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Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO

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Introduction

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished members of the committee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), thank you for inviting me to testify.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization successfully led the Western democracies through the Cold War and the U.S. triumph over the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. While the political, security, and economic dynamics have changed over the past 30 years, I firmly believe that NATO can serve as the bulwark that brings the transatlantic alliance through the challenges posed by a rapacious authoritarian state — Russia — and the China-led axis of aggressors that supports and enables Russia.

However, for far too long, many of our NATO allies ignored these threats. They failed to invest in the alliance — or even their own defense — and cajoling by successive Republican and Democratic presidents went unheeded. However, thanks to President Donald Trump’s prioritization of NATO defense spending targets — and President Putin’s violent military aggression against Ukraine and persistent efforts to undermine democratic governments in Eastern Europe — more NATO members are finally stepping up to the plate. Just last week, Secretary General Mark Rutte said he anticipates NATO members will agree to increase the defense spending target to a total of 5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) between defense spending and associated security spending.¹

This spending is essential, and it must be focused on the battles NATO needs to be prepared to fight and win today and tomorrow. The Trump administration has been right to call out European lethargy, but the answer to the challenge from Russia is not that America should do less, but rather Europe should do more. As NATO prepares for its next summit in the Hague later this month, my testimony outlines the intertwined threats Washington and its NATO allies face from a growing axis of aggressors and provides ten recommended steps the alliance and the United States should take to defeat these threats.

Way Forward: 10 Recommendations to Meet the Challenge

1. Increase NATO Defense Spending Targets to 5 percent of GDP (including Enablers)
2. Protect the Critical Infrastructure Essential to NATO’s Military Mobility
3. Arm Ukraine to Defend Itself and Survive
4. Incentivize Joint Ventures with Ukraine
5. Punish Russian Aggression
6. Counter Russian Malign Influence Operations
7. Deepen Partnerships to Hold China Accountable for Supporting Russian Aggression
8. Maintain U.S. Enablers and Force Posture in Europe
9. Assign a U.S. Officer as Supreme Allied Commander Europe
10. Stop Antagonizing Denmark Over Greenland

¹ NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and Prime Minister of Iceland Kristinn Þórvaldursson, “NATO Secretary General meets the Prime Minister of Iceland,” *Joint Press Conference*, May 28, 2025. (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events_67375.htm)

The Converging Challenges to NATO

NATO faces clear, overt threats from Russia and its partner in the axis of aggressors, China. These threats challenge the territorial integrity, representative democracy, and economic prosperity of both Europe and America. But NATO also faces challenges from within. Europe's lack of investment and commitment to its own security and its lax approach to the threat from China jeopardize the credibility of the alliance. Washington's response to both Russian aggression and European malaise poses an equally risky challenge. Neither Russia nor China will be cajoled or coddled into compliance or even peaceful coexistence, and both Europe and America need to process that reality.

Russia. The Russian Federation, led by its dictator, Vladimir Putin, is the single greatest threat to peace and democracy in Europe. Putin is not a misunderstood regional leader or an aggrieved actor reacting to NATO expansion. He is a stone-cold killer who has launched wars of conquest, invading his neighbors three times in the past 20 years. He is ruthlessly and violently crushing democratic movements growing in his hinterlands and harassing, torturing, and murdering his domestic critics.

Even Putin knows that NATO is not a first-mover military threat to Russia. If it were, he would have fortified his borders with NATO countries, which he has not done. But Putin does have a problem with NATO — countries that are part of the alliance are harder for him to coerce and bully.² Putin is always looking for ways to weaken the alliance and European solidarity. My colleague at FDD, Ivana Stradner, has written extensively on how he is stoking ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans in order to destabilize the region and ignite another conflict on NATO's borders.³ Putin has deployed spies, trolls, and cronies to fuel anti-Western sentiment and attempted to interfere with elections in Moldova, Romania, and Georgia.⁴ Here in the United States, Russia is attempting to pollute the information environment and discourage the public's interest in European security.

When Putin cannot manipulate his way to victory, he uses military force. In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in an unprovoked act of aggression. Putin is solely responsible for the ongoing war in Ukraine. He has conducted the war by means that intentionally target and kill Ukrainian civilians and destroy public health and safety infrastructures. He has overseen the intentional kidnapping and political indoctrination of thousands of Ukrainian children in direct violation of international law. He is, by any reasonable metric, this century's most despicable war criminal in Europe. Anyone who attempts to coddle or build relationships with Putin will have their legacy permanently stained by this thug's blood-soaked hands.

