

Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
on “Understanding and Deterring Russia: U.S. Policies and Strategies”

Statement of Evelyn N. Farkas, Ph.D.
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia/Ukraine/Eurasia
@EvelynNFarkas

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Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, Members of the Committee, Russia poses a geostrategic threat to the United States and our interests. Indeed, last week Secretary Carter ranked it first among the threats faced by our country.

It is unfortunate and almost absurd in the 21st century to have Russia and the United States opposed to one another on fundamentals and most foreign policy issues. But the reality is that the Russian government is pursuing policies that run counter to U.S. national security interests and values.

The Kremlin's objectives are clear: 1) Retain President Putin's position as the leader of the Russian Federation, preserving the autocratic political system and mafia-style crony economy that together comprise “Putinism”; 2) Restore Russia’s status as a great power; 3) Rewrite the international rules and norms to prevent intervention in states to protect its citizens; 4) Maintain political control of Russia’s geographical periphery; and if possible, 5) Break NATO, the European Union and transatlantic unity.

President Putin’s drive to achieve these objectives has raised tension between Russia and the United States. To demonstrate Russia's great power, or "equal among equals" status, Russia has worked not simply to balance U.S. power, but to check it. Divergent policies regarding democracy and sovereignty have become a greater obstacle to cooperative bilateral relations as the Kremlin implements its agenda. The United States advocates for democracies where civil society checks the powers of the state, and supports the rights of citizens to turn out their despots and vote in new leaders. Putin is incensed by Arab springs and European color revolutions; his latest military operation in Syria aims to protect the dictator from the people he has gassed, barrel bombed and forced to flee en masse.

By the time Putin took office again as president in 2012, it was clear due to falling oil prices, and corruption that his earlier bargain with the Russian people – economic improvement in exchange for a free governing hand -- was no longer sustainable. The Kremlin adopted a nationalist, revisionist, anti-American foreign policy. Putin went beyond bemoaning the demise of the Soviet Union, and blaming the West for an epic

Russian humiliation to a public determination to rebuild the Russian sphere of influence. For good measure, he injected an element of a culture war into his policy by attacking the West for its moral turpitude (mainly based on our advancement of equal rights regardless of sexual orientation and identity). He worked actively to counter NATO and EU expansion, favoring competition over cooperation.

To achieve his objectives, Putin ramped up political and economic subversion and intimidation throughout Eurasia, funding anti-Western, pro-Russian and/or fringe NGOs and political parties in its periphery and in NATO countries. His government continued to exert economic pressure through its near monopoly of oil and gas supply and corrupt ties with elites worldwide. The Kremlin increased its use of lies and propaganda to influence ethnic Russian populations and the international community and to confuse policy debates. And Russia again invaded a neighboring country and occupied its territory. The Kremlin continues to use force in its periphery, and now in the Middle East, to hold a veto over sovereign state policies and gain leverage for diplomatic negotiations.

Underpinning Russia's aggressive foreign policy is a modernizing military. Since 2008, when the shortcomings of Russia's military became evident in the aftermath of the invasion of Georgia, the Kremlin embarked in earnest on a plan to reorganize and modernize the Russian armed forces. The modernization effort -- \$700 billion over ten years -- applies to all the services, but has focused on developing key conventional and asymmetric capabilities.

Meanwhile, military doctrine had evolved -- dangerously. Starting with the 2000 Military Doctrine Russia declared -- in a bid to compensate for its conventional weakness relative to the United States and its allies -- the right to first use of a nuclear weapon in response to a conventional attack that put the existence of the state at risk. In addition, the Russian armed forces developed a further means to attempt to deter the West using nuclear or asymmetric weapons -- the concept of "escalating to de-escalate." The rationale is that by raising the price to the adversary -- through a cyberattack or limited use of a nuclear weapon -- Russia could force the enemy to capitulate.

We've seen what Russia can do even with its unfinished military modernization in advancement of the Kremlin's objectives. In response, we must use all elements of U.S. national power - diplomatic, economic, informational and military - to pressure Russia to reverse course.

If Russia wins its aims -- Ukraine remains ungovernable, territories in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova remain occupied, and Assad remains in power -- Putin's Kremlin will be emboldened to use military force again and again to achieve its foreign (and domestic) policy objectives. At stake is no less than the post-World War II world order, which simultaneously enshrined territorial state sovereignty and human and minority rights.

The United States must counter and resist Russia's actions through a combination of deterrence, strengthening our allies and partners and communicating the truth about the Kremlin's actions to the international community.

On the diplomatic front, in Europe we must now double down with the international community to press Russia to withdraw Russian forces from eastern Ukraine and Crimea and restore Ukraine's territorial integrity. This means implementing the Minsk agreements, which grant greater autonomy to the Russian-backed separatist regions of eastern Ukraine in exchange for Russian withdrawal. And, in the Middle East, we must gain economic and military leverage against Assad and Putin before we will succeed in negotiations.

International diplomacy must be coupled with and strengthened by positive and negative economic and military measures. I urge Congress to ratify and support the implementation of the trade agreements negotiated by President Obama – the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) and U.S.-E.U. Free Trade Agreement (TTIP). Congress should also authorize and appropriate greater economic, trade and investment assistance to Ukraine and the other vulnerable Russian neighbors who have opted to seek association with the European Union.

