

Statement by

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Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on policy matters related to the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) area of responsibility. I would like to express my appreciation for the continued support from Congress, and this Committee, in shaping and resourcing the Department of Defense's efforts in this region. It is an honor to appear beside General Wolters, an outstanding partner.

Today I will highlight the most important foundation of all Department of Defense efforts in this theater – our Alliances. Then, I will describe our strategic approach to Europe, the importance of NATO, and capability issues of note, followed by a narrative assessing regional threats and challenges.

The Department's Approach to Strategic Competition

The United States' greatest strategic asset is our Alliances. For decades, alongside our European Allies and partners, we led and sustained a stable, open, and rules-based international system. Allies stood by our side against common threats and adversaries and helped advance our shared interests and values. Today, the global landscape is changing. A range of threats that do not respect borders, coupled with a redistribution of power, challenge the rules-based international order. To compete in this new landscape, the Department of Defense is heeding the call of the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance and engaging our transatlantic friends with renewed vigor, reclaiming our place in international institutions, and revitalizing America's unmatched network of allies and partners.

On numerous occasions, President Biden and Secretary Austin have stated that the transatlantic alliance is the essential forum for consultation, decision, and action, and the

foundation on which our collective security and our shared prosperity are built.

As strategic competitors continue to invest heavily in efforts to check U.S. strengths and prevent us from defending our interests, the Department of Defense is leaning forward and engaging with Europe and Israel. We are harnessing our network of allies and partners to deter aggression from China and Russia, to contend with persistent threats from North Korea, Iran, and terrorist groups, and to adapt to emerging challenges like cyber threats, climate change, and digital authoritarianism. We are consulting with key Allies, such as the UK, France, Germany, and Italy, on shared global challenges that threaten the rules-based international order, including disinformation, malign cyber activity, attempts to restrict access to maritime, space, and cyber domains, and actions that weaken multilateral institutions and treaties that for decades have underpinned our security and prosperity. At NATO, we are working more effectively with Allies to ensure military readiness and enhance a combat-credible deterrent across the transatlantic community. We are prioritizing efforts to build the capacity, and support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations, of Ukraine and Georgia, strategic partners on the frontline of Russian aggression, as we continue to monitor closely Russia's provocative actions in the region. And we will continue to forward-deploy forces to bolster the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture. To this end, the Secretary of Defense is conducting a comprehensive Department-wide global posture review to ensure alignment of U.S. overseas force presence with Presidential national security priorities. In this increasingly competitive environment, our security remains grounded in a free and prosperous Europe, and a credible and strong NATO.

The Department's Strategic Approach to Europe

The Department is reinvigorating our alliances and partnerships to bolster our military advantage in Europe. With a realistic understanding of the threat, we continue to expand our

access, basing, and overflight agreements. Dynamic Force Employment and a robust exercise program with allies and partners improve interoperability and demonstrate a strong commitment to collective defense. To assess our strategic readiness, we are also conducting the DEFENDER exercise series and other multi-domain exercises in the European theater of operation.

Additionally, our access and basing agreements allow forward positioning of equipment, munitions, and materiel. They also enable rapid transition of forces to the front lines, ease strategic air and sea lift requirements for units deploying from the United States, and reassure allies and partners while deterring adversaries.

We are working to improve the resilience of front-line states, especially Ukraine and Georgia, our strategic partners facing Russian aggression. The Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative is a key component of U.S. efforts to strengthen the capacity of Ukraine's forces to preserve the country's territorial integrity, continue building NATO interoperability, and implement defense sector reforms. As a result of intensified conflict in the South Caucasus last year, Russia now has ground forces in all three South Caucasus countries -- strengthening a strong influence in the region.

Bipartisan, bicameral support of the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) and the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI) are also key components in ensuring U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) can confront the challenges in deterring aggression and retaining long-term advantages. The EDI provides one of the primary funding sources for USEUCOM to adjust posture in response to the changing security environment, support rotational force deployments, make infrastructure investments, and deliver needed capabilities in key locations throughout Europe. The BSI specifically enables our Baltic Allies to address shared national security threats by augmenting Baltic national funding for capability gaps and modernization. Any additional

funds, including those under the EDI, the BSI, or other appropriations, will allow the Department to expand efforts to invest in programs and further bolster NATO's ability to respond decisively to potential Russian aggression.

