



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Christopher H. Smith

Chairman - Helsinki Commission

Good afternoon and welcome to the Helsinki Commission's hearing. The witnesses at today's hearing will consider how the OSCE principles of democracy, human rights and security might be applied to the Middle East region. This area spreads from Morocco in the West to Iran in the East, from Sudan in the South to Turkey in the North. Turkey is a participating State in the OSCE and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation with the organization.

One of the most profound lessons learned from 9-11 is the urgent need for democratization and respect for human rights in that part of the world. The Middle East is trapped today in the polar opposite of the OSCE process; instead of democratic principles pushing democratic progress, state repression breeds resentment and poverty, both monetary and intellectual. Instead of dialogue and confidence-building in the region, we have sullen extremism. The end result too frequently is stagnation and violence.

The considerable successes of the Helsinki Process during and after the Cold War should not blind us, however, to the differences and difficulties of applying the OSCE framework in the Middle East. As National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said recently, "Nobody really believes that democratic development can be somehow forced from the outside. That's simply not the case." To work, willing partners are necessary.

There has been a "Mediterranean dimension" of the Helsinki Process from the outset. The 1975 Final Act included a separate Mediterranean Chapter and extended the status of Non-Participating Mediterranean States to numerous states in the region.

More than a decade ago, this Commission held a hearing which examined the prospects for collective security in the Middle East. Israel's former Minister of Foreign Affairs for Israel testified that "[in] the Middle East, as with Europe, the key to peace lies in institutionalized regional cooperation." Former Egyptian Ambassador to the US Ahmed Maher El Sayed expressed support for "a very active role by the United States and the European countries in this process in the Middle East..." The 1994 Peace Agreement between Israel and Jordan made the commitment to "the creation, in the Middle East, of a CSCME (Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Middle East).

This commitment entails the adoption of regional models of security ... along the lines of the Helsinki process, culminating in a regional zone of security and stability." Then through a series of briefings in 1995, the Helsinki Commission explored the application of the OSCE

model to other regions of the world, including the Middle East.

Interested parties keep asking the question, what have we learned from history? Could the model of the OSCE institutions and Helsinki commitments made by the participating States enhance security, promote cooperation and protect human rights in the Middle East?

There are two other important differences between the current situation and the Cold War that I hope we can try to address this afternoon. The first is the threat of Islamic extremism facing many of the states in the Middle East. That threat makes Middle Eastern leaders nervous about liberalization. The second is the question of the role of countries outside of the region, including the United States. I would hope that we would explore these issues this afternoon as well.

With that as background, it is time for us to have an open and frank discussion on how best to encourage respect for human rights and promote democratic reforms in the expansive Middle East/North Africa region and the lessons learned from the Helsinki Process.

I look forward to hearing the testimonies from our witnesses. I would like to yield my time now to my good friend and colleague, Rep. Ben Cardin, who is the ranking House Member on the Helsinki Commission.