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Transatlantic Security Challenges: Central and Eastern Europe

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Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Johnson, Members of the Committee, I am honored to speak at this hearing on the state of our interests in Central and Eastern Europe.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine presents a significant challenge to the security and stability of Europe and to U.S. leadership and credibility. For the second time in less than six years, Russia has invaded a neighboring country simply because that nation sought to move closer to Europe and to integrate itself into that community's multilateral organizations. As was the case with Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the West has yet to generate a response to its seizure of Crimea that is likely to deter Moscow from further aggression against Ukraine or other states in Eastern Europe and along Russia's periphery.

The Kremlin's actions against Ukraine are but one element of a sustained revanchist policy that Vladimir Putin has articulated and exercised ever since he became president of Russia at the end of 1999. His objective has been to reestablish Russian hegemony, if not full control, over the space of the former Soviet Union. Toward this end, he has applied the full suite of Russian economic, energy, political, and military capacities to weaken and dominate neighboring states. He has leveraged information and cyber warfare, corruption and criminal networks, political provocateurs, separatist groups, frozen conflicts, and military incursions, among other means. His campaign history includes the 2007 cyber attack against Estonia, the separatist movement in Moldova, energy embargoes against Lithuania and Ukraine, and the aforementioned invasion of Georgia.

President Putin's strategy is one that pursues 20th-century objectives through 21st-century techniques and old-fashioned brute force. The implications of this most recent aggression against Ukraine include the following:

First, it is an unprovoked violation of the territorial sovereignty of a European nation – in this case the continent's second largest - situated at the strategically significant crossroads of Europe and Eurasia.

Second, it undercuts efforts to curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Russia's seizure of Crimea is a direct violation of the 1994 Budapest

Agreement in which Russia agreed to respect and protect Ukraine's territorial integrity in return for Kyiv giving up the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the USSR.

Third, Putin's assertion that he has the unilateral right to redraw borders on the grounds that he is protecting ethnic Russians reintroduces into Europe a dangerous principle that provoked wars and caused countless deaths in earlier centuries and that we all hoped had been relegated to that past.

Fourth, Russia's incursion into Ukraine is a direct threat to the vision of Europe, whole, free, and secure. President Putin's objectives would create a new confrontational divide in Europe, between a community defined by self-determination, democracy, and rule of law and one burdened by authoritarianism, hegemony and occupation.

Fifth, the aggression against Ukraine constitutes a challenge to the credibility of U.S. leadership. It serves Moscow's desire to portray Washington and NATO as lacking the diplomatic, economic, and military capability and will to counter effectively Russian power.

The response of the United States should be guided by three overlapping and mutually reinforcing objectives:

- To deter Russia from further aggression against Ukraine and other neighboring countries;
- To reinforce Ukraine's confidence in its capacity to defend itself; and,
- To assist Ukraine in its effort to become a modern, prosperous democratic European state.

These objectives can be pursued through immediate and longer-term initiatives that will impose economic and geopolitical costs on Russia, increase the risks to Moscow of further provocative behavior, reinforce Central and Eastern Europe's sense of security, enhance Ukraine's capacity for defense, and help it transform into a successful, democratic, and prosperous European state. These include:

1) Firmer Economic Sanctions against Russia: Current economic sanctions against Russia are clearly insufficient. Russian forces remain mobilized on Ukraine's border, the Kremlin still asserts the right to intervene in Ukraine, and its effort to destabilize Ukraine continues unabated.

Russia is a country that takes great pride in its history of enduring extreme economic hardship and military pain. It is not a polity where foreign economic sanctions against a limited set of Russian individuals and a bank or two will

generate dynamics threatening to Putin's control in the near or medium term. The fact is that most of Russia today conducts business as usual, including with its American and European business partners. The overly narrow scope of these sanctions has let them be portrayed as badges of courage among Russia's crony elite rather than creating the systemic economic pain necessary to make an authoritarian regime rethink its actions.

Congress' provision to the president of authority to expand the set of sanctioned officials and entities to those involved in corruption should be leveraged immediately by the Obama administration. Widening the sanctions list is needed to have a more significant and immediate impact on Russia's financial operations, and the option Congress has offered cleverly ties those sanctions to a concern that generates real anti-government outrage in the Russian population: corruption.

2) Strengthened Defense of Central Europe: NATO's response to the invasion of Ukraine has been underwhelming. In its Crimea operation, Russia mobilized over 100,000 troops on its western frontier and invaded the peninsula with 20-30,000 troops. Today, tens of thousands of Russian soldiers backed by armor and air capacities are poised in high readiness on Ukraine's eastern borders.

Six weeks after the start of that invasion, the Alliance's reaction is a largely symbolic reinforcement of Baltic, Polish, and Romanian airspace with NATO AWACS and a two dozen Allied aircraft, most of which are U.S. F-15s and F-16s. Washington also announced that it is sending 175 Marines to its forward operating base in Romania and a ship to the Black Sea.

