



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## Testimony :: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings

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

Ladies and gentlemen, ordinarily, I welcome people to Commission hearings but this is one I am sorry to have to convene. In Russia's August 2008 invasion of Georgia, we have witnessed a war between two OSCE states – the very contingency the Helsinki Process was designed to prevent, by basing relations among states on principles that preclude the use of force to resolve disputes.

The human cost of this war has been terrible. Hundreds of people on both sides were killed. I extend my condolences to families of all the victims.

For Georgia, this war has been a disaster. The country already had hundreds of thousands of displaced people from conflicts in the early 1990s. Now there are scores of thousands more to care for – not to mention the consequences of military defeat, Russia's destruction of Georgian military and economic infrastructure and the stationing of troops around so-called security zones and strategic points, like the port of Poti. Most ominously, Russia's victory on the battlefield has allowed it to dismember Georgia.

In looking at the origins of this conflict, it seems to me that Russia's leaders set an ingenious trap into which Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili fell. But however you assign responsibility, it is clear from Russian actions that Moscow turned what it characterized as a "protective operation" into a punitive war against a small country that appeared to be integrating itself into Western institutions and hoped to join NATO.

The implications extend far beyond Georgia or the Caucasus. On August 26th, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. With this fateful step Moscow rejected Georgia's territorial integrity, which Russia had hitherto acknowledged, thereby threatening to upend the entire international system.

Russia's actions have won hurrahs from the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah but very few credible international actors. Obviously, the United States and European Union refused to follow Moscow's lead. But more telling has been Moscow's failure to round up support even among its neighbors and ostensible allies. Their nuanced statements and especially support for the principle of territorial integrity are sober testament to the danger they feel personally – and their grim understanding that the ground under their feet has shifted.

Indeed, we today inhabit a world much changed since August 1. Until now, Russia has been seen as a status quo power. With its actions in Georgia, which aim not merely to protect its client breakaway regions but to disarm Georgia, damage its economy and, if possible, effect regime change, Russia has become a revisionist state. The post-Cold War settlement is in question and may be definitively over.

To drive the point home, last week President Medvedev declared that Russia will defend its citizens abroad and claimed regions of privileged interests in neighboring states with which Moscow has historically had special relations. In effect, ladies and gentlemen, the Kremlin is openly proclaiming its right to spheres of influence on the territory of former Soviet Republics – and who knows where else? I am struck by the brazen bellicosity of this policy: Russia thinks it has the right to exert influence over its neighbors not by the attraction of ideas, the lure of capital or the power of positive example but the domination of sheer force.

This is the law of the jungle, not the rule of law. It goes without saying that the United States rejects this flagrant power grab. We will not recognize Russia's dismemberment of Georgia or its trampling on the fundamental proposition that States must retain the right to freely choose their own alliances.

The Bush Administration has already announced plans to provide \$1 billion in emergency assistance to Georgia. Along with my fellow lawmakers, I will work to speed the passage of legislation to supplement this assistance.