² Bradley Bowman, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Three Years Later," *FDD Media Call*, February 20, 2025. ([https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FDD -MediaCall Transcript -Russias-Invasion-of-Ukraine-Three-Years-Later.pdf](https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FDD_-_MediaCall_Transcript_-_Russias-Invasion-of-Ukraine-Three-Years-Later.pdf))

³ Ivana Stradner and Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, "Putin Wants War in the Balkans," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2024. (<https://www.wsj.com/opinion/putin-wants-war-in-the-balkans-02bdcc5a>)

⁴ Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery and Ivana Stradner, "Russia continues to subvert democracy in Moldova and Georgia," *The Hill*, November 15, 2024. (<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4991880-russia-continues-to-subvert-democracy-in-moldova-and-georgia>)

Putin's invasion of Ukraine is not just about territorial ambition. It is about dismantling the credibility of NATO, reversing post-Cold War progress in Eastern Europe, and upending the transatlantic partnership that has helped fuel American prosperity. If NATO fails to impose severe costs on his regime, the alliance will see this threat metastasize beyond Ukraine — into neighboring countries like Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania but also in more distant regions like the Arctic. There is no room for strategic ambiguity. This is a test of transatlantic resolve.

China. China leads the axis of aggressors — China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran — a bloc of authoritarian states that work together to threaten beleaguered democracies and marginalize the transparent, rules-based trade system that has underpinned U.S. prosperity and the free world. In Europe, China conducts massive cyber espionage, cyberattacks, and influence operations that deliberately target democratic institutions and economic stability. Beijing's goal is not just to steal data — it is to sow confusion, create division, and degrade public trust in democratic governance.

Chinese hackers have targeted European parliaments, defense contractors, and critical infrastructure with increasingly sophisticated malware and phishing operations. The Chinese hacking group APT31, a known affiliate of China's Ministry of State Security, has conducted cyber campaigns targeting thousands of victims from the United States and NATO member states.⁵

At the same time, China has used its illegal business practices and state-subsidized investments in emerging technology to manipulate global markets to establish an uneven playing field and achieve technological dominance in Europe and globally. Over the past decade, China has acquired stakes in more than a dozen European ports, including the port of Piraeus in Greece and terminals in Rotterdam, Valencia, and Antwerp.⁶ Chinese telecommunication giants like Huawei have attempted to dominate Europe's 5G rollout, which would give Beijing direct access to the continent's critical communications infrastructure.⁷ Huawei's manipulation of telecommunications infrastructure not only undercuts innovation but also injects insecurity into NATO's communications and supply chains.

Germany, in particular, has been too lax on Huawei, undermining the European Union's stated policy to remove high-risk vendors from 5G infrastructure.⁸ NATO previously called out Chinese cyber aggression, but thanks to weakness on the part of some EU members, the body failed to condemn Chinese cyber operations earlier this spring.⁹ Hopefully, Beijing's recent,

⁵ Stuart Lau and Paul De Villepin, "China targeted European lawmakers with cyberattacks, Washington says," *Politico*, March 27, 2024. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-targeted-european-lawmakers-cyberattacks-washington-says>)

⁶ Joanna Kakissis, "Chinese Firms Now Hold Stakes In Over A Dozen European Ports," *NPR*, October 9, 2018. (<https://www.npr.org/2018/10/09/642587456/chinese-firms-now-hold-stakes-in-over-a-dozen-european-ports>)

⁷ Sherisse Pham, "Huawei's hopes of global domination have been dashed," *CNN Business*, July 15, 2020. (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/15/tech/huawei-fallout-5g-hnk-intl>)

⁸ Noah Barkin, "Watching China in Europe—April 2025," *German Marshall Fund*, April 1, 2025. (<https://www.gmfus.org/news/watching-china-europe-april-2025>)

⁹ Noah Barkin, "Watching China in Europe—March 2025," *German Marshall Fund*, March 7, 2025. (<https://www.gmfus.org/news/watching-china-europe-march-2025>)

brazen attack on the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs will remove Brussels' rose-colored glasses.¹⁰

Beijing's economic influence is matched by its growing strategic ambition to cleave Europe from the United States and weaken America's relationships with its allies and partners from within. Chinese government officials and state and party media have flooded social media platforms with pro-Russian narratives, amplifying the Kremlin's agenda and undermining Western support for Ukraine.¹¹

China's support for Russia is not merely a symbolic act — it is part of a strategic plan. As Western nations cut Russia off from trade opportunities, Beijing has become Moscow's economic lifeline. Since the 2022 invasion, China has become a major importer of Russia's cheap energy supplies and has remained the largest buyer of Russian fossil fuels,¹² helping Russia stabilize its energy revenues and fund its warfighting machine. China acts as a force multiplier for the Kremlin, exporting UAV parts, semiconductors, and even dual-use technologies to Russia.

