

**Testimony of**  
**Laura K. Cooper**  
**Adjunct Assistant Professor, Georgetown University**  
**Russia's Use of Hybrid Warfare in Europe to Threaten U.S. Interests**  
**Subcommittee on Europe, House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
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Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss Russian hybrid threats to U.S. national security. This is my first appearance before Congress since my final assignment at the Pentagon as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia – capping 25 years of federal service – and the views I will express today are solely my own and rely upon publicly available information.

As we sit here in Washington, I can imagine Vladimir Putin gloating as he contemplates what he believes will be a successful outcome to his war against Ukraine and – relatedly – to his hybrid campaign in Europe. I believe that Russian victory in Ukraine or elsewhere in Europe is not by any means inevitable, and today I will discuss how we can turn the tide back in U.S. favor. I will first briefly characterize what's new about Moscow's tactics; second, consider how they fit into a broader Kremlin strategy against the United States and Europe; and, finally, offer thoughts on how to make sure Russia's hybrid tradecraft doesn't succeed.

**What's Old is New Again: Russia's Hybrid Campaign Today**

First, let's examine what we are dealing with in terms of a Russian hybrid campaign. What was a dribble of destructive actions from 2014-2022 has become a wave of attacks that has intensified and broadened in scope. After two rounds of U.S. and European expulsions of Russian intelligence operatives (the first in 2018, after the GRU used nerve agent against Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>, and then another round after Russia's large-scale invasion of

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<sup>1</sup> Harding, Luke. "A Chain of Stupidity: the Skripal case and the decline of Russia's spy agencies," *The Guardian*, June 23, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/23/skripal-salisbury-poisoning-decline-of-russia-spy-agencies-gru>

Ukraine in 2022<sup>2</sup>), Russia has increasingly relied upon criminals and sometimes unwitting citizens to commit sabotage for payment. We have seen Russian-linked individuals carry out well over one hundred acts of sabotage and attempted attacks in Europe since 2022<sup>3</sup>. At the low end, we're seeing vandalism and bomb threats. At higher ends of the spectrum, there's a host of disruptive and dangerous attacks that range from damage to railway lines, GPS jamming of aircraft, cuts in undersea cables, arson attacks, cyber attacks with physical effects on transportation<sup>4</sup>, explosions in warehouses and arms factories<sup>5</sup>, and assassination attempts such as the plot against the head of Rheinmetall, Germany's largest arms manufacturer<sup>6</sup>. In another potentially deadly scheme, bombs at DHL logistics hubs in 2024 in Germany, England, and Poland point to an attempt to get incendiary devices aboard planes.<sup>7</sup> On top of this, since September 2025 we have seen a dramatic uptick in menacing activity in the skies, including drones and balloons launched into NATO's eastern flank countries and incursions into NATO airspace by Russian fighter aircraft.

In parallel to this unprecedented volume and frequency of potentially lethal attacks, Russia has leveraged economic, political, and information tools against NATO members and to evade international sanctions. Russia and the Lukashenka regime in Belarus have weaponized illegal migration, sending waves of illegal migrants across borders into Finland, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Norway.<sup>8</sup> Russia's shadow fleet illegally ships oil and gas around the world in

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<sup>2</sup> Sabbagh, Dan, "Half of Russian spies in Europe expelled since Ukraine invasion, says MI6 Chief," *The Guardian*, July 21, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/21/half-of-russian-spies-in-europe-expelled-since-ukraine-invasion-says-mi6-chief>

<sup>3</sup> Bowser, Donald, "Russian Organized Crime and Links to Hybrid War in Europe," Globsec, November 2025. [https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/russias-crime-terror-nexus-criminality-tool-hybrid-warfare-europe?\\_\\_cf\\_chl=tk=hro4AYiWWQu4rVi\\_ZIN\\_gdntq3ciADyptiAKnfB.S4o-1763485871-1.0.1.1-ZvzNLORHcN1JK9xpmxFcQ3mCUdyWxLGcniYRm1r83ww](https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/russias-crime-terror-nexus-criminality-tool-hybrid-warfare-europe?__cf_chl=tk=hro4AYiWWQu4rVi_ZIN_gdntq3ciADyptiAKnfB.S4o-1763485871-1.0.1.1-ZvzNLORHcN1JK9xpmxFcQ3mCUdyWxLGcniYRm1r83ww)

