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Good morning, Chair Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and other Members of Congress. Thank you for the opportunity to present my analysis on the topic of Russia's waning influence. My views are my own and I do not speak for any of my associations.

I am going to approach the topic from the angle of how Russia's war against Ukraine could influence other key geopolitical phenomena and why, although we may wish that Russia's influence is dramatically waning, it may not be in key areas. Having a clear-eyed assessment of the situation is imperative.

I have four main points for the Committee's consideration. One, despite Russia's losses, hits to its economy, and negative international reputation, Russia's war does not appear to have chilled the China-Russia partnership; their aims to undermine the United States and our alliances are enduring. Two, the Biden administration's rhetoric in support of Ukraine's defense is at odds with its reluctant provision of certain weapons to Ukraine before the invasion, and once deterrence failed, throughout the invasion. Three, despite assertions that NATO is united, Russia persists in pressing fractures between allies who perceive the threats of Russian imperialism to varying degrees. And four, which is the culminating point: It is because of the threat China poses to the United States, and its convergence with Russia, that I believe it is critical that the United States fully back Ukraine to victory with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency and ensure NATO has more and better options for deterring Russian aggression. Doing this could more effectively weaken Russian influence and help shape Xi's calculations towards determining military aggression against US allies, territories, and interests, would not be worth the cost. Failing to do this, however, could signal to Xi that now is the time to launch his own attacks, and he could have the support from Putin to do so.

It is important to set the geopolitical context. As the Biden administration's National Security Strategy states, in agreement with the previous Administration's NSS, the People's Republic of China (PRC), "is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective."¹ I agree with this assessment and appreciate the continuity across administrations as well as the bipartisan expressions of solidarity with democratic Taiwan. However, I disagree with the Biden administration's decision to abandon the framework used in the 2017 NSS and 2018 National Defense Strategy that placed Russia in the top tier of long-term strategic adversaries, behind China. The dangers of downgrading and underestimating the Russia threat—

¹ Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy, October 2022, p. 8, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

as the Biden administration did in the year leading up to the war—have become visible and ultimately culminated in the greatest deterrence failure of the post-Cold War era in the lead-up to the war. Almost immediately upon taking office, the Biden administration telegraphed an unwillingness to push back on Russia by renewing New START without even attempting to improve it, waiving sanctions on Nord Stream 2 despite broad bipartisan support for the sanctions, pursuing a "cyber dialogue" with Russia even as Russian ransomware attacks on US energy infrastructure were occurring, doing essentially nothing after Russia conducted a highly dangerous ASAT putting our astronauts in serious peril.² It fit the pattern of the Biden administration trying to downplay the Russia acts of aggression and dangerous behavior, or offer Russia concessions in an effort to appease Putin, when media reports indicated the Biden administration was contemplating Russia's list of demands while Russia amassed troops,³ and reportedly pressuring Ukraine⁴ to cede territory in an effort to appease Russia to prevent the invasion.

My first point is that the ramifications of the administration's continued hesitance towards helping Ukraine achieve victory over a major strategic adversary of the United States will have an impact far beyond Central and Eastern Europe. What happens in Ukraine will impact Xi's decision calculus for whether he acts aggressively against Taiwan. My assessment is that Xi has not backed away from partnering with Putin. In June of 2019 Xi said Putin was his "best friend."⁵ Their announcement in Beijing, while Russia's invasion of Ukraine was imminent, outlined their intent to deepen collaboration and said that their partnership had no "forbidden areas of cooperation."⁶ The nature of Xi and Putin's national aims to weaken and replace US and ally influence means that we cannot treat their threats separately or in a compartmentalized manner. In Xi's September 2022 public remarks, he remained committed to "work with Russia to extend strong mutual support on issues concerning each other's core interests, and deepen practical cooperation in trade, agriculture, connectivity and other areas."⁷ As uncovered by China expert Matt Pottinger, "days before Xi and Putin's meeting, Beijing sent an emissary to Moscow to deliver the strongest official statement of Chinese support for Putin's war that exists in the public record. Li even endorsed Putin's claim that the invasion of Ukraine was a 'counterattack'

² NASA Administrator Statement on Russia ASAT Test, NASA, November 15, 2021, <https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/nasa-administrator-statement-on-russian-asat-test>.

³ WJ Hennigan, "US Willing to Strike Deal with Russia Over Missiles and Military Exercises as Ukraine Crisis Deepens," *TIME*, January 8, 2022, <https://time.com/6137966/russia-military-missiles-ukraine/>.