This hesitant response has been unnerving to NATO's Central European allies and partners. It has reinforced their concerns about NATO's ability to act decisively, about the United States' declared "pivot to Asia," and over the reduction of U.S. combat capability in Europe. It strengthens the assertions of those who say that Washington's commitment to Europe's security has declined.

Immediate steps that should be taken by the United States and NATO to reinforce Central European allies include the following:

- The deployment of a brigade-level combat capability with air support to Poland and Romania. (This could involve the U.S. combat brigade team that the Department of Defense has regionally aligned for Europe.)
- The initiation of military exercises in the Baltic Sea and in the Baltic states and the deployment of special forces contingents to those countries.
- Rescinding the provision of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act in which the Alliance asserted that it had no need to permanently station significant combat capability on the territory of new NATO member states. As long as

Crimea remains occupied by Russian forces, this policy, which was formulated in a time of partnership with Moscow, should be shelved.

- An immediate freeze of the execution of President Obama's 2012 decision to reduce U.S. combat capability in Europe and a reorientation of the U.S. European Command's on-going review that portends further reductions of U.S. forces and presence. That reorientation should be geared toward redefining EUCOM's requirements in the face of Russia's increasingly aggressive posture. Special consideration should be given to permanently deploying brigade-level combat capability in Central Europe, and our West European allies should be encouraged to do the same.

These immediate steps backed by the articulation of longer-term force redeployment plans would build a context of security and confidence to Ukraine's immediate west. They are reasonable in light of Russia's long-term military build-up in the region and the magnitude of its aggression against Ukraine. They would constitute a clear setback for Moscow's regional aspirations, at least for those defined by President Putin.

3) Military Assurance to Ukraine¹: As NATO reinforces the territory of its member states, it also must bolster Ukraine's self-defense capability and self-confidence, and avoid steps that militarily isolate Kyiv.

To date, NATO and the United States have done the latter. They have refused Ukraine's request for weapons that would help it better defend itself. NATO leaders, including President Obama, have publicly stated that they will not be drawn into a "military excursion" against Russia. This, in combination with the small scale of NATO's reinforcement of Central Europe, draws a red line, a limit to action, on the Alliance's eastern frontier that in essence leaves Kyiv to fend for itself.

It must be deeply disillusioning for Ukrainians who in recent months have so courageously expressed their desire for freedom and a place in Europe – and whose military are recently as November contributed to a NATO collective defense exercise, STEADFAST JAZZ. The West's self-imposed red line only reassures Vladimir Putin and his military planners, whose use in Crimea of unmarked military personnel — and the plausible deniability they provided — reflected at least initial concern about potential responses from NATO.

The following are defensive measures the United States and NATO can take to directly bolster Ukraine's security:

¹ Parts of this section were adapted from Ian Brzezinski's "Three Ways NATO can Bolster Ukraine's Security," [The Washington Post](#), 25 March 2014.

- Ukraine's request for military equipment should be immediately granted, and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons should be included. Equipment and weapons could quickly be transferred from prepositioned U.S. military stocks in Europe. If NATO cannot attain the consensus to offer such help, then Washington should forge a coalition of the willing or act on its own. These weapons would complicate Russian military planning and add risk to its operations against Ukraine. U.S. equipment, in particular, would bring back unpleasant memories of when Soviet forces last encountered them in Afghanistan.
- The Alliance or a U.S.-led coalition should deploy intelligence and surveillance capabilities and military trainers to Ukraine. This would provide needed situational awareness and help the Ukrainian military maximize its defensive capacities. It also would force Moscow to consider the potential political and military repercussions of any actions that affect that presence. The deployment of military trainers to Georgia was one of the more effective elements of the U.S. effort to bolster Georgia's security after it was invaded by Russia in 2008.
- NATO allies and partners should conduct now a military exercise in Ukraine as part of the effort to train the Ukrainian military. The Alliance's plan to schedule exercises in Ukraine later in May and June seems to ignore Putin's timelines and could incentivize Russia to take additional military action before then.

Regarding this last recommendation, the NATO Response Force is well suited for such an operation. It was created to deploy on short notice a brigade-level force backed by combat air support. The NRF offers a means to demonstrate Western resolve prudently and rapidly. While it has the potential to significantly reinforce Ukraine's defense against a sudden Russian offensive, it is certainly not big enough to jeopardize Russia's territorial integrity.

Each of these initiatives would complicate Putin's ambitions regarding Ukraine and could be executed in the near term. None would present a threat to Russia. They would, however, erase the red line the Alliance has mistakenly created, assure Ukrainians that they are not alone, demonstrate that President Putin is unable to intimidate the West, and force Moscow to consider the possibility of a much more costly and prolonged military conflict.

