



Developments in Ukraine

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey
Philip Solondz Distinguished Visiting Fellow,
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Testimony submitted to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 5, 2014

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today. What has happened in Ukraine is the most significant challenge to the international order since the attacks of September 11. While not aimed directly at the United States, the strategic fallout of Russia's aggression against Ukraine is, in some respects, more threatening to the global order we have helped build and defend over the past century. After all, we are not dealing with a terrorist group, but a nuclear-armed UN Security Council permanent member, one of the world's greatest hydrocarbons exporters, intending to regain the international status enjoyed by the Soviet Union. To this end, Russia has used all tools at its disposal, from gas export blackmail to direct and indirect invasion—from Georgia and Syria to Crimea and Eastern Ukraine—to achieve that status, not only trampling the values that ground our global order in the process, but to a significant degree, attempting to replace it.

As such, the Ukraine crisis requires action at three levels by the United States and its partners. First, we must take immediate steps to deal with the situation at hand in a Ukraine being deliberately destabilized. Second, we must take long-term steps to counter the Russian goal of denying Ukraine any level of independence and stability that would permit it to develop relations with the West and avoid being absorbed by Russia. Third, Russian actions in Ukraine and elsewhere, combined with China's actions in its near abroad, and the ever-deepening partnership of Russia and China, require us and our friends to rethink the very foundations of the international order since 1989.

The Obama administration has been generally successful at the first level and is working hard at the second, but appears at best uncertain about the third. Let me describe each of these challenges and responses.

Based on my experience with President Bush during Russia's attack on Georgia in 2008, the Obama administration has reacted in a generally reasonable way, similar to that of the Bush administration, to this latest Russian aggression. It has of course had to adapt to an EU often reluctant to act against Russia. It has, correctly, not challenged Russia militarily on an issue of vital importance to it but not directly to us, in an area not easily accessible for U.S. forces. But, as President Obama noted at West Point, his administration has mobilized international condemnation, economic sanctions, albeit limited, and significant coordination with EU states in response, and effectively assisted the new Ukrainian government. The president has taken appropriate military steps to reinforce NATO's eastern marches, including ship transits into the Black Sea, aircraft reinforcements, and rotating ground troop deployments throughout at least the rest of this year.

These steps have had impact. While sanctions so far have been very limited, their very specter has at least temporarily damaged the Russian economy, from the value of the ruble and investment outflows to GDP growth, and the threat of more sanctions appears to be an effective deterrent against new direct Russian aggression. Furthermore, Mr. Putin did not count on the power of free men and women to act against vassalage. The high turnout and resounding victory of Mr. Poroshenko in the elections ten days ago, and the reluctance of even many Ukrainians in alleged "pro-Russian" areas of Eastern Ukraine to abandon their country, have stymied, at least temporarily, Putin's gambit for an easy, "popular" win.

Nevertheless, he has not abandoned his goal "by other means." While Russia has pulled back many of its conventional troops arrayed on the Ukrainian border, its public line concerning the Ukrainian government remains harsh and dismissive, and it shows no willingness to reverse its illegal annexation of Crimea. Most disturbingly, its continued direct pressure on Kiev—with deployment of irregular combat units to Ukraine to augment Russian nationalists and intelligence teams, and additional financial and gas price pressure—demonstrates that only the tactics, not the goals, of its campaign against Ukraine have changed.

It is thus critical that the United States, NATO, and the EU augment longer-term measures to counter this blatant Russian aggression. Many of these measures parallel the proposals in the draft Russian Aggression Prevention Act under consideration. Given the absolute requirement for the United States to act in accordance with NATO and the EU in responding to the Ukraine crisis, I would urge that the administration be given latitude in deciding which measures to implement, how, and when, to ensure we remain synchronized with our European partners. But I believe that the most important steps for the United States and its friends to take should include the following:

- First, lift the ban on lethal weapons and advisory support, including against irregular forces, to the Ukrainian security forces. This is a difficult decision given its impact on Ukrainian government perceptions, Russian calculations, and European concerns. But refusing direct assistance to a democratic government facing what is unquestionably aggression is a mistake. In the end, such a move almost certainly will not "provoke" Putin. He is opting for aggression with or without U.S. "provocations," and while all such steps have risk, we are more likely to gain his attention if we stop "self-detering" ourselves. The Ukrainians have earned the right for more support than MREs. To quote the Fall 2004 edition of *Middle East Quarterly*, providing an account of the 2004 battle of Kut, Iraq, "The Ukrainian Army...soldiers who were stationed at the CPA compound fought valiantly and tirelessly during the assault."
- Second, in line with the president's new initiative announced in Warsaw, strengthen NATO's eastern border countries, not simply with deployments of U.S. light infantry, but by pre-positioning battalion-size "heavy packages" of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and self-propelled artillery in each of the frontline NATO states. The United States would keep a company forward deployed with the remainder of a battalion ready to fall in on the pre-positioned equipment. This should be a NATO-blessed deployment, and NATO states should provide a second battalion package in each country. That, plus urgent specialized equipping and training of several local battalions in each country to cooperate closely with this force, would give an almost immediately available reinforced heavy brigade on each NATO country's borders. Aside from the significant defensive enhancement against any new "Crimea," this step would signal Moscow that the United States and NATO are going to defend alliance territory, and that military moves are still in the Obama administration's quiver.