Importance of NATO and European Partners

NATO, and Europe, are vital to U.S. strategy. NATO's most important task is to deter aggression against its members and to be ready to fight and win should deterrence fail. To that end, all NATO Allies share in the responsibility to procure, prepare, and provide the ready and interoperable forces and capabilities necessary to present a credible deterrence. By engaging in baseline peacetime activities, and through the European Deterrence and NATO Readiness Initiatives, the United States continues to strengthen our collective deterrence and defense in step with our European Allies.

We are continuously engaging with NATO Allies, through NATO and bilaterally, to ensure that NATO is prepared for modern challenges and is able to deter aggression from any adversary. Allies have made considerable progress on the "three c's" of responsibility sharing: cash, contributions, and capabilities.

Although we are encouraged by the fact that we are now in our seventh year of steady NATO defense spending increases by our Allies, and we expect this trend to continue, we continue to encourage our NATO Allies strongly to increase their defense budgets, increase their procurement of needed capabilities, and increase their contributions to NATO operations. Having capabilities and contributions tomorrow depends on devoting cash today. Allies are answering the call for greater investment. Between 2016 and 2020, non-U.S. investment increased by more than \$130 billion. The accumulated increase in defense spending by the end of 2024 is projected to be \$400 billion. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting

economic strength, NATO Allies remain committed to addressing the security threats that have not diminished.

Allies have been reassured by Secretary Austin's consistent messaging on Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The U.S. commitment remains ironclad, and the United States will continue to be a reliable security partner committed to the transatlantic bond. We will continue to work with NATO Allies to share responsibilities equitably and invest in our comparative advantages to ensure NATO's deterrence and defense posture is fit to meet the security challenges facing the Alliance. The Department continues to prioritize working with NATO Allies to improve their readiness, increase allied speed of decision making, and to improve military mobility across Europe.

In addition to regular engagement with our NATO Allies, the Department continues to pursue, and emphasize, close coordination between NATO and the European Union (EU). One area of particular importance in this coordination is military mobility. The ability to move forces seamlessly across Europe is a flagship of NATO-EU cooperation, with similar endeavors focusing on resilience and other areas of mutual interest. There are ongoing NATO and EU efforts to defend against Russian hybrid efforts and to ensure European societies and infrastructure are ready and able to support NATO operations on the continent should they be necessary. We remain supportive of EU efforts to develop a host of its own defense initiatives, but the EU must not duplicate, and should complement, NATO's intended efforts, and should also remain transparent and open to non-EU NATO Allies to maximize our ability to deter common adversaries effectively.

Nuclear Deterrence

NATO's commitment to deterring nuclear attack against the Alliance remains a backstop

of transatlantic security. The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capabilities is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. The United States continues to make available its strategic nuclear forces for the defense of NATO, and they are the supreme guarantee of the security of NATO Allies. The independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance. In addition to strategic forces, the United States continues to forward-deploy nuclear weapons to Europe. These weapons, combined with U.S. and Allied dual-capable aircraft and supporting infrastructure, tangibly demonstrate Alliance cohesion and resolve through an equitable and sustainable distribution of roles, responsibilities, and burdens. The presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in NATO countries for the last 50 years have contributed to the successful deterrence of aggression against the Alliance, continue to backstop our conventional deterrent, and provide an essential political and military link between Europe and North America. As Secretary Austin has attested, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear weapons exist.

Missile Defense

Missile defense is another critical capability where continued investments in Europe demonstrate the United States' enduring commitment to transatlantic security. Missile defense plays a critical role in NATO's defense of Europe from coercion and aggression. Interoperable NATO missile defense systems will improve the Alliance's collective defense capabilities and strengthen our own security.

The Department is committed to completing the deployment of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), which is the U.S. contribution to NATO ballistic missile defense and will expand defensive coverage against medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missile

threats from the Middle East. The EPAA includes an AN/TPY-2 radar located in Turkey, BMD-capable destroyers homeported in Rota, Spain, the first operational Aegis Ashore system in Romania, and an Aegis Ashore system in Poland that is under construction.