4) Reinforced Public Diplomacy/Information Capability: Another priority is countering Russia's significant propaganda effort to foster dissension and turmoil in Ukraine. As long as President Putin has been in power, Russia has used its formidable state-controlled media, which is widely distributed in Ukraine, to influence Ukrainian political events, including elections. Since the November outbreak of protests in Kyiv against then-President Yanukovich, Moscow has turned

up its disinformation war against Ukraine to a level not seen since the Cold War.

Left unaddressed, this campaign threatens Ukraine's ability to conduct a free and fair election in May for a new president. It weakens the political unity Ukraine needs to undertake necessary and painful economic reforms, and it creates opportunity for the often-violent provocateurs Moscow has sent into the country.

Congress is to be commended for directing resources to reinforce U.S. public broadcasting in the region. It is an important step in strengthening Kyiv's resilience against information warfare. Expanding Ukrainian, U.S., and international dissemination of accurate, credible information and news through all forms of media throughout Ukraine and increasing the presence of international observers there is essential to neutralizing Russia's efforts to destabilize Ukraine.

5) Support to Ukraine's Economic Transformation and Integration into Europe: Ukraine's emergence as a stable and secure part of Europe is, of course, not just a military issue. It will require Ukraine to evolve into a prosperous and fully democratic polity, characterized by freedom and rule of law. In the context of Russia's military aggression, that transformation is particularly challenging and will require significant Western economic assistance.

The West, with US leadership, has done well in mobilizing international financial support for Ukraine. The evolving IMF loan package, the European Union's assistance package and contributions by others in the international community, including by the United States and this Congress, promises Ukraine a needed foundation upon which to launch long-overdue fundamental reform.

One realm of economic transformation meriting further US government action is the diversification of Ukraine's energy supplies and its integration into the European energy market. Allowing the nations of Central and Eastern Europe direct and unfettered access to U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports would significantly enhance energy security in the region including that of Ukraine. It would undercut Moscow's excessive leverage in their gas markets.

Increased access to LNG would help drive forward infrastructure plans and investments that are linking the energy markets of this region and integrating them into that of Western Europe. It would enhance the prospects of the North-South gas corridor in Central Europe linking the Adriatic and Baltic Seas, offshoots of which would tie into Ukraine's pipeline network. Access to cheaper, reliably sourced energy would serve this region as a powerful economic stimulus.

Europe's need for U.S. energy exports has never been more urgent. A decision today to allow such exports would immediately send to allies and adversaries a powerful political signal of transatlantic solidarity. In the medium and long term, it would serve as a cornerstone of a transatlantic energy market that can only

reinforce the solidarity of this important community of democracies.

6) Reanimating the Vision of Europe Whole and Free: One of the key principals guiding U.S. policy toward Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall has been the vision of Europe, undivided, secure and free. The West, led by the United States, must ensure that this vision is neither weakened nor perceived as having been derailed by Moscow's intimidation.

NATO will, in all likelihood, conduct its summit meeting in Cardiff, UK this September in the context of Russia's provocative aggression against Ukraine. In addition to addressing its defense capabilities and the credibility of its Article V commitment to its member states, the Alliance should use the moment to reanimate the process of NATO enlargement.

NATO must make clear that its "open-door policy" for membership is no passive phrase or empty slogan. Toward, that end, it should extend an invitation to Montenegro, a country that has made significant progress since 2009 under the Alliance's Membership Action Plan.

Reaffirmation of Washington's adherence to this vision is an important way to underscore Washington's commitment to the security of Central and Eastern Europe. And, for these reasons, no decision or recommendation should be permitted or advanced that would in anyway limit its applicability to any country of Europe.

CONCLUSION

The absence of a firm Western response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine will only encourage Putin to act aggressively, be it to drive deeper into Ukraine, make another attempt to seize Georgia, expand Russia's occupation of Moldovan territory or grab other areas that were once part of the Soviet Union.

The steps outlined above are prudent, defensive, mutually-reinforcing and consistent with the aspirations of the Ukrainian people to live in peace, in freedom, and as part of Europe.

By enhancing the security of Ukraine and the region, they will contribute substantively to a context favorable for genuine and enduring cooperation with Russia. The most effective way to counter President's Putin's hegemonic aspirations is to deny them opportunity for actualization. Russia will not be threatened by, but can only benefit from, having secure and prosperous democracies in its neighborhood. Such a development will help redirect the focus of authorities in Moscow to Russia's pressing internal problems. It may even provide momentum for those Russians who have grown weary of authoritarianism, corruption and antiquated notions of empire. Security in Central and Eastern Europe has always

been the most effective way to forge a true and enduring partnership between Europe and Russia, and between Washington and Moscow.