Beijing is watching Ukraine carefully — not as a bystander but as a strategist. How the West responds to Ukraine will shape China's calculus on Taiwan, the South China Sea, and beyond.

Europe. Like it or not, Europe finds itself on the front line of global democratic defense. NATO's credibility rests on whether Europe can serve as both a shield and a spear — defending its citizens, deterring its adversaries, and deploying power where needed. After Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Eastern European nations — particularly the Baltic states and Poland — began reinvigorating their military preparedness. These same Eastern European countries doubled down on this effort after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and they have achieved measurable results — increasing defense budgets, delivering advanced weapons systems, improving military readiness, and fortifying NATO's eastern flank. But the recovery of European defense capacity and capability is far from done.

This is because some NATO members still do not pull their own weight. Defense spending in large economies — especially Spain and Italy but also Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, the so-called “leaders of Europe” — has lagged behind, despite the severity of the situation at hand. That must change. And quickly. If countries with more limited economic resources like Poland can contribute 4 percent of GDP,¹³ and the Baltic states are pledging to hit

¹⁰ “EU stands in solidarity with Czech Republic after cyberattack blamed on China,” *Reuters*, May 28, 2025. (<https://www.yahoo.com/news/eu-stands-solidarity-czech-republic-091547090.html>)

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, The Global Engagement Center, Public Statement, “People's Republic of China Efforts to Amplify the Kremlin's Voice on Ukraine,” May 4, 2022. (<https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/peoples-republic-of-china-efforts-to-amplify-the-kremlins-voice-on-ukraine>)

¹² Vaibhav Raghunandan, “January 2025 — Monthly analysis of Russian fossil fuel exports and sanctions,” *Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air*, February 11, 2025. (<https://energyandcleanair.org/january-2025-monthly-analysis-of-russian-fossil-fuel-exports-and-sanctions>)

¹³ Anthony Reuben, “How much do Nato members spend on defence?” *BBC* (UK), February 18, 2025. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>)

5 percent within the next two years,¹⁴ then other, wealthier nations must do more than scrape by the 2 percent commitment level.

A positive sign is that NATO is increasing its ready brigade target from 80 to 130 brigades — about 600,000 soldiers, nearly all European. This will require member states to invest in readiness alongside procurement in a manner they have not in the past.¹⁵

These extra ground forces will be needed as Europe's geography creates a major challenge for NATO unity. Thanks to the accession of Sweden and Finland into NATO, the Baltic Sea is now a heavily contested space for the Russian Navy. But defending any one of the Baltic States or the Suwalki Gap (the 60-mile strip between Poland and Lithuania) from Russian ground aggression remain NATO's most daunting tasks. With Kaliningrad to the West and Belarus to the East, Russia could seize this strategic corridor and sever Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia from the rest of Europe. This would not only isolate these Baltic nations geographically but also fatally erode NATO's unity and ability to move troops across the eastern flank. With only two major roads and a single rail line available in this strip to move troops and heavy equipment in a crisis, there remain too many bottlenecks that could and would compromise troop movement, igniting a broader conflict in the region.

Meanwhile, Europe's energy supply is no longer just an economic issue — it is a bargaining chip. Russia made that clear when it weaponized the Nord Stream pipelines in the 2000s and 2010s. Europe's overreliance on Russian gas was a policy failure that gave rise to national security vulnerabilities that Putin exploited with lethal precision. To their credit, European nations have made real progress since the invasion of Ukraine. REPowerEU — the European Commission's €300 billion plan to end its reliance on Russian energy — is shaping how energy flows across the continent.¹⁶ Russian gas exports into the European Union fell by nearly 60 percent in 2024. Countries like Germany, long criticized for their dependence on Nord Stream, have rapidly pushed toward building and commissioning floating liquid natural gas (LNG) terminals to reduce their dependence.¹⁷ As one might expect, Lithuania was a pioneer in becoming fully independent from Russian gas years earlier.¹⁸

But progress in energy resilience has not been distributed evenly. Much of Central and Eastern Europe remains vulnerable to supply shocks and grid instability. Nations like Hungary and Slovakia continue to undermine collective resilience, showing no signs of decoupling from Russian gas. Meanwhile, LNG infrastructure is disproportionately concentrated in Western

¹⁴ Joshua Posaner, "Lithuania pledges to hit Donald Trump's 5 percent defense spending target," *Politico*, January 17, 2025. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/lithuania-pledges-to-hit-donald-trumps-5-percent-defense-spending-target>)

¹⁵ Sabine Siebold, "Exclusive: NATO to ask Berlin for seven more brigades under new targets, sources say," *Reuters*, May 28, 2025. (<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-ask-berlin-seven-more-brigades-under-new-targets-sources-say-2025-05-28>)

