "Clinton, Yeltsin Gloss Over Chechen War," *The Washington Post*, April 22, 1996, p. A1.

¹⁸Anthony Lake, assistant to the president for national security affairs, "The Challenge of Change in Russia," remarks before the US-Russia Business Council, April 1, 1996 (Washington, DC: The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, April 3, 1996), p. 2.

¹⁹See Talbott, statement before a subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, February 5, 1995, (transcript provided by the Federal News Service, Washington, DC), p. 3.

²⁰Talbott, "Supporting Democracy and Economic Reform in the New Independent States," statement before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, February 9, 1995, in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, Vol. 6, No. 8, February 20, 1995, p. 121. See also Christopher interview on the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, December 13, 1994.

²¹Christopher interview on the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, December 13, 1994.

²²McCurry, State Department Briefing, January 3, 1994.

²³National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, March 30, 1995, Transcript No. 1574-5, p. 2.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Wendy Ross, "The Role of Foreign Policy Advisors in Dole, Clinton Campaigns, U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda," *USIA Electronic Journals*, Vol. 1, No. 14, October 1996. Dole also called the May 1995 summit a failure because Clinton failed to secure any concessions on Chechnya. See CNN, May 11, 1995, Transcript No. 1020-3.

²⁶Z. Brzezinski on CNN International, June 15, 1996, Transcript No. 1549-3.

²⁷Among these democratic assistance organizations, only the National Endowment for Democracy spoke out openly against the war and actively supported those groups in Russia that opposed the war.

²⁸ITAR-TASS, "Operatsiya nachalas, Goriachaya Chronika," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, August 14, 1999, p. 3.

²⁹Vladimir Zainetdinov, Aleksei Siviv, Maria Belocklova. "Vchera v schkolakh ot Chokhotki do Kaliningrada prozvenel pervii zvonok. A v Ohotnom riyadu poslednii zvonok," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, September 2, 1999, p. 1.

³⁰Hoffman, "Russian Premier Pins Bombing on Chechens," *The Washington Post*, September 16, 1999, p. A26.

³¹Putin, as quoted in "Na voine kak na voine," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, September 25, 1999, p. 1.

³²"Goriachia Chronoka: Konechnaya tsel unichtozhit banditov," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, October 6, 1999, p. 1.

³³Mark Kramer, "Civil-Military Relations in Russia and the Chechnya Conflict," *Policy Memo Series*, No. 99 (Cambridge: Program on New Approaches to Russian Security, December 1999), and Dmitri Trenin, "Chechnya: Effects of the War and Prospects for Peace," unpublished manuscript, 2000.

³⁴Human Rights Watch doggedly documented human atrocities carried out in the second Chechen war, including summary executions, bombings of villages, and rape of Chechen women. See, for instance, their publications, "Now Happiness Remains: Civilian Killings, Pillage, and Rape in Alkhan-Yurt," *Russia/Chechnya*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (D), April 2000, pp. 1-33; "February 5: A Day of Slaughter in Novye Aldi," *Russia/Chechnya*, Vol. 12, No. 9 (D), June 2000, pp. 1-43; "The 'Dirty War' in Chechnya: Forced Disappearances, Torture, and Summary Executions," *Russia/Chechnya*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (D), March 2001, pp. 1-42; and "Burying the Evidence: The Botched Investigation into a Mass Grave in Chechnya," *Russia/Chechnya*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (D), May 2001, pp. 1-26. John Dunlop's *Chechnya Weekly*, published by the Jamestown Foundation, also provides comprehensive coverage of events related to the war, including extensive reporting on human rights violations.

³⁵This figure is cited in Mendelson, "Russia, Chechnya, and International Norms: The Power and Paucity of Human Rights," working paper, (Washington, DC: The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2001), p. 11.

³⁶On Russia's zigzags during the war and after, see McFaul, "Russia's Many Foreign Policies," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (summer 1999), pp. 393-412, and "Russia's Pyhrric 'Pristina Victory,'" *The Wall Street Journal* (European Edition), June 17, 1999.

³⁷See the final chapter of McFaul, *Russia's 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1997).

³⁸See the chapter on SPS in McFaul, Andrei Ryabov, and Nikolai Petrov, *Primer on Russia's 1999 Duma Elections* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

³⁹Talbott, "Russia: Its Current Troubles and Its Ongoing Transformation," prepared testimony before the House International Relations Committee, October 19, 1999, p. 1.

⁴⁰Talbott, "Pursuing U.S. Interests with Russia and with President-Elect Putin," prepared testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, April 4, 2000, p. 6.