<sup>4</sup> CSIS, "Significant Cyber Incidents." <https://www.csis.org/programs/strategic-technologies-program/significant-cyber-incidents>

<sup>5</sup> David Ignatius, "Russia Is Punching Back at NATO in the Shadows," *Washington Post*, June 21, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/06/21/russia-nato-ukraine-sabotage-attacks/>. Krassen Nikolov, "Explosions at Bulgarian Arms Factory Set to Export to Ukraine," Euractiv, June 26, 2023.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/explosions-at-bulgarian-arms-factory-set-to-export-to-ukraine>

<sup>6</sup> Barnes, Julian, Lara Jakes, and Christopher Schuetze, "U.S. Uncovers Russian Plot to Assassinate CEO of German Arms Maker," *New York Times*, July 11, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Pancevski, Bojan, Thomas Grove, Max Colchester, Daniel Michaels, "Russia Suspected of Plotting to Send Incendiary Devices on U.S.-Bound Planes," *Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/russia-plot-us-planes-incendiary-devices-de3b8c0a>; Jones, Sam, John Paul Rathbone, and Richard Milne, "Russian Plotting Sabotage Across Europe, Intelligence Agencies

<sup>8</sup> Jones, Seth. "Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank" CSIS November 17, 2025. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/deterrence-natos-eastern-flank>

contravention of sanctions. Russia has mounted campaigns to interfere in democratic elections, including most recently pumping hundreds of millions of euros into what turned out to be an unsuccessful plot to disrupt Moldova's election.<sup>9</sup> To drain U.S. and European support for Ukraine, Russia projects an image of inevitable victory with propaganda that minimizes Russia's dire casualties and paints a false picture of swift Russian advances in the east of Ukraine<sup>10</sup>.

### **The Hybrid Pillar of Russia's Ukraine War Strategy**

Let's put these hybrid operations in context. In the lower end cases, they seem indistinguishable from the sorts of terrorist acts we've seen from ISIS – only these have a state sponsor. Such Russian operations may seem like throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what might stick. However, we should not view these attacks as random acts of violence by reckless Russian operatives and their proxies. While these operations no doubt are opportunistic and flexible, these types of hybrid attacks fall under the umbrella of Kremlin-sanctioned warfare, while drawing on Russia's long tradition of using “active measures” which are “covert and deniable political influence and subversion operations, from corruption and disinformation through to outright assassination and even sponsorship of coups.”<sup>11</sup> In the United States, we tend to talk about competition short of armed conflict, but this term and even the term “hybrid warfare” are originally Western terms<sup>12</sup>. The Institute for the Study of War notes that Moscow views that “hybrid war” as “a strategic-level effort to shape the governance and geostrategic

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<sup>9</sup> Wethington, Olin, “How Moldova's democracy succeeded against Russian interference,” *New Atlanticist*, October 23, 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/how-moldovas-democracy-succeeded-against-russian-interference/>

<sup>10</sup> “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment,” Institute for the Study of War. December 9, 2025. <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-92025/#:~:text=ISW%20has%20observed%20evidence%20to%20assess%20that,or%20about%2083%20casualties%20per%20square%20kilometer.>

<sup>11</sup> Galeotti, Mark. “Active Measures: Russia's Covert Global Reach,” *Russia's Global Reach: a Security and Statecraft Assessment*. Graeme P. Herd, editor. George C. Marshall Center, 2021 (Chapter 14) <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/marshall-center-books/russias-global-reach-security-and-statecraft-assessment/chapter-14-active-measures-russias-covert-global-reach>

<sup>12</sup> Goransson, Markus, “Understanding Russian Thinking on Gibrudnaya Vodna”, 2021, <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph-detail?docid=b-9781788317795&tocid=b-9781788317795-chapter6>

orientation of a target state in which all actions, *up to and including the use of conventional military forces in regional conflicts*, are subordinate to an information campaign.”<sup>13</sup>