¹⁶ "REPowerEU," *European Commission*, accessed May 28, 2025. (https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repower.eu_en)

¹⁷ Jack Burke, "Germany brings third floating LNG terminal online," *Compressor Tech2*, May 27, 2025. (<https://www.compressortech2.com/news/germany-brings-third-floating-lng-terminal-online/8062069.article?zephrossoott=4k2AjP>)

¹⁸ Rob Schmitz, "Lithuania has become the 1st European country to stop using Russian gas," *NPR*, May 26, 2022. (<https://www.npr.org/2022/05/26/1101568189/lithuania-has-become-the-1st-european-country-to-stop-using-russian-gas>)

Europe. Grid interconnections needed to distribute surplus electricity from the West to the East remain limited and underdeveloped, exacerbating the region's energy insecurity. This is not just an infrastructure gap. It is a strategic risk.

Above all, Europe must remain politically unified. NATO is not here for a debate — it is a warfighting alliance. Populist movements, far-left pacifism, and far-right Kremlin apologists all threaten the cohesion of the NATO alliance.

United States. The United States has always been the strategic backbone of NATO. No other nation has the same combination of power projection capacity, warfighting enablers, cyber capabilities, nuclear deterrence, and global reach. American leadership is existential to the alliance's success, but NATO is also essential to the United States — it is the security partnership that complements America's most prolific trade partnership. In 2024 alone, NATO countries represented more than 35 percent of U.S. trade.¹⁹ Policymakers who advocate “leaving Europe to the Europeans” conveniently ignore this relationship and put America's economic future at risk.

U.S. credibility is built on presence and power projection. Today, over 80,000 U.S. troops are permanently stationed across Europe, with tens of thousands more temporarily, rotationally deployed — a force posture that has deterred Russian escalation and reassured European allies and partners since the invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. military remains a forward line of deterrence, backed by persistent rotational deployments in Poland and Romania, pre-positioned stocks in Germany and the Baltics, and high-readiness air and naval assets in Italy, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom — all of which are essential parts of NATO's deterrence architecture.

The United States provides the NATO alliance with strategic airlift, long-range fires, nuclear deterrence, and theater-level command and control — capabilities that turn military planning into operational reality. U.S. forces do not just complement NATO, they enable it. Without U.S. logistics, surveillance, or command networks, even the most advanced European forces cannot sustain operations at the necessary tempo or scale.

This deterrence architecture, the enablers of military operations, and the logistics and command networks must all be maintained and hardened against enemy sabotage, cyberattacks, and political uncertainty.

Maintaining U.S. posture in Europe gives NATO's Article 5 its teeth. The credibility of NATO's deterrence depends on American commitment, and any chaotic step back could signal to Moscow to test the alliance's limits, particularly in areas like the Suwalki Gap. The proper response to Russia's authoritarian actions is not for the United States to do less but for Europe to do more.

President Trump is right to demand that the Europeans do their fair share. American leadership within NATO must shape the alliance's modernization strategies and reinforce burden-sharing

¹⁹ “United States Exports By Country,” *Trading Economics*, accessed May 28, 2025.
(<https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/exports-by-country>)

through responsible and reliable political and fiscal commitments. Downscaling U.S. leadership would be misguided — leadership does not mean shouldering the whole burden ourselves. Rather, it means setting the tone and holding the line for others to follow. America's role in NATO is not charity work. It is an investment in our own national security, economic productivity, and resilience. An unstable Europe means weak U.S. allies and partners that welcome more cyberattacks on Americans, more Chinese leverage across the globe, more vulnerable trade relationships, and a higher likelihood that U.S. troops will have to respond to a war that could have been prevented. As Ben Franklin spoke to these risks eloquently in 1776, it is far cheaper — and smarter — to deter conflict alongside allies than to fight alone later.

NATO needs a steady commander, and the United States must continue to lead from the front.

Way Forward: 10 Recommendations to Meet the Challenge

Today, the European geopolitical landscape is more dangerous than at any point since the end of the Second World War. NATO stands in the breach, but U.S. leadership, European defense investments, and collective action to punish our adversaries are all necessary if democracies are to prevail against the axis of aggressors. Congress has the opportunity to set the course of U.S. policy and defend U.S. national security.