Simultaneously, we must maintain the broad U.S. and European sanctions on Russia related to Ukraine, while continuing narrow sanctions aimed at Russia's defense sector until Russian troops redeploy from Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova (all countries where they are present without the consent of the sovereign governments). We should also consider placing new sanctions on Russia for the humanitarian impact of their military operation in Syria and their failure to act in good faith in the war on ISIS and in the Syrian peace process. Such sanctions should be implemented in concert not only with the EU members already sanctioning Russia, but all European states, including Turkey, and our Middle Eastern allies.

The Defense Department should no longer do any business with Russia. This means that no rockets used by the U.S. defense industry should be Russian -- nor should Russian scientists be involved in our rocket launches. And Congress should authorize and appropriate for a new foreign military assistance fund to help allies and partners throughout Europe and Afghanistan transition from Russian to U.S. military equipment. Finally, we must work with Germany and other allies to meet Europe's natural gas demand in way that gives them leverage against Moscow, not the other way around, and benefits U.S. companies and alternative suppliers.

On the military front, we must deter Russia from further military action. I enthusiastically applaud the President and Secretary Carter's decision to more than quadruple-down on the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to establish a true deterrent to Russian military action against NATO. I urge the members of this committee to authorize the funds requested for ERI for exercises, training, positioning

equipment and rotating troops through the vulnerable Baltic and Balkan countries and Poland, and to work to ensure that future funding for ERI is included in the base budget. In addition, Congress should urge the Pentagon to provide an aviation brigade to support the armored brigade combat team. Finally, as the Army implements the plan for the new brigade Congress should keep an eye on readiness and, if necessary, be willing to reconsider current endstrength limits.

On the non-NATO periphery, Congress should continue to support beefing up security assistance to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova to defend their territory. The military assistance provided from 2014 to the end of 2015 – over \$260 million, well over \$40 million and over \$30 million in equipment and training to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, respectively -- has much improved those militaries. Future assistance should expand the current territorial defense training for Ukraine to cover a greater portion of their armed forces and this model should be applied to Georgia and Moldova. We must push for faster NATO implementation of the assistance package Georgia received at the NATO summit last year. Our European partners should work with us on training in territorial defense for Georgia, distinct from the counterterrorism training we provide before Georgians deploy with us – as the second largest troop contributor – to Afghanistan. Not least, we should provide all three countries with anti-tank weapons, so that they can have a chance to deter the larger, more ready Russian forces.

In Syria, we must use all U.S. influence to get our allies engaged on the battlefield and to provide equipment and other support to the Syrian opposition. We are already in a proxy war; let's not lose it and the peace Syria needs so badly by failing to garner necessary leverage against Asad and Putin. If we do also succeed in finding economic and other leverage, this could mitigate the need for more fighting, but it is unavoidable now.

And across the Caucasus and Central Asia we should advance our interest in energy diversity for Europe, counterterrorism cooperation and an open land and air supply route to and from Afghanistan. We must continue to offer those countries an alternative partner to Russia. We must finish our work in Afghanistan so it is never again a haven for terrorism against the United States, but also so Kabul can withstand ill-intentioned outside interference, including from Russia. Finally, if we could devise a snap solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, which would freeze Russia out, this master stroke would give Armenia the option to regain its full sovereignty and catch up economically with its neighbors.

On the unconventional front, Congress should continue to support the Special Operations Command and its components' work with NATO and partner countries to help thwart Putin's "little green men." Allied ability to deter, prevent and respond to Russian cyber operations must be improved and we must protect U.S. military assets and edge in space. In the nuclear realm, if Russia cannot be brought into compliance with the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, we and our allies must be prepared,

regrettably, to deploy intermediate forces to NATO territory in Europe to ensure effective nuclear deterrence, as we did in the 1980s.

The United States must also work proactively to put out accurate information on Russian policy and actions and also improve current efforts to counter Russian propaganda. We need a dedicated team like the one being established as the new State Department Global Engagement Center to counter radical Islamic terrorists' messages. Such a Russia-focused team should be supported by an intelligence cell tasked with pushing declassified and reclassified intelligence to share with the public, allies and partners. And our cyber expertise should be applied to exposing Russian so-called "trolls" and generally foiling Russian message campaigns.

We must be strong and united with our allies and partners worldwide and resolute towards Russian bad behavior. But we need not enter a new Cold War or an across-the-board stand off with Russia. Where the Kremlin is open to cooperation and there are mutual interests we should work with Moscow. We should also maintain a dialogue to foster as much transparency as possible – recognizing that the Kremlin manufactures lies with impunity – to reduce the risks of misperception and miscalculation and to be ready for opportunities to cooperate. Specifically, when it comes to the most dangerous aspect of our relationship, nuclear weapons and strategic stability – the combined conventional and nuclear balance between Russia and the United States – we must exchange views and information.

If we take the actions described above in conjunction with our allies and partners worldwide we will raise the price for Putin of achieving his international objectives – controlling the countries on Russia's periphery and rewriting the international rules. Russia will be forced to reconsider its approach. Then, perhaps, the pent-up and misguided human resources of the Russian people can be directed towards a future that is economically, politically and culturally better for all citizens of the Russian Federation and Russians beyond its borders. And we will have successfully managed what is currently the greatest potential geostrategic threat to U.S. national security interests.