⁴ Zachary Rogers, "Biden Plans to Pressure Ukraine to Cede Territory to Russia-Backed Groups, Report Says," ABC News, December 9, 2021, <https://abcnews4.com/news/nation-world/biden-plans-to-pressure-ukraine-to-cede-territory-to-russia-backed-groups-report-says>.

⁵ Scott Neuman, "As Relations With US Sour, Xi Describes Putin as Best Friend at Moscow Meeting," NPR, June 6, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/06/730200317/as-relations-with-u-s-sour-xi-describes-putin-as-best-friend-at-moscow-meeting>.

⁶ Tony Munro, Andrew Osborn, and Humeyra Pamuk, "China and Russia Partner Up Against West at Olympics Summit," Reuters, February 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-china-tell-nato-stop-expansion-moscow-backs-beijing-taiwan-2022-02-04/>.

⁷ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, "President Xi Jinping Meets With Russian President Vladimir Putin," September 15, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202209/t20220915_10766678.html.

on NATO forces.”⁸ Although China has so far abstained from providing direct military support to Russia during its invasion, economic ties between the two nations have sky-rocketed since Russia’s invasion, giving Russia crucial support to weather sanctions.⁹ China has also maintained its schedule of joint military exercises with Russia,¹⁰ and just as Chinese officials defended Russia’s erroneous claims about NATO, Russian officials have supported Chinese erroneous claims about Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s legitimate visit to Taiwan.

My second point is this: the Biden administration’s rhetoric in support of Ukraine’s defense is at odds with its reluctance to impose truly meaningful sanctions and unwillingness to provide Ukraine the necessary support to deter Russian aggression and then empower Ukraine to expel Russia once deterrence failed. I’ll provide a few examples.

On the sanctions front, the administration has been slow to apply the most impactful sanctions against Russia. While some of the sanctions have caused some economic pain, the Biden administration has yet to apply any serious energy sanctions. Russia has reportedly made over \$160 billion in energy revenues since the conflict began.¹¹ And just yesterday, for the 4th time since the war began, the Biden administration extended a general license exempting nearly all energy-related transactions with sanctioned Russian banks.

Regarding weapons provisions and operational leeway, the Biden administration blocked a \$60m DoD-produced Presidential Drawdown Authority package to deliver emergency aid to Ukraine when Russia was building up its military in the spring of 2021.¹² That fall, as the Russian build-up intensified, the Biden administration again froze a \$200 million aid package to Ukraine for weeks, out of concern it would be seen as “provocative,” by the Russians.¹³ In addition, the administration slow-rolled export licenses for key weapons systems like Stinger MANPADS, which Lithuania and Latvia were willing to deliver to Ukraine in January 2022 and could only do so after the delay became public and the administration subsequently approved the export license.¹⁴ This kicked off what has become an exhausting yet familiar ritual of

⁸ Matthew Pottinger, “No Limits: Xi’s Support for Putin is Unwavering,” FDD, October 11, 2022, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2022/10/11/no-limits-xis-support-for-putin-is-unwavering/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ronn Blitzer, “Russia, China Begin Military Exercises as Moscow, Beijing Strengthen Ties,” Fox News, September 1, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/russia-china-begin-military-exercises-moscow-beijing-strengthen-ties>.

¹¹ Marc Bennetts, “Putin’s Energy War Profits Dwarf Cost of Ukraine Conflict,” *The Times*, September 6, 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/putins-energy-war-profits-dwarf-cost-of-ukraine-conflict-sgn32p0qv>.

¹² Betsy Woodruff Swan and Paul McCleary, “White House Freezes Ukraine Military Package that Includes Lethal Weapons,” *Politico*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/06/18/white-house-ukraine-military-lethal-weapons-495169>.

¹³ Courtney Kube and Dan De Luce, “Despite Appeals From Ukraine, Biden Admin Holds Back Additional Military Aid to Kyiv Amid Diplomatic Push,” NBC News, December 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/appeals-ukraine-biden-admin-holds-back-additional-military-aid-kyiv-di-rcna8421>.

¹⁴ Aaron Mehta, “Baltic Nations Sending US-Made Stingers and Javelins to Ukraine,” *Breaking Defense*, January 21, 2022, <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/01/baltic-nations-sending-us-made-stingers-javelins-to-ukraine/>.

public/congressional pressure and exposure that's been needed every time the administration balks at providing a new advanced capability to Ukraine or increasing the quantity of assistance.