1. Increase NATO Defense Spending Targets to 5 percent of GDP (Including Enablers):

Agreed upon at the 2014 Wales Summit,²⁰ the benchmark target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense was never intended to be a ceiling — it was the floor. Yet still, ten years later, only 23 of 32 NATO member countries are expected to meet that low threshold.²¹ Over the past decade, security conditions in Europe have worsened, and Russia's aggressive intent is abundantly clear. If NATO fails to resource its defenses today — especially in high-demand areas like air and missile defense, cyber, space, and industrial base development — it will pay a much higher price in the future in dollars, territory, and lives. If they wish to maintain their security, NATO's national governments — even those not within range of Russian long-range fires — must commit to Secretary General Mark Rutte's proposed new spending pledge of at least 3.5 percent of GDP on defense and another 1.5 percent on defense enablers like infrastructure protection and cybersecurity.

This defense spending target should include the United States, whose defense spending has also slipped since the end of the Cold War. As my colleagues at FDD, Bradley Bowman and Ryan Brobst, have pointed out, U.S. defense spending is hovering near 70-year lows as a share of GDP — at a shade over 3 percent.²² The Trump administration's proposed fiscal year 2026 defense

²⁰ “Wales Summit Declaration,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, September 5, 2014. (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

²¹ John Hardie, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, Bradley Bowman, and Joe Dougherty, “The leverage Trump needs when talking with Putin,” *FDD Media Call*, page 12, January 27, 2025. (https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/FDD_-_MediaCall_Transcript_-_The-leverage-Trump-needs-when-talking-with-Putin.pdf); Chris Lunday, “NATO's Rutte embraces 5 percent defense spending goal,” *Politico*, May 26, 2025. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/mark-rutte-embrace-5-percent-defense-goal-nato-summit>)

²² Bradley Bowman and Ryan Bobst, “Trump Can't Have ‘Peace Through Strength’ on a Biden Defense Budget,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 6, 2025. (https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy_briefs/2025/05/06/trump-cant-have-peace-through-strength-on-a-biden-

budget request of \$892.6 billion fails to keep pace with inflation or meet the requirements of the administration's "Peace Through Strength" agenda. Unless Congress appropriates the full \$150 billion in reconciliation and increases the base budget by 3 to 5 percent above inflation, U.S. defense spending will fall below 3 percent of GDP by 2027. An effective decrease in U.S. defense spending is hypocritical as the United States pushes allies to spend more on defense.

Without adequate funding, NATO countries will end up with forces that might look ready on paper but cannot move, shoot, or sustain a fight. The longer we wait, the worse it will get. "Peace Through Strength" requires the 'strength' part to be real. That begins with both Europe and the United States committing 3.5 percent of GDP to defense spending and 5 percent in defense-related expenditures — nothing less.²³

2. Protect the Critical Infrastructure Essential to NATO's Military Mobility: Moving troops and equipment efficiently over land, sea, and air is essential to NATO's ability to project power and sustain forces to fight and win wars. In the United States, civilian-owned rail networks, commercial ports, and airport authorities will transport the majority of service members and materiel during a significant, rapid mobilization. My colleague, Annie Fixler, and I have written an extensive monograph on the severe challenges America faces in securing this infrastructure against Chinese and Russian cyber-enabled threats. Our monograph contains more than a dozen recommendations, all of which can be acted on by Congress.²⁴ While the cyber resilience of this infrastructure is insufficient, the Pentagon has at least taken the first step of identifying the strategic railways, seaports, and airports it needs the most in a crisis. The United States needs our partners and allies to do the same.²⁵

Across Europe, NATO forces rely on critical infrastructure owned and operated by local governments and companies. Its military readiness requires reliable, secure infrastructure wherever NATO forces operate. If Washington asked NATO to identify its critical infrastructure priorities, it should not respond with one priority from each NATO member. Its critical infrastructure priorities must align with its war plans, particularly as it relates to flowing U.S., UK, and French forces into and through Europe. Washington must push its allies to consider critical infrastructure resilience through this lens and prioritize this issue as a supreme allied commander Europe (SACEUR)-NATO problem, not a NATO secretary general consensus issue, as ultimately, NATO force mobilization affects America's ability to fight with and through our allies.

[defense-budget](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/12/05/u-s-defense-spending-visualized)); Bradley Bowman, "U.S. Defense Spending: Visualized," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 5, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/12/05/u-s-defense-spending-visualized>)

²³ Bradley Bowman and Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, "Trump Can — and Should — Fully Fund Our Military," *National Review*, November 29, 2024. (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2024/11/trump-can-and-should-fully-fund-our-military>)

²⁴ Annie Fixler, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, and Rory Lane, "Military Mobility Depends on Secure Critical Infrastructure," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 27, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/03/27/military-mobility-depends-on-secure-critical-infrastructure>)

²⁵ Retired Gen. Mike Minihan, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, Annie Fixler, and Bradley Bowman, "Persistent Access, Persistent Threat: Ensuring Military Mobility Against Malicious Cyber Actors," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 17, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/events/2025/04/17/persistent-access-persistent-threat-ensuring-military-mobility-against-malicious-cyber-actors>)

Deterrence requires a forward posture, and NATO must shift from reactive defense to forward defense. That also includes a long-overdue shift in how we treat energy. NATO must begin treating pipelines, LNG terminals, and power grid infrastructure in the same way it treats airfields, ports, and railways — as strategic military assets. NATO must include critical energy corridors in military mobility planning, integrate energy disruption scenarios into NATO tabletop exercises, and invest in cyber and physical protections for energy infrastructure, which are now prime targets for hostile actors like Russia and its allies.