In addition to these EPAA capabilities, individual NATO Allies are also fielding national air and missile defense systems designed to defend against shorter-range ballistic and cruise missiles. These active defenses will play a crucial role in countering missile strikes that underpin potential adversaries' anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) operations to limit U.S. power projection through missile attacks on U.S. forces, allies, and critical in-theater infrastructure.

Arms Control

Russia's repeated misinformation, disinformation, and diplomatic campaign concerning its numerous violations of multiple treaties and political commitments over the years underscores its short-term national interest-centered approach to arms control, in contrast with the norms-building approach favored by many Western states. We recognize the reality that the relationship with Russia remains challenging, but reducing the risks of an arms race is crucial to our national security. Extending the New START Treaty is one example of where the United States and Russia found mutual interest in maintaining verifiable limits on their respective strategic nuclear arsenals. This Administration's decision to extend the New START Treaty was in the national security interest of the United States, and is only the beginning of U.S. efforts to engage Russia and other countries to reduce nuclear threats. As directed by President Biden, the United States will explore strategic stability discussions with Russia on a range of arms control and emerging security issues. We also recognize a second reality. If the United States does not make the investments necessary to field a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent beyond the service lives of its existing nuclear forces, Russia and other competitors will have little incentive

to engage in meaningful and effective arms control negotiations. Based on historical experience, the United States has the best chance of achieving its goals in arms control negotiations when our negotiating partners see a U.S. commitment to nuclear modernization in the budget. In short, leverage still matters, and a modernizing U.S. nuclear force provides the best chance to incentivize Russia, and eventually others, to participate productively in future negotiations.

Russia

Russia has chosen to become an enduring and increasingly aggressive adversary that continues to be a primary security challenge for the United States and Europe. The Kremlin regime's core security interests remain inimical to those of the United States, and Russia is likely to threaten our interests for the foreseeable future as it continues its attempts to dominate the other sovereign states in the region and to assert itself as a global power broker.

Moscow is clear about its intent to shape a new world order more favorable to its interests and consistent with its authoritarian model. It has demonstrated its flagrant disregard for international law by infringing on the sovereignty of other states, including our own, often in the form of election interference and social media manipulation in attempts to sow disunion and mistrust. Russia has adopted a full-spectrum approach, including "hybrid" and malign influence activities, to advance its interests with the goal of avoiding a military response. It also has used military force and other acts of coercion to achieve its foreign policy objectives and to intimidate other sovereign states. In violation of international law, Russia has used chemical weapons to poison dissidents at home and abroad.

Russia continues an investment strategy designed to expand and modify its conventional and nuclear forces to offset NATO and U.S. conventional military advantages and missile defense programs. This includes fielding nuclear-armed intercontinental hypersonic weapons

and approximately two-thousand non-strategic nuclear weapons, including dual-capable sea- and land-based cruise missiles. Its nuclear arsenal is purposeful in its design and backs a military doctrine that emphasizes the coercive military value of nuclear weapons, including limited nuclear first-use in a regional conflict. Additionally, we can expect Russia to use its nuclear capabilities to deter potential forceful response to its activities in the grey zone. And although the prospects of a war with Russia are still low, we are likely to face Russian systems and methods of warfare as Russia proliferates military capabilities to others.

Russia is also working to integrate devastating operations in space and cyberspace into its plans to undermine NATO's advantages. Russia has already demonstrated its potent cyber capabilities against U.S., allied, and partner targets. Although the Russian Government publicly claims it does not intend to weaponize space, it blatantly continues to modernize develop and test its space-based and ground-based weapons intended to disrupt U.S. command and control, communications, and intelligence capabilities that provide force-multiplying effects in every domain. In the space and cyber domains, the Department is ensuring that the United States identifies and develops the right capabilities and strategies to defend U.S. interests and to sustain our advantages. The Department is also working with allies and partners to ensure our collective capabilities provide an effective deterrent and guarantee operational freedom of maneuver to sustain our advantages.