- Third, help meet the needs of the Ukrainian economy and its energy sector, along with EU international financial institutions. The IMF has pledged \$17 billion, which will be supported by \$15 billion from the EU, \$1 billion from the United States, and various other sources. This money must be used more wisely by Ukrainians than in the past, but the need is palpable. Providing Ukraine with gas from the European gas net and other energy relief being worked on by the EU and the U.S. government is critical, especially by the Fall.
- Fourth, Ukrainian democracy and unity must be encouraged in the UN and other institutions, and on the ground. This means support and counsel in the struggle to regain territory taken by separatists. The United States has much experience in stabilization under fire and should help. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with its Geneva process is assisting on reconciliation with those among the separatists willing to lay down arms and talk. We should encourage Ukraine to reach out to them. But regaining security control is paramount in contested areas, and we need to help.
- Fifth, keep the sanctions already in place until Russia ceases its attempts to subvert Ukraine and is willing to discuss the future of Crimea.
- Sixth, help Western Europe become less dependent on Russian gas and cash flows. Overall trade and financial exchanges with Russia are limited for the EU, but significant for Russia. That theoretically gives the EU the upper hand. But Russia is a command economy with one man deciding. Europe is a decentralized capitalist economy, with many vested interests and no single leader. Thus, this will not be easy. Nevertheless, initiatives to give Europe more energy options—including steps to realize what the Economist estimates as a possible U.S. export of 75 billion cubic meters of gas a year and other measures to promote liquefied natural gas—must have priority.

But, while Ukraine's fate is not yet secured and will be a risk even with these measures, my biggest concern is at the aforementioned third level, the underlying message that Putin's many moves against the global order portend.

While on the margins the United States and NATO could have tailored relations with Russia differently since 1991, I reject the notion that it was Western actions that produced the Russia we face today. Could NATO have decided not to expand eastward? Of course, but it is difficult to see how that would have assuaged Putin and at least a good part of the Russian population who long for the return of a Soviet-sized empire. After all, while NATO expanded, it simultaneously drew down dramatically. U.S. combat brigade equivalents in Europe are down from eighteen in 1989 to two today. Major continental NATO armies, notably the British, German, and French, have been drastically cut, with conscription ended. The Russian military to the contrary has not been reduced proportionally. NATO expansion thus did not increase an alliance offensive threat against Russia. Rather, it strove to block the re-creation of Imperial and Soviet Russia through force, an inherently legitimate goal existential to the free peoples of eastern Europe.

Furthermore, throughout the last twenty-plus years the United States, NATO, the EU, OSCE, and other international organizations did everything possible to fashion for Russia a strategic position in the global order, from tens of billions of dollars in direct and indirect aid, to massive investments and joint ventures, to subcontracting much of Western European energy requirements to Gazprom, to sponsoring Russian entry into Western global institutions, most notably the World Trade Organization, and reinforcing the Security Council. Clearly neither that nor the drawdown of NATO force structure had any effect on Putin and many of

his countrymen and women. Rather, it is at least as likely that by providing him with potential pressure points from gas deliveries to local conventional-force superiority, it encouraged his policies.

At this point, we have to consider the stark likelihood of not just a Russia, but possibly a China as well, motivated to challenge both the international order based on peaceful settlement of disputes, international law, and global security, and America as guarantor of that system. If, as is likely based on events from Crimea to the South China Sea, this threat materializes, the United States will have to rethink its entire foreign policy.

Neither Europe, as we have seen repeatedly in the current Ukraine crisis, nor Japan and South Korea, are able on their own to "pivot" to a new posture. This will require analysis and then action by the United States. This potential threat was not covered in detail in the president's West Point speech. Furthermore, his recipe for most foreign policy challenges—acting only with the support and concurrence of international organizations, and within multilateral constraints—is unlikely to work against major conventional state competitors. For example, such an approach certainly will be impossible at least in the UN with Russia and China at the table, and very difficult with the EU or with our East Asian allies without strong, "from the front" U.S. leadership, including readiness to use force to defend the current system. The administration appears ambivalent about such uses of force. But if we wish to avoid a geostrategic shift as dramatic as 1989, only in the other direction, then maintaining the integrity of this global system must be among our "vital" interests.