3. Arm Ukraine to Defend Itself and Survive: The U.S. objective must be to secure a peace that allows Ukraine to survive and thrive as a democratic state — not for Ukraine to reach an unacceptable ceasefire negotiated under duress, and certainly not for it to lose the war. Ukraine needs two things above all else — constant U.S. intelligence support and access to American-made munitions.²⁶ It specifically needs access to the U.S. defense industrial base and a consistent, high-volume supply of 155 mm artillery shells, guided multiple launch rocket system (GMLRS), and air defense munitions like advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles (AMRAAMs), and Patriots. NATO allies can provide the funding, but sufficient quantities of these weapons can only come from the U.S. defense industrial base, either through direct delivery from U.S. stocks or through foreign military sales.

One specific recommendation comes from my visits with Ukrainian F-16 units. Currently, Ukrainian forces are often using \$400,000 AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles to shoot down Iranian Shahed drones that cost Russia tens of thousands of dollars to produce. For Kyiv, this is a current tactical necessity — but a costly strategy. Washington should accelerate the transfer of more cost-effective alternatives like the air-delivered version of the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon Systems — precision-guided 2.75-inch rockets — which cost between \$15,000 to \$20,000 per unit and are already fielded by Ukraine’s ground forces.

Ukrainian commanders are being forced to conserve ammunition while facing daily missile and drone attacks, making life-or-death calculations daily. A prolonged war or “frozen conflict” which weakens Ukraine’s position will only embolden Russia, undermine NATO’s credibility, and set the stage for another future invasion. The United States cannot afford to be a fickle ally. Washington must act decisively and provide Ukraine with the tools it needs to break Russia’s resilience.

4. Incentivize Joint Ventures with Ukraine: In the face of Russian onslaughts, Ukrainian companies have demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in designing cost-effective and combat-tested solutions.²⁷ Ukraine’s drone industry is growing rapidly — developing scalable, low-cost, first-person-view (FPV) drones that are reshaping the battlefield and outpacing Russian adaptations. But without sustained support from its allies and partners, Ukraine’s tactical edge may not last. The U.S. defense industry’s manufacturing scale is America’s greatest asset, but it

²⁶ “Ukraine needs U.S. intelligence, precise munitions — Admiral Mark Montgomery,” *Espresso*, May 21, 2025. (<https://global.espresso.tv/russia-ukraine-war-ukraine-needs-two-things-from-us-continuous-intelligence-support-and-specific-ammunition>)

²⁷ Isaac Harris and Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, “How Ukraine can help accelerate US defense technology,” *The Hill*, December 18, 2024. (<https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/5045668-how-ukraine-can-help-accelerate-us-defense-technology>)

often struggles to adapt rapidly to changing needs. Ukrainian expertise in battlefield innovation and rapid prototyping could complement U.S. capabilities and bolster U.S. preparedness for future conflicts. As a first-order effort, Washington and Kyiv need to align export controls and intellectual property protections to facilitate the transfer of sensitive technologies for defense collaboration. Next, the two countries should create a defense innovation fund to support research and development in critical technologies, including autonomous drones and electronic warfare. This collaboration can deliver tangible results on today's battlefield and beyond, even stretching to the Taiwan Strait.

5. Punish Russian Aggression: Putin will only change his calculus if the cost of continuing the war becomes unsustainable for him. The United States and its European allies must increase pressure and impose costs on Russia by backing Ukraine with military aid while ramping up a coordinated economic warfare campaign. This means targeting the financial arteries of the Russian war machine — starting with its energy revenues. For instance, 75 percent of Russia's fossil fuel exports are sustained by China, India, and Turkey. My colleagues at FDD, Max Meizlish and John Hardie, have detailed how Russia has adapted to sanctions by utilizing state-owned enterprises and building sanctions-evading networks in places like China, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. These networks continue to fund and supply the Kremlin's war effort by enabling Moscow to import and export resources with few consequences.²⁸ Meizlish and Hardie recommend incrementally tightening enforcement of the G7 oil price cap to get prices as close to the cost of production as possible. Washington should also enforce secondary sanctions on Russia's enablers, designate shadow fleet tankers and their financiers, and extend price controls and restrictions to high-revenue sectors, like metals, minerals, nuclear fuel, and technology — recommendations I wholly endorse. Congress should also be prepared to use its authorities under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act to block the Trump administration from prematurely or inappropriately lifting sanctions.²⁹ Restrictions on Russia's defense industrial base, meanwhile, should remain in place regardless of any potential ceasefire deal.

