



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## Testimony :: Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin

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**Co-Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Mr. Chairman, I commend you on convening this hearing. If much remains unclear about the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, we can already conclude that it marks a major concern in East-West relations and relations between Russia and her neighbors.

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Most of the world has rightly condemned Moscow’s policies. But they appear to have brought political dividends at home, where Russia’s military victory has been greeted by public approval, accentuated by outbursts of xenophobic bluster. This speaks volumes about the effectiveness of state control of the media, which the Kremlin has inexorably implemented since 2000.

In that connection, let me note one implication of this war which has received too little attention. Since 2000, the Russian state has relentlessly whittled away Georgian society’s freedom of expression and ability to maneuver politically. We now see aggressiveness abroad accompanying repression at home. It also is a real possibility that Moscow’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will stimulate other non-Russian peoples inside the Federation to campaign for independence, causing Moscow to possibly resort to a harder line. This could further erode chances for Russia’s democratization, in which we all have a powerful stake.

President Medvedev says Moscow is not afraid of anything, including a new Cold War. I sincerely hope that is not where we are heading. But the next U.S. president, whoever he is, will certainly face a much more truculent Russia than his two predecessors.

This hearing offers us the opportunity to look at ways that we can constructively engage Russia making it clear that its military actions cannot be condoned.