Once Russia did launch its invasion, the risk-aversion continued.¹⁵ Credible reporting indicated the White House would not provide certain targeting data to Ukraine citing legal concerns.¹⁶ And more advanced systems like the HIMARs have been slow to arrive. The White House remains opposed to delivering systems that Ukrainian President Zelensky has requested, including those with longer-ranges, because they could hit targets deeper into Russian territory.¹⁷ Rather than helping Ukraine win by expelling the Russians, the aim of the United States seems to be to help Ukraine not lose quickly. Put another way, the aim seems to be stalemate.

This stands in stark contrast to statements from officials, like National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, who said “Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine. We’re not going to pressure them; we’re not going to dictate to them... we believe in a just peace based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that are not things we made up but that are embedded in the U.N. Charter. The G7 leaders spoke to these principles of a just peace, including territorial integrity. President Zelenskyy has spoken to these.”¹⁸ A just peace will not be achieved through a premature ceasefire, which would permit the Russians to cement their gains and finish mobilization before reattacking. Neither will a just peace be achieved by a protracted war of attrition.

A corollary to my second point is administration officials’ public emphasis on Russian nuclear saber-rattling and its significant mistake to preclude certain US actions, which has taught the lesson that there is great value in nuclear saber-rattling in wars of conquest. It has only increased Russia’s influence through the most dangerous and provocative means. Though Vladimir Putin has not detonated a nuclear weapon, he used, and continues to use, his nuclear arsenal to threaten the United States and other NATO nations against continuing to support Ukraine’s defense. Through pre-invasion nuclear saber-rattling, verbally threatening to employ nuclear weapons on the battlefield, and putting such weapons on alert, Russia caused President Biden and his administration to declare repeatedly their fears of “World War III” and to adopt a gradual, highly cautious approach to helping Ukraine. Russia appears to have successfully used nuclear threats to deter the United States from certain actions that are on lower levels on the spectrum of escalation, enabling itself to control escalation to serve its aims.¹⁹ This only increases the

¹⁵ Rebecca Heinrichs, “Biden’s Risk Aversion is Escalating Putin’s War,” *Washington Examiner*, May 17, 2022, <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/biden-s-risk-aversion-is-escalating-putin-s-war>.

¹⁶ Ken Dillanian, Carol E. Lee, Courtney Kube, and Dan De Luce, “Biden Admin Carefully Examining Legal Issues Providing Arms to Ukraine,” CNN, February 24, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/biden-admin-carefully-examining-legal-issues-providing-arms-ukraine-rcna17758>.

¹⁷ Warren Strobel, Nancy Youseff, Michael Gordon, “Ukraine’s Appeal for Longer-Range Missiles Presents Fresh Test of Biden Administration Support,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-appeal-for-longer-range-missiles-presents-fresh-test-of-biden-administration-support-11665083684>.

¹⁸ White House Press Briefing Transcript, on board Air Force One, to Cambodia, November 11, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/11/11/press-gaggle-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-en-route-phnom-penh-cambodia/>.

¹⁹ Rebecca Heinrichs, “How to Strengthen US Deterrence and Weaken Attempts of Nuclear Coercion,” Hudson Institute, September 22, 2022, p. 1,

attractiveness of continued Russian nuclear threats and could also tempt other authoritarians to follow suit.

Three, presidents across political parties have urged allies to contribute more to their security and to help with alliance security. In the case of Ukraine, ally nations especially on NATO's eastern front,²⁰ have done exactly that, and when allies do what we have been urging, we should make good on our commitments. This will be imperative in our efforts to further weaken Russia's influence and in our long contest with the PRC over global influence. It is in our strong national interest to lead and collaborate well with our allies in Europe who perceive the threats of Russian imperialism most acutely. Beyond Ukraine, it means we should continue to bolster NATO's front with even more capable weapons leveraging modern technology.

Finally, because of the threat China poses and its convergence with Russia, the United States should commit to Ukraine's defense and restoration of its national independence with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency. Ukraine is degrading the Russian military but should be empowered and unencumbered to do much more. Backing Ukraine to victory and using this time to strengthen the frontline of NATO in the east, will help shape Putin's calculations towards determining Moscow cannot prevail by further attempts at invasion or aggression. Likewise, it could also shape Xi's calculations regarding possible attempts to subdue Taiwan by force, especially if the United States and Pacific allies learn from the failures to deter Russia and bolster military preparedness now to deter PRC aggression.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/How+to+Strengthen+US+Deterrence+and+Weaken+the+Attempts+of+Rival+Nuclear+Coercion+%E2%80%93+Rebecca+L.+Heinrichs.pdf>.

²⁰ "Who Is Doing Most to Help Ukraine Against Russia? America, Poland and Tiny Baltic States Stand Out," *The Economist*, October 12, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2022/10/12/who-is-doing-most-to-help-ukraine-against-russia>.