China

We are working with European allies and partners, both bilaterally and through NATO, to understand and address the challenges posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC). As Secretary Austin often asserts, China is the Department's pacing challenge. The PRC seeks to improve its warfighting capabilities through insights drawn from advanced militaries in Europe

and elsewhere, and we encourage allies and partners to think carefully through the types of engagements they conduct with the People's Liberation Army. Although many investments are beneficial, some PRC investments in Europe's critical infrastructure and technology, including telecommunications, ports, railways, and cutting-edge technologies with military application, require careful screening to ensure they do not pose a threat to NATO's security. The Department encourages counterpart governments to consider stronger processes and laws requiring foreign investment reviews, supply chain protections, and export controls to help blunt these PRC activities and to ensure that critical infrastructure and technologies are protected in the interest of national security. We agree with the European Union, which last year labelled China a systemic rival.

The PRC and Russia do collaborate across a variety of arenas, including their joint military exercises in the Baltic Sea and Russia. At the same time, there are potential areas of competition between the two despite their recent efforts to showcase high-level bilateral engagement. We continue to monitor this cooperation alongside our allies and partners, as well as the PRC and Russia's respective efforts to undermine the international rules-based order. Although the threats have increased, we are revitalizing and strengthening our alliances and partnerships to be able to meet these threats.

The Arctic

The Department's approach to the Arctic is described in the 2019 Arctic Strategy, which focuses on strategic competition as the principal challenge to long-term U.S. security and prosperity. The Department's desired end-state for the Arctic is "a secure and stable region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is defended, and nations work cooperatively to address challenges."

The Arctic Strategy establishes three defense objectives that guide the Department's approach to addressing strategic competition in the Arctic: 1) defend the homeland; 2) compete when necessary to maintain a favorable regional balance of power; and 3) ensure access to critical domains remains free and open.

The immediate prospect of conflict in the Arctic is low, but the Department maintains a realistic approach to the differing effects of competitors' activities on U.S. interests in the region and beyond. Russia's military investments in the Arctic contribute to its territorial defense yet also may have strategic implications for future access to the region. The PRC is seeking a role in Arctic governance, despite it having no territorial claims in the region, and there is a risk that the PRC may repeat predatory economic behavior in the Arctic that it has exhibited in other regions to further its strategic ambitions.

The Department is taking steps to enhance the Joint Force's ability to operate in the Arctic and project power through the region and beyond, both independently and in cooperation with allies and partners. Enhanced domain awareness, regular exercises and training, interoperable supporting infrastructure, and extreme cold weather resilience are mutual areas of development we are pursuing with allies and partners. The changing environment in the Arctic highlights the need to maintain the full range of navigation and overflight rights and freedoms guaranteed by international law to both military forces and lawful commerce.

Finally, our network of allies and partners is a key strategic advantage for the United States in the Arctic and is the cornerstone of the Department's strategic approach to the region. Six of the seven other Arctic nations are either NATO Allies or NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partners. Our allies and partners are highly capable and proficient in the Arctic region's operating conditions, and they share the United States' interest in maintaining the international

rules-based order – including in the Arctic region. Defense cooperation with allies and partners complements wider U.S. Government Arctic cooperation in forums such as the Arctic Council, which includes the United States, Canada, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden as members.

With the Department’s 2019 Arctic Strategy, and a strong network of allies and partners, we believe we have the right strategic approach to address the unique challenges of this dynamic region.

Europe’s Eastern Flank

NATO's Eastern Flank remains a focus of U.S. force posture in response to an increasingly aggressive Russia in the Baltic and Black Sea regions. In 2015, under Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE, the United States began rotating forces through and along the Eastern Flank to reassure our allies and deter Russia. This continues to be a Departmental priority, and we welcome the support of our NATO Allies through their contributions to enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic Sea region, tailored Forward Presence (tFP) in the Black Sea region, and their respective Air Policing missions.