Without cutting off Russia's access to global markets via secondary sanctions and strategic chokepoints, Russia's wartime economy will continue to adapt and recover. NATO must be prepared to stifle Moscow systemically, targeting the broader ecosystem that maintains Russia's footprint — not just in Ukraine but across its authoritarian operations worldwide.

6. Counter Russian Malign Influence Operations: Moscow — as well as Beijing and Tehran — is attempting to corrupt the information space by spreading propaganda and conducting cyber-enabled influence operations in the United States. Russia is attacking the American homeland, but because information is the weapon and cyberspace is the domain, the Kremlin is getting away with it. The Trump administration has spent the past four months dismantling capabilities at the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security that were designed to identify foreign malign influence campaigns and counter Russian and Chinese lies at home and

²⁸ Max Meizlish and John Hardie, "Trump's Russia Sanctions Toolkit," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 14, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/05/14/trumps-russia-sanctions-toolkit>)

²⁹ John Hardie, Peter Doran, Matthew Zweig, and Nick Stewart, "On Crimea and Russia Sanctions Relief, Congress Has Leverage," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 25, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/04/25/on-crimea-and-russia-sanctions-relief-congress-has-leverage>)

abroad.³⁰ Now, Washington is left wringing its hands as our adversaries undermine our civil society and weaken our alliances abroad. We must reverse this course and reconstitute U.S. capabilities to counter the lies of our adversaries.

7. Deepen Partnerships to Hold China Accountable for Supporting Russian Aggression:

Dictators and despots are using the ambiguity of the gray zone — coercion short of war — and cyber operations to pressure free nations. And these nations are enabling each other's aggression. The United States and its allies need new tools to counter this authoritarian playbook and, in particular, to hold China accountable for enabling the aggression of other members of the axis. The United States needs to work closely with its European allies to align export controls to prevent China from acquiring cutting-edge technology. Washington needs to push its European partners to make hard decisions to excise Chinese companies from critical infrastructure and sensitive supply chains. And most specifically for NATO, the United States should work with its allies to develop a playbook that not only counters Chinese economic coercion and financial warfare against Taiwan but also punishes Beijing for its support of Moscow's war machine. This playbook should cut across traditionally stove-piped authorities and develop responses that combine cyber, economic, military, legal, and diplomatic levers. Rather than being subject to the crisis of the moment, the playbook should have options that are pre-vetted and reviewed by the lawyers. As part of the playbook development, Washington should work closely with allies to analyze key intermediary components and materials that China needs in its support of Russia and for its ability to threaten Taiwan — and identify how to cut off supplies of these components. In anticipation of further Chinese aggression against Taiwan, this joint escalation playbook should plot a path for imposing significant costs up front, lest Beijing adapt to gradually increasing sanctions as Russia has done.³¹

8. Maintain U.S. Enablers and Force Posture in Europe: NATO's strength is not measured by how many nations it includes but by how quickly it can move and fight. That speed depends on U.S. enablers — strategic lift, logistics, intelligence, and command-and-control infrastructure — that no other ally can match. That is why maintaining — and forward-deploying — U.S. forces and equipment across Europe is essential to NATO's capabilities. NATO cannot afford to wait for a crisis to move resources across the Atlantic or through bottlenecks in the region. It must prepare for action — blending traditional deterrence with modern technology while maintaining enhanced air and naval assets. NATO must take on a more forward defense posture — pre-positioning forces and equipment in Poland and the Baltic states — expanding its permanent presence and upgrading the reliability of its mobility infrastructure in order to sustain combat operations.

One of NATO's greatest vulnerabilities remains the Suwalki Gap. In war, that corridor could be cut off by Russia in a matter of hours. Belarus — which served as a launchpad for the invasion of Ukraine — sits on one side. Kaliningrad, Russia's most militarized outpost in Europe, sits on the other. NATO must reduce its reliance on the corridor for transporting troops and equipment in a

³⁰ Ari Ben Am and Johanna Yang, "China and Russia Rejoice as the U.S. Cuts Its Global Media," *The National Interest*, April 13, 2025. (<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/authoritarians-rejoice-as-the-u-s-cuts-its-global-media>)

³¹ Craig Singleton, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, and Benjamin Jensen, "Targeting Taiwan: Beijing's Playbook for Economic and Cyber Warfare," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, October 4, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/10/04/targeting-taiwan>)

crisis. Instead, NATO forces, including U.S. forces, must already be pre-positioned in the Baltics and Poland before a crisis starts. For Putin, taking control of the Suwalki Gap is a low-cost and high-impact maneuver that could fracture NATO, isolate the Baltics, and call Article 5 into question. We cannot allow that scenario to remain viable.