⁴¹Aleksandr Koretskii, "Chechnya ob'yavila voinu SSHA," *Segodnya*, August 24, 1999, p. 1.

⁴²Stephen Sestanovich, special advisor to the secretary of state for the New Independent States, "The Conflict in Chechnya and its Implications for U.S. Relations with Russia," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, November 4, 1999, p. 2.

⁴³Bill Powell, "Boris to Bill: Butt Out," *Newsweek*, November 29, 1999, p. 60.

⁴⁴Madeleine Albright, "Clear on Chechnya," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2000, p. A31.

⁴⁵Remarks by Albright following statement by acting President Vladimir Putin at Multilateral Steering Committee Group Meeting, Moscow, Russia, State Department Briefing, February 1, 2000, reprinted on Federal News Service.

⁴⁶In comparing tactics, Russian military expert Pavel Baev wrote, "Some Western experts have concluded that the Russians are following the NATO model from Kosovo, but in fact it is quite difficult to find much similarity between the two operations: NATO used massive airpower with high-precision strikes in order to avoid a ground campaign, while Russia has used limited airpower (with very little precision to speak of) in support of a ground campaign, relying primarily on the massive and indiscriminate use of artillery. There is nothing new about this 'firewall' Russian tactic...." Baev, "Will Russia Go for a Military Victory in Chechnya?" *Policy Memo Series*, No. 107 (Cambridge: Program on New Approaches to Russian Security, February 2000) p. 1.

⁴⁷Sestanovich, "The Conflict in Chechnya and its Implications for U.S. Relations with Russia," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, November 4, 1999, p. 2.

⁴⁸Talbott, "Pursuing U.S. Interests with Russia and with President-Elect Putin," prepared testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, April 4, 2000, p. 6.

⁴⁹Talbott, "Russia: Its Current Troubles and Its Ongoing Transformation," prepared testimony before the House International Relations Committee, October 19, 1999, p. 2.

⁵⁰Talbott, "Statement on Russian Attack on Grozny, Chechnya," as released by the Office of the Spokesman, US Department of State, October 22, 1999.

⁵¹Talbott, "Russia: Its Current Troubles and Its Ongoing Transformation," prepared testimony before the House International Relations Committee, October 19, 1999, p. 2.

⁵²Talbott, "Pursuing U.S. Interests with Russia and with President-Elect Putin," prepared testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, April 4, 2000, pp. 7-8.

⁵³On this point, however, they still remained sensitive. See McFaul, "Indifferent to Democracy," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2000, and Albright's response, "Clear on Chechnya," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2000, p. A31.

⁵⁴"Albright Warns Against Remaking Russia a U.S. Enemy," *Agence France Press*, November 25, 1999.

⁵⁵Clinton, "Remembering Yeltsin," *TIME*, January 1, 2001, p. 94.

⁵⁶Sestanovich, "Where Does Russia Belong?" *The National Interest* (winter 2000/2001), p. 15.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸David Briscoe, "US Gov't Bank to Nix Russia Loans," *The Associated Press*, December 21, 1999.

⁵⁹Press statement by Jamie Rubin, November 12, 1999.

⁶⁰Clinton first pushed this issue with Putin in September 1999 in Auckland, New Zealand.

⁶¹Sestanovich, "Russia's Elections and American Policy," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 12, 2000, p. 3.

⁶²Sestanovich, "Where Does Russia Belong?" *The National Interest* (winter 2000/2001), p. 15.

⁶³Talbott manuscript.

⁶⁴Helms staff members Steven Biegun and Ian Brzezinski were the two staffers that sustained the campaign concerning Chechnya.

⁶⁵Prepared statement of US Senator Mitch McConnell before the Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, April 4, 2000.

⁶⁶Even the title sounded partisan. The document is called "Russia's Road to Corruption: How the Clinton Administration Exported Government Instead of Free Enterprise and Failed the Russian People" (Washington, DC: US House of Representatives, September 2000).

⁶⁷“Russia’s Road to Corruption: How the Clinton Administration Exported Government Instead of Free Enterprise and Failed the Russian People” (Washington, DC: US House of Representatives, September 2000), p. 57.

⁶⁸Senate Resolution 262.

⁶⁹This resolution never won a majority in either the Senate or House.

⁷⁰Talbott, “Russia: Its Current Troubles and Its Ongoing Transformation,” prepared testimony before the House International Relations Committee, October 19, 1999, p. 5.

⁷¹Briscoe, “US Gov’t Bank to Nix Russia Loans,” *The Associated Press*, December 21, 1999.