Poland

Poland is a hub for these European deterrence efforts. As a result, the Department has increased its rotational presence in Poland, including through the deployment of a rotational Armored Brigade Combat Team, a combat aviation detachment, a U.S. battalion leading the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group, the newly established V Corps Forward Command Post, and a planned AEGIS-Ashore facility. The United States has on average 4,500 rotational personnel in Poland, though the numbers fluctuate depending on exercise and deployment schedules.

In August 2020, the United States and the Government of Poland signed an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which, along with providing important legal protections for U.S. personnel operating in Poland, created an innovative cost-sharing framework. The EDCA sets out how Poland will fund logistical and infrastructure support for U.S. operating locations in Poland, except for those pertaining to ballistic missile defense and eFP. It is flexible and scalable to match the evolving deterrence and posture needs of the United States, Poland, and NATO.

The Baltics

In the Baltic region, the Department is bolstering the Eastern Flank Allies through security cooperation and capacity-building initiatives targeted at improving defense and security infrastructure in the Baltics and strengthening national resilience. NATO's enhanced air policing over the Baltics reinforces NATO's collective defense, demonstrating NATO's cohesion and the collective resolve of NATO Allies to implement deterrence through defense cooperation. The Baltic States support NATO's enhanced Forward Presence by hosting NATO battlegroups to help maintain an effective deterrent against Russia in the Baltic region. The United States stepped up security cooperation since 2015 following Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea and aggression in Eastern Ukraine. The Department is providing nearly \$100 million for joint procurement of large-caliber ammunition and more than \$70 million in training and equipping programs to the Baltics to build the capacity of the national military or national-level security forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to conduct border-security operations. The Department intends to continue with exercises and the periodic deployment of forces to the Baltic States to strengthen deterrence and to catalyze the efforts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to develop their national defense.

Thanks to continued strong congressional support, such as enactment of the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI) in the Defense Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2021, the Department continues to invest in programs in the Baltics to deter Russian aggression, increase interoperability, and support modernization. The budget request included \$45 million for Baltic Air Defense Programs, which will invest in capabilities aligned with the Baltic Nations' own national defense plans and with U.S. European Command and NATO plans. We greatly appreciate the congressional support for these capacity-building efforts in the Baltic States.

Romania and Bulgaria

Southeastern Europe, specifically the Black Sea region, is also a focus of U.S. force posture and deterrence efforts in the Eastern Flank as Russia builds up forces in and around Crimea and maintains troops on territories taken by force from Moldova and Georgia in 1992 and 2008. Romania and Bulgaria are two important allies in defending our southeastern flank. Romania has been a forward-leaning NATO Ally implementing tailored Forward Presence (tFP) measures and providing full support for a U.S. presence in Romania of up to 1,000 rotational personnel. Our force posture in Romania, and especially our Army presence there, has grown in the past five years with the rotation of a battalion from an Armored Brigade Combat Team at Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) Air Base, a combat aviation detachment at MK Air Base, and an MQ-9 site at Campia Turzii Air Base. In addition, U.S. sailors operate the Aegis Ashore missile defense site in Deveselu, and U.S. personnel staff NATO's Multinational Division Southeast in Bucharest.

Bulgaria has taken bold steps to confront aggressive Russian actions in the Black Sea region and has taken bold steps to modernize its Soviet-era military equipment. Bulgaria purchased eight F-16 Block 70s for \$1.3 billion to begin replacing its MiG-29 fleet, plans to

purchase eight more aircraft within the next year, and entered into a formal strategic partnership with the United States. Bulgaria provides U.S. forces broad access to three joint facilities, where the United States maintains a force presence of about approximately 250 personnel at any given period for training and exercises.

In October 2020, both Romania and Bulgaria signed Roadmaps for Defense Cooperation with the United States, which build upon existing efforts to advance their military readiness and capabilities through 2030, consistent with the U.S. defense priorities, NATO commitments, and their respective national defense priorities. We continuously review our force posture in this region, including through the current Global Force Posture Review, to deter and, if necessary, defend against Russian aggression along NATO's Eastern Flank and Black Sea region.

