



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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Today's hearing provides an important and timely opportunity to shed light on the role some countries of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have played and may be playing in arming rogue regimes. While the issue of such arms transfers has been raised in the context of other Commission hearings, the experts assembled today will be able to provide a comprehensive analysis of a topic with direct implications for the security interests of the United States. Additionally, the murky world of arms brokers is linked to corruption and international crime.

During my service on the Helsinki Commission I have repeatedly urged the State Department to raise the issues of corruption and international crime within the OSCE. While we have made some modest inroads, the scope of the threats requires much more attention. At a time when the OSCE is assessing "new threats" to security, it would be foolhardy to overlook the multidimensional threats posed by corruption and international crime. The United States should take the lead in pressing the subject of this hearing at the first Annual Security Review Conference to be convened in Vienna later this month.

It is no coincidence that many of the countries to be discussed at today's hearing have fallen short of their commitments to build open and democratic societies. At the extreme is Belarus, Europe's holdout dictatorship. The Belarus Democracy Act, which I sponsored in the Senate, is an attempt to support democracy, human rights and the rule of law in that country. As the Belarusian economy has spiraled downward, sales to rouge states have likely taken on even greater importance, though the closed nature of the regime makes it difficult to fully assess.

In Ukraine, we have President Kuchma on tape authorizing the sale of sophisticated radars to Iraq. An isolated incident? Doubtful. Kuchma's reckless action renders him an unreliable partner and casts a shadow over relations with Ukraine as long as he is in power. I am particularly disturbed that some officials in Washington have been ready to gloss over this whole affair. What message does it send to others if the United States is prepared to let him off the hook on such a grave matter?

The role of the Russian Federation is of deep concern given the evidence of past transfers as well as the potential for future deals. With arms merchants crisscrossing the country, it is hard to imagine that Putin, the KGB chief turned president is not informed. It is also worth noting that revelations of illicit arms trading in Russia have failed to lead to even a single conviction.

While some may claim a lack of technical know-how impedes their ability to track arms transfers, we must not lose sight of the important element of political will. We cannot afford to turn a blind eye with respect to the complicity of senior civilian and military leaders in transfers that violate international commitments or are otherwise detrimental to the security interests of the United States.