⁷²Interview with George W. Bush on *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, February 16, 2000. Available at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/election/jan-june00/bush_2-16.html.

⁷³Z. Brzezinski, “Why the West Should Care About Chechnya,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 1999. He made a similar argument in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 12, 2000.

⁷⁴Z. Brzezinski, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 12, 2000.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶American Committee for Chechnya, “Founding Declaration,” sent to the author February 10, 2000.

⁷⁷Z. Brzezinski, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 12, 2000.

⁷⁸American Committee for Chechnya, “Founding Declaration,” sent to the author February 10, 2000.

⁷⁹Z. Brzezinski, “Why the West Should Care About Chechnya,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 1999.

⁸⁰*Welcome to Hell: Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Extortion in Chechnya* (New York: Human Rights Watch, October 2000).

⁸¹See, for instance, McFaul, “Indifference to Democracy,” *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2000, and the response by Albright, “Clear on Chechnya,” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2000.

⁸²Mendelson, “Russia, Chechnya, and International Norms,” working paper, (Washington, DC: The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2001), p. 3.

⁸³See Lieven, "Through a Distorted Lens: Chechnya and the Western Media," *Current History*, October 2000, pp. 321-328.

⁸⁴Dimitri Simes, from transcript of *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, November 18, 1999, p. 5.

⁸⁵In this respect, Bush's foreign policy advisors came to a very different conclusion about Russia than the Cox Report, which urged more assistance for reform, not less.

⁸⁶Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January/February 2000), pp. 45-62.

⁸⁷This impression is based on the author's conversations with several Vulcans during the 2000 campaign.

⁸⁸Interview with Bush on *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, February 16, 2000. Available at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/election/jan-june00/bush-2-16.html.

⁸⁹Rice, "Exercising Power Without Arrogance," *The Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 2000.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Vernon Loeb and Susan Glaser, "Bush Backs Expulsion of 50 Russians," *The Washington Post*, March 23, 2001, p. A1.

⁹³In 1997 Sestanovich had met with Maskhadov in Washington, but that was during a period when Moscow recognized him as the elected president of Chechnya. In 1999 the Russian government considered Maskhadov a "terrorist."

⁹⁴Donald Rumsfeld, interviewed by Winston Churchill, posted March 18, 2001, on www.telegraph.co.uk.

⁹⁵Quoted in James Risen and James Perlez, "Russian Diplomats Ordered Expelled in a Countermove," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2001, p. A1.

⁹⁶McFaul, "A Step Backward on Nuclear Cooperation," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2001.

⁹⁷Perlez, "Tougher on Russia," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2001, p. A4.

⁹⁸Press Conference by President Bush and Russian President Putin, Brdo Castle, Brdo Pri Kranju, Slovenia, June 16, 2001, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010618.html, p. 6.

⁹⁹Ari Fleischer, White House Briefing, September 26, 2001.

¹⁰⁰Jamie Dettmer, "Bush Woos Putin but Ignores Chechnya," *Insight on the News*, August 27, 2002.

¹⁰¹Dana Milibank and Peter Baker, "Bush Wary of Confronting Putin," *The Washington Post*, May 26, 2002, p. A22.

¹⁰²"President Bush, President Putin Discuss Joint Efforts Against Terrorism," remarks by President Bush and President Putin at photo opportunity," Kananaskis, Canada, June 27, 2002, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/print/20020627-3.html, p. 3.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴*Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 3, No. 16, June 4, 2002, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵Rice, in an answer to a question after her remarks to the Conservative Political Action Conference, Arlington, Virginia, February 1, 2002. See www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/20020201-6.html, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶"U.S. Envoy Hails Ties, Chides Russia on Chechnya," Reuters, December 28, 2001; "Vershbow Cites Some Progress," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 4, 2002, p. 2; Francesca Mereu, "Russia: U.S. Ambassador Discusses Bilateral Ties, Press Freedom, Chechnya," RFE/RL, May 31, 2002.

¹⁰⁷Steven Pifer, deputy assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, statement, "Hearing: Developments in the Chechen Conflict, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe," US Congress, May 9, 2002, p. 2. Pifer also stressed that "Contrary to some media reporting, we have not seen evidence of extensive ties between Chechens and Al Qaeda in Chechnya...."

¹⁰⁸Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹Colin Powell, testimony before Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 20, 2001.

¹¹⁰Pifer statement, p. 1.

¹¹¹Richard Boucher, State Department Briefing, March 27, 2001, p. 4.

