

Berman urges U.S.-Russia cooperation in Moscow

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Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) on Tuesday stressed that the United States and Russia must cooperate on common threats despite significant differences over Georgia.

Currently in Moscow, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee is the highest-level U.S. government official to visit Russia since that country's conflict with

Georgia this summer. The relationship between Russia and the U.S. has chilled significantly since Russia invaded its neighbor over a dispute over the breakaway Georgian province of South Ossetia.

Berman, who visited Georgia in mid-August at the behest of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), is now visiting Moscow at the Russians' invitation as part of a parliamentary exchange.

Berman on Tuesday stressed that U.S.-Russian relations must reflect areas of common interest, such as reducing the spread of nuclear arms, even as Washington and Moscow continue to disagree over the August conflict in Georgia.

"Our two countries have to address some difficult issues, especially in the wake of the Georgia conflict," Berman said after meeting with Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the State Duma International Affairs Committee. "But we also face many common threats that should push us to develop a stronger partnership."

Those threats include Iran's aims to develop nuclear weapons, global nuclear nonproliferation, the food crisis and climate change, Berman said.

The lawmaker co-sponsored legislation authorizing expanded economic assistance to Georgia. But on Tuesday, he indicated that any decision about military assistance to Georgia would be made by the next U.S. administration and Congress in 2009.

He reassured his Russian counterpart that, despite significant policy differences, "there is no Cold War mindset in the United States — nor do we expect to see that in our future."

Berman's three-day visit to Moscow includes meetings with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and senior officials at Russia's Nuclear Energy State Corporation.