

# Not U.S. vs. Russia, but Humanity vs. Inhumanity

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The Romans, it was said, “create a wilderness and call it peace.” In Chechnya, Moscow has created rubble and called it “restoration of legal structures.” Since January of this year, the Russian army, with its overwhelming troop strength and firepower, has captured Grozny and established control over most of Chechnya. In the process, the Russian army brutally reduced Grozny’s former population of 400,000 by half. Thousands of Russians living in the city died alongside their Chechen neighbors during the shelling and bombing of their city.

In late April, Russia announced suspension of military operations in Chechnya until 15 May, after the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany. This was a welcome move, and we hope it will lead to a just and lasting resolution of the conflict. But it has come too late for hundreds of persons trapped by the hostilities. In late March, the Russian army launched an offensive against Chechen forces that had retreated south of Grozny, but the offensive was not limited to military targets. In the town of Samashky, for instance, Chechen, Russian, and foreign witnesses have reported blood-chilling atrocities being carried out by Russian soldiers against civilians. One Russian observer described it as “nothing less than genocide.”

At this moment, a long-term mission of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe is being established in Grozny. This mission is tasked to promote respect for human rights; to foster development of democratic institutions; to assist in holding elections; to facilitate the return of refugees and the delivery of humanitarian aid; and to work for a peaceful resolution of the crisis “in conformity with the principle of territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.” The Commission intends to follow the progress of this mission very closely. U.S. tax money must not be used to subsidize some diplomatic band-aids on the wounds caused by Russia’s war machine. We trust the mission will carry out its mandate faithfully and that the Russian government will provide maximum cooperation in its efforts. There must be justice for all the people of Chechnya, and those guilty of human rights violations and war crimes, regardless of which side they serve, should be brought to account.

I wish to make it clear that our criticism of Russia’s policy in Chechnya is not an issue of “United States vs. Russia” but rather “humanity vs. inhumanity.” We are adding our voices to those of deeply concerned Russian citizens such as Sergei Kovalev, Dr. Elena Bonner, and thousands of others who are protesting their government’s policy in Chechnya. The manner in which Russia resolves the Chechnya crisis may well decide its political direction into the next century. If the political and military forces that precipitated the bloody violence set the tone in Moscow for governance, then undoubtedly both the people of Russia and the entire world will suffer the baleful effects.

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