

Statement of John F. Tefft
Ambassador-Nominee to Russia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

July 29, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next Ambassador of the United States to the Russian Federation. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Kerry for their support and for their confidence in recalling me to government service. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely once again with the Members of this Committee and its staff, as we face some of the most challenging times in the relations between the United States and Russia since the end of the Cold War.

I have had the privilege of serving my country for nearly 41 years as a Foreign Service Officer, much of that time in Eastern and Central Europe. Three times I served as a U.S. Ambassador—most recently in Ukraine, and previously in Georgia, and Lithuania. I also served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow – and for 10 months of my assignment I was Charge d'affaires at the Embassy.

As an Ambassador my most important responsibility and highest duty has been to promote and defend the interests of the United States. Over the course of my career, I have tried to do that as best I can, to advance the objectives of our country and to represent the values and ideas for which the United States stands.

Mr. Chairman, our relations with Russia today are in serious trouble and their future is uncertain. The United States cannot ignore the fundamental challenge to the international order posed by Russia's actions in the Ukraine crisis. Russia's efforts to annex Crimea – which we will never accept – have violated core precepts of international law, and have shredded the very fabric of freely adopted obligations among Europe's nations that have kept the peace for nearly 70 years. Russia's policy of destabilizing parts of eastern Ukraine violates the sovereignty of its neighbor. It also undercuts the solemn obligations Russia itself undertook

freely to observe the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. As President Obama and many European leaders have emphasized, adherence to the structure of European security is vital. The horrendous shootdown of the Malaysian airliner and loss of almost three hundred innocent lives has shocked the world and underlined once again the importance of resolving this crisis quickly and peacefully.

In this environment, we must continue to talk clearly to our Russian interlocutors and make sure Russian officials and citizens understand American policy, interests and values. At the same time, managing this crisis effectively and wisely will require that our own government continues to know as precisely as we can what the Russian side is thinking, what their objectives are, and why they are taking the approaches that they do even when we find them unacceptable.

If given the opportunity to serve, I will try to do just that – to engage in frank and difficult diplomacy.

Historically, we have had many dimensions to our relationship with Russia, chief among them human rights and democracy, security and arms control, and economic and business affairs. We must continue to press all of these in concert. We also need to be ready to engage in cooperation on the international stage when it is clearly in our interest – for example, to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons. And we must work to preserve people-to-people ties, even during times of severe tensions.

If confirmed, I will also do my best to engage Russians from all parts of that society. I will try to explain what we stand for, and to promote respect for the dignity of every citizen, democratic values, good governance, and rule of law. I say this in the conviction that the most effective antidote to Russian propaganda mounted against the United States is simply stating the plain truth about our country and our values.

If given the opportunity to serve again, I will also use the resources at my disposal to promote and protect U.S. economic interests in the Russian market. My record on supporting American business over the course of my career is clear. I will vigorously oppose corruption, and I will do my utmost to ensure America's firms

receive equal and fair treatment in trade and investment transactions in accordance with U.S. law and WTO rules.

Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee, America's relations with Russia have a long and complex history.

We have been allies and we have been adversaries.

We have cooperated and we have clashed.

But, one constant has been our country's enduring engagement with Russia, its people, and its government. That engagement reflects geographic, economic and geopolitical realities. We have no alternative to managing and conducting our relations in a way that most effectively advances and protects American interests and global peace.

Just as our interests and values now require intensive diplomacy accompanied by firm sanctions to counter Russia's recent threats to European stability, it is inescapable that pursuing America's most important interests around the world will sometimes also mean working with Russia. We need to identify and counter terrorist threats, stem narcotics flows, ensure aviation and maritime safety, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, verifiably reduce nuclear arsenals and eliminate nuclear fissile material wherever it is in the world. America cannot address these tasks alone. But Russia remains a critical international player in many of these matters, and America's hand can become stronger when our interests and Russia's align.

If confirmed, I will use all the resources at my disposal to pursue American goals through diplomatic engagement with the Russian government, and I will promote expanded ties between the American and Russian people.

Mr. Chairman, one of the great privileges of my career has been to lead the teams of committed Americans serving our country at embassies overseas. If confirmed, I will do my best to lead our highly professional and motivated team at the Embassy in Moscow and in our three consulates across Russia. This is a team of skilled officers and staff. I know that the Americans who serve our country in Russia understand the importance of their work. It will be an honor to lead them. And, Mr. Chairman, if the Senate chooses to place its confidence in me as

U.S. Ambassador to Russia, I will ensure that we conduct our business in a manner that is fully consistent with the highest standards of ethical and moral values.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to recognize my wife Mariella, who has been my indispensable partner in this career from the very beginning. In addition to her own professional accomplishments as a biostatistician and a nurse, she has made her own unique contributions to representing our country in every post in which we have served. I know she will once again bring her invaluable experience to bear in Moscow. I would also like to thank my wonderful daughters, Christine and Cathleen. They make me proud every day, and have been supportive of my work throughout my career.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the privilege of appearing before the Committee. I am prepared to answer any questions you might have.