¹¹²Ibid, p. 7.

¹¹³Putin has cleverly adopted the same rhetoric and logic used by President Bush to assert that Russia has a right to attack terrorists even if this means violating the sovereignty of the host country.

¹¹⁴Helms statement before hearing of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, July 18, 2001.

¹¹⁵See Z. Brzezinski, Max Kampelman, and Alexander Haig, "An Opening on Chechnya," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 2001, p. A19.

¹¹⁶Z. Brzezinski, on *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, November 15, 2001, available at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/july-dec01/bush-putin_11-15.html.

¹¹⁷Talbott, e-mail exchange with Anne Applebaum on *Slate.com*, June 12, 2002.

¹¹⁸The Taliban recognized Chechen independence, but only three states recognized the Taliban regime.

¹¹⁹Rice, "Exercising Power Without Arrogance," *The Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 2000.

¹²⁰Bush, as quoted in Mike Allen, "Bush Defends Putin in Handling of Siege," *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2002.

About the Author

Michael McFaul, a member of the Joint Task Force on Domestic Politics and America's Russia Policy, is a Helen and Peter Bing Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution and an associate professor of political science at Stanford University. He is also a nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His latest book is *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

Euro-Atlantic Initiatives

The Euro-Atlantic Initiatives program seeks to build and foster communities in the United States and Europe committed to comprehensive Euro-Atlantic security through research and analysis by policy professionals and the convening of open dialogue forums among political and opinion leaders.

The objective of the Euro-Atlantic Initiatives program is threefold:

- To engage the US policymaking community on the importance of political, economic, and security transition in Russia and Eastern Europe and its impact on Euro-Atlantic security.
- To improve comprehensive—political, economic, and military—approaches to Euro-Atlantic security between the United States and Europe.
- To foster and sustain a dialogue on the integration of Eastern European countries into a wider military, political, and economic Euro-Atlantic security framework.

The Century Foundation

The Century Foundation sponsors and supervises timely analyses of economic policy, foreign affairs, and domestic political issues. Not-for-profit and nonpartisan, it was founded in 1919 and endowed by Edward A. Filene.

Board of Trustees of The Century Foundation

H. Brandt Ayers	Alicia H. Munnell
Peter A. A. Berle	P. Michael Pitfield
Alan Brinkley, <i>Chairman</i>	John Podesta
Joseph A. Califano, Jr.	Richard Ravitch
Alexander Morgan Capron	Alan Sagner
Hodding Carter III	Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.
Edward E. David, Jr.	Harvey I. Sloane, M.D.
Brewster C. Denny	Theodore C. Sorensen
Christopher Edley, Jr.	Kathleen M. Sullivan
Charles V. Hamilton	David B. Truman
Matina S. Horner	Shirley Williams
Lewis B. Kaden	William Julius Wilson
James A. Leach	
Richard C. Leone	
Jessica Tuchman Mathews	

Richard C. Leone, *President*

Headquarters

41 East 70th Street
New York, NY 10021
Telephone: 212-535-4441
Fax: 212-535-7534
E-mail: info@tcf.org

Washington, DC, Office

Suite 550
1755 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: 202-387-0400
Fax: 202-483-9430
E-mail: info@tcf.org
www.tcf.org

The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation that strives for secure peace with freedom and justice by promoting public understanding, constructive dialogue, and cooperative action on critical international issues. Its work takes the form of media programs, educational initiatives, and focused discussions that convene policy professionals, diplomats, and other experts.

Programming is varied and reaches multiple audiences. The foundation convenes conferences and seminars, providing a forum for high-level dialogue among policy professionals, policy-makers, and opinion leaders on selected topics in global governance and US foreign policy. Global education programs reach and involve educators, administrators, and students from elementary school to college. The foundation produces a weekly public radio program on world affairs, *Common Ground*, and publishes *World Press Review*, the only English-language monthly magazine focusing on global issues through the prism of the international press.

Programs focus on matters including the United Nations and other international organizations, bilateral relations involving the United Nations, international security issues, global citizenship development, human rights, and global civil society.

The foundation works with a number of partners around the world, including public policy institutions, nongovernmental organizations, community colleges, elementary and secondary schools, media organizations, and others.

The foundation does not make grants.

Most Stanley Foundation reports, publications, programs, and a wealth of other information are instantly available on our Web site: www.stanleyfoundation.org.

The Stanley Foundation
209 Iowa Avenue
Muscatine, IA 52761 USA
Telephone: 563-264-1500
Fax: 563-264-0864
E-mail: info@stanleyfoundation.org