U.S. force posture is critical in this exact scenario. The more than 80,000 forward stationed forces in Europe that serve as enablers and warfighters as well as the U.S. rotational fighting forces that serve in Poland and the Baltics must be at the front at the start of the crisis. Europe must do more to build its capacity of front-line forces in and near the Suwalki Gap and the Baltics, but the United States should not step back here. America can and should, however, withdraw the thousands of U.S. forces sent over to Europe to facilitate logistics and training for Ukrainian forces. As these missions are transferred to NATO and European responsibilities, these temporary, rotational forces should return to America.

9. Assign a U.S. Officer as Supreme Allied Commander Europe: The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) is the military commander of NATO — and an American officer has always filled the post. This has not just been out of tradition but also out of strategic necessity. The SACEUR also commands U.S. European Command (EUCOM) — a dual-hatted structure that gives NATO direct access to U.S. military equipment, manpower, and first-class intelligence and logistics capabilities, cyber support, operational planning, and nuclear deterrence. Without a U.S. commander as SACEUR, NATO may fail to coordinate with EUCOM and U.S. Strategic Command during a crisis — creating potential unnecessary and unprecedented disasters. Additionally, placing a non-American officer in this role would force American troops to operate under foreign command in a major Article 5 war. Were that to occur, it would be the first time American forces did so since World War I.³² Removing the integration between EUCOM and NATO commands would complicate nuclear command-and-control protocols, which currently allow for dual authority between the two commands.³³ Upending this integration risks creating gaps in decision-making during a contingency. As NATO continues to face Russian aggression, undermining a structure that has worked for decades would be a short-sighted move.

10. Stop Antagonizing Denmark Over Greenland: Denmark is a vital ally with strategic geography, a responsible Arctic presence, and a history of military cooperation with the United States dating back to World War II. Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, plays a strategically important role in U.S. missile defense and space surveillance. It hosts the Pituffik Space Base (formerly known as the Thule Air Base), the northernmost U.S. military installation, which provides early warning of missile launches and conducts more than 15,000 satellite contacts a year to support U.S. space surveillance capabilities. This installation is not just a Cold War relic — it is a frontline asset in modern deterrence, missile defense, and great power competition. At a time when Russia is reactivating Arctic bases — deploying S-400 air defense systems along its northern coast — and China is seeking economic ties to influence and

³² Valerie Insinna, “A non-American as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO? That’d be ‘problematic,’ Cavoli says,” *Breaking Defense*, April 3, 2025. (<https://breakingdefense.com/2025/04/a-non-american-as-supreme-allied-commander-of-nato-thatd-be-problematic-cavoli-says>)

³³ “Why SACEUR Has Always Been an American Officer?” *Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. (<https://shape.nato.int/page214845858>)

insert itself in polar governance frameworks, we should be working more closely with our allies, not bullying them.

Undermining our relationship with Denmark over Greenland's internal affairs is short-sighted and strategically reckless. In 2018, Copenhagen blocked a Chinese bid to build dual-use airport infrastructure in Greenland.³⁴ Denmark has also aligned its Arctic strategy with NATO priorities and actively supports U.S. basing and intelligence operations on its territory. Washington should be strengthening its partnership with Copenhagen to secure Arctic mobility, surveillance, and communications — not antagonizing one of our most capable and cooperative northern partners.

Conclusion

Geography and politics in Europe make defending the freedom and prosperity of democratic nations challenging. But NATO is well positioned for the task if its members invest in their own defense. This includes Washington. We cannot push our allies to increase defense spending while simultaneously cutting ours. We need a comprehensive effort: a defense budget that reflects today's challenges; the resilience to withstand cyber and gray zone assaults from our adversaries; and a clear-eyed commitment to our alliances. With those pillars, the United States and its NATO allies will once again prevail over the forces that threaten global peace and security, both in Europe and globally.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

³⁴ Patrik Andersson, "Greenland Eyes China Amid Denmark-US Tensions — But Chinese Investors Won't Rush In," *The Diplomat*, April 24, 2025. (<https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/greenland-eyes-china-amid-denmark-us-tensions-but-chinese-investors-wont-rush-in>)