



**The Chechen Conflict and Russian Democratic
Development: Hearing Before the Commission on
Security and Cooperation in Europe, One
Hundred Fourth ... Session, March 6, 1996 (Classic
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Excerpt from The Chechen Conflict and Russian Democratic Development: Hearing Before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, One Hundred Fourth Congress, Second Session, March 6, 1996

The Commission met, pursuant to adjournment, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, The Honorable Christopher Smith [Commission Chairman] presiding.

Commissioners present: Hon. Benjamin Cardin.

Also present: Sergei Kovalev, Jack Matlock, Jr., and Anatol Li even.

Opening Statement Of Chairman Christopher Ii. Smith

Mr. SMITH. The Commission will come to order. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on the subject of the crisis in Chechnya and its effect on democratic development in Russia. My name is Congressman Chris Smith, and I am Chairman of the Commission. The Commission is a bipartisan agency of the Federal Government mandated to monitor compliance with the Helsinki Accords and related documents, and the situation in Chechnya is one in which the Commission is greatly concerned. Moreover, we should make no mistake about it; developments in Chechnya will inevitably affect long-term development in Russia, and developments in Russia will inevitably affect our own country and the rest of the world.

Former Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev once called the war in Afghanistan a "bleeding wound as the Soviet army was bogged down in what was seemingly an unwinnable war there. From afar the Chechen conflict appears to be a bleeding wound that could derail the development of democracy in Russia. President Yeltsin himself has stated that his reelection depends on ending the conflict, yet he appears committed to a military victory, and he has surrounded himself with hardline advisers on Chechnya.

Chechen military forces have been clearly hurt by the weight of the Russian military machine, and Moscow has shown that, despite pledges as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to seek to avoid civilian casualties during hostilities in its own territory, it is quite capable and willing to call in artillery and airstrikes on civilian targets at the least provocation. Still, while many Chechens would welcome an end to hostilities, Chechen military leaders still appear committed to total removal of Moscow's political authority in light of the many atrocities carried out against the civilian population.

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