So how does this hybrid war fit into Russia’s larger strategy? Russia’s strategic calculus on hybrid war in Europe is enmeshed in its objectives for its conventional war against Ukraine. The Kremlin’s immediate goal is to drive down European and American support for Ukraine by trying to create a sense of insecurity and fear. The larger, long-standing Russian goal is to exploit fractures within the NATO alliance, including those not of its making, and undermine NATO’s effectiveness, including its ability to deter Russian aggression in the broader region. Further, Russia’s information strategy seeks to use threats about potential Russian use of conventional or nuclear force to intimidate the United States and Europe into inaction. I believe weakness in our response to Russia’s war of conquest in Ukraine and hesitancy in our response to this hybrid campaign in turn lead to further Russian escalation. Right now, I think Putin perceives he’s succeeding in intimidating governments and exploiting frictions between the United States and Europe (as well as within Europe), fueling his appetite to press on.

### **How to Regain U.S. Initiative and Advantage**

How do we disrupt this cycle of Russian escalation and regain initiative to protect and defend U.S. interests? There are dozens of reasonable steps we can take. They range from increased sanctions and more robust sanctions enforcement to clamping down on Russia’s shadow fleet; bolstering NATO’s Eastern Sentry operation with the latest counter-drone and air defense capabilities; showing vigilance against undersea threats; and, more broadly, exercising a unified NATO response playbook for hybrid threat response. The bottom line is that we need to show the Kremlin that we are aware of what it is trying to do and that it will fail to achieve its war aims. This means visibly supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine in their defense of Ukraine’s very existence, and it means working closely with NATO Allies on a unified response to Russia’s hybrid war across Europe to show Putin he can neither divide nor intimidate us.

On Ukraine, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)’s inclusion of resources for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative is a good start to signal Moscow that the United

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<sup>13</sup> “Russian Hybrid Warfare.” Institute for the Study of War, September 2020.  
<https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-hybrid-warfare-2/>

States stands by Ukraine, but it provides a fraction of wartime requirements. When the United States outsourced support for Ukraine to Europe earlier this year, our message to Putin was essentially that his strategy of division is working. We also stymied the burgeoning – and much needed – partnership between the U.S. defense sector and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, one of most powerful and innovative militaries of the future. Walking away from Ukraine security assistance comes with a high risk that European support alone will not be able to deny Putin his objectives. After all, if Russia succeeds in Ukraine, Putin’s ambitions for elsewhere in Europe could go well beyond the hybrid war. This is another reason why Congressional support for U.S. troop presence in Europe, reflected in the NDAA, sends an important message to Putin of U.S. interests in a secure Europe, our number one security and trade partner.

Finally, I will defer to colleagues with China expertise to drill down on Beijing’s actions, but I want to highlight that increasingly the Russia challenge and the China challenge are inextricably intertwined. Russia is highly dependent on China, and China has a strong interest in seeing Russia succeed in the war against Ukraine, especially if it demonstrates that the United States is unwilling to stand up for its interests. At the strategic level, China is watching to see how the West responds to Russia’s hybrid warfare, whether it rewards Russian aggression, and if the United States turns its back on its Allies and partners. At the operational level, on the one side, the United States has backed away from direct security assistance support for Ukraine’s military – complicating our ability to learn first-hand from Ukraine’s battlefield innovation including drone technology. On the other side, China, along with Russia’s war profiteering partners Iran and DPRK, stand to learn from Russia’s battlefield lessons. We’ve already seen that China has access to Russian missile, electronic warfare, and air defense technology.<sup>14</sup> This authoritarian quartet sees eye to eye on one critical issue – the desire to degrade U.S. power. Any U.S. strategy to protect our national interests in Europe must account for the fact that the United States is unlikely to be successful in driving a wedge between Russia and China. Instead, we need to forge a unified approach with NATO and our Indo-Pacific Allies to deter and defend against both Moscow and Beijing.

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<sup>14</sup> Racz, Andras and Alina Hrytsenko, “Partnership Short of Alliance: Military Cooperation Between Russia and China,” CEPA, June 16, 2025. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/partnership-short-of-alliance-military-cooperation-between-russia-and-china/>