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**United States Mission to the OSCE**  
**U.S. Statement for the**  
**Forum for Security Cooperation:**  
**General Statements –**  
**Russia’s War of Aggression Against Ukraine**

As delivered by Arms Control Counselor Daniel Wartko  
January 31, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

History is replete with examples that illustrate why dictators cannot and must not be appeased. When dictators are appeased rather than confronted for their aggression, they will simply cause more chaos, death, and destruction. The risks -- and the threats -- to global peace and security will continue to rise.

After two years of brutal war, it is difficult to be shocked, but look at what Dmitry Medvedev, Former President of the Russian Federation, Former Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, and current Deputy National Security Advisor of the Russian Federation – had to say about Ukraine just two weeks ago:

**“The existence of Ukraine is mortally dangerous for Ukrainians. And I don’t mean only the current state...I’m talking about any, absolutely any Ukraine.**

**Why? The presence of an independent state on historical Russian territories will now be a constant reason for the resumption of hostilities.”**

[Source: [t.me/Medvedev\\_telegram/437](https://t.me/Medvedev_telegram/437) – January 17, 2024]

Several months ago, we dissected Russia’s baseless and illegitimate claims to “historic lands.” I knew then that we had not heard the last of this baseless rationale, and I would like to remind all delegates in this forum where exactly Putin’s and Medvedev’s logic leads:

I’ll repeat Mr. Medvedev’s threat: The presence of an independent state on what Russia considers its “historical territories” will be a constant reason for Russian hostilities.

This goes well beyond Ukraine.

- This, in fact, suggests that the very existence of independent Baltic States -- once upon a time conquered and incorporated first into the Tsarist and then into the Soviet empires -- “is a constant reason for the resumption of hostilities.”
- The existence of independent states in Central Asia – Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – are all “a constant reason for hostilities.”
- The existence of the independent states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan -- “a constant reason for hostilities.”
- The existence of Finland, Poland, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, and even Turkey and the United States – all of which contain at least some territory once controlled by the Russian or Soviet Empires – present “a constant reason for hostilities.”

Mr. Chair,

I am not scaremongering or fabricating these threats. Russia’s raging war of aggression against Ukraine is fueled by this very justification. And Russia has already begun to issue veiled and open threats of force against many more immediate neighbors. Here are a sample of those threats coming from Russia’s leaders themselves:

- In June 2022, Vladimir Putin suggested that the city of Narva in Estonia belonged to Russia, and Russia “must take back and secure [it].”
- In August 2022, Medvedev published a statement on social media that questioned the sovereignty of Kazakhstan, calling it an “artificial state.”
- A little over a year later, in August 2023, Medvedev suggested Moscow could annex occupied territories in Georgia.

- In November 2023, Medvedev suggested Poland could lose its statehood.
- Also in December 2023, Russia’s Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, said about Finland, “Since they are our neighbors, if ... there is some escalation, they will be the first to suffer.”
- On January 16 this year, Putin suggested that Latvia’s internal residency policies directly affected Russia's security.

Mr. Chair,

Section II of the Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between participating States in the Helsinki Final Act clearly states, “the participating States will refrain from any acts constituting a threat of force or direct or indirect use of force against another participating State.”

History has taught us that appeasement and bending to aggression in the hope that it will bring peace is an illusion – it is in fact simply a road to more aggression and more war. The choice that Russia has presented all of us, that it is now presenting to all of us is simply this: war now, or even more war later. We should take the Russian leadership at face value when they say again and again that they want Russia’s historic conquests to be restored. We have seen what Putin has done to Georgia and to Ukraine, and he will do it again if he is not deterred.

By standing firm against this aggression, we will continue to send a clear message to all the other authoritarian regimes around the world who also seek to turn back the clock on democratic progress. We support the rule of law, democracy, and freedom around the world, we support the independence and territorial integrity of all states, and we will stand with Ukraine until it emerges from Russia’s war as a nation that remains sovereign, independent, and free.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.