Ukraine and Georgia

Ukraine and Georgia are frontline states in the strategic competition with Russia and are also vital partners in Europe's Eastern Flank and Black Sea region. In Ukraine, Russia occupies Crimea and sustains conflict in the Donbas in its attempt to intimidate the people of Ukraine, deny Ukraine its own sovereign choice, and redraw international borders by force, undermining the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that have upheld the international order for decades. Russia's campaign to destabilize Ukraine's defense, economic, and political sectors includes disruptive cyber-attacks, denying Ukraine's navigation rights and freedoms in the Black Sea, Kerch Strait, and Sea of Azov, and the ongoing military aggression in the Donbas. Russia hopes these combined efforts will bolster the Russian Government's ability to dominate the region and thwart Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. However, we continue to stand by the declaration made at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, and reiterated at the 2018 Brussels Summit, which states that Georgia and Ukraine will join the Alliance.

The United States strongly condemns Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, a country that gave up a significant nuclear arsenal after the USSR's collapse. We will maintain corresponding sanctions until the Russian Government returns control of Crimea to Ukraine and lives up to its security commitments under the Minsk agreements.

The United States is unwavering in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders. The United States has committed more than \$2 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since 2014, including Javelin anti-tank missile systems, armed patrol boats, and other train-and-equip programs. The United States, in coordination with key allies, will continue to support Ukraine's most critical operational needs and enable Ukraine to build its long-term defense capacity, defend its territorial integrity, and deter further Russian aggression.

Ukraine has committed to enacting critical defense reforms, fighting corruption, and reshaping its defense industrial sector to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces more effectively. Critical to the reform efforts is the work of a cadre of U.S. senior advisors who have helped Ukraine implement reforms to align its national security architecture with Euro-Atlantic principles. These key institutional reforms constitute a major step toward Ukraine's goals of achieving NATO interoperability and establishing a defense industrial sector that best supports the Ukrainian warfighter. These efforts will bolster Ukraine's ability to defend its territorial integrity in support of a secure and thriving democratic Ukraine.

Georgia also faces Russian aggression, with 20 percent of its territory still occupied by Russia in violation of the 2008 ceasefire agreement that ended the 2008 conflict between the two countries. Russia leverages its military presence in Georgia, as well as other tools of influence and coercion such as disruptive cyberattacks and disinformation operations, in an ongoing

attempt to undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The United States fully supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and continues to call on Russia to fulfill its obligations and commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement.

As a key strategic partner committed to pursuing closer integration with the West, including NATO membership, Georgia provides crucial support to Department of Defense efforts to advance U.S. interests in the geo-strategically important South Caucasus and Black Sea regions.

In addition to promoting regional security and stability, Georgia contributes approximately 860 military personnel, without caveats, to NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, making it the largest non-NATO, and largest per capita, force contributor. It has suffered 32 soldiers killed in action, and more than 290 wounded in Afghanistan.

The United States is committed to helping Georgia build its resilience and military capabilities in the face of Russia's malign efforts to undermine its sovereignty and disrupt its Euro-Atlantic integration. In its third and final year, the bilateral Georgia Defense Readiness Program is developing Georgia's institutional capacity to staff, train, equip, and sustain the Georgian Defense Forces. Enhancing Georgia's capability independently to generate and maintain ready forces prepared to execute all national missions enables it to defend itself more effectively and is key to deterring and countering Russian aggression in the Black Sea region.

Europe's Southern Flank

Bolstering our force posture in Southern Europe has been a focus since the attacks on our compounds in Benghazi, Libya, in 2012. An increased presence in this area improves access for crisis response and counter-terrorism and protects U.S. installations and interests in Africa. Our presence in NATO's Southern Flank also provides a counter balance to growing

Chinese and Russian influence in Southern Europe and Africa. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China is seeking economic and political influence in Europe, including investment in commercial ports, which could have implications for our strategic access and freedom of movement. Meanwhile, Russia is expanding its presence in the Mediterranean, and in particular the Eastern Mediterranean, notably through its naval base at the Port of Tartus in Syria, but also more broadly through its malign influence efforts.

Italy, Spain, and Portugal

Italy hosts 13,500 U.S. military, civilian, and contractor personnel for operations and training on five major bases and other smaller installations. Naval Air Station Sigonella, in particular, has become an important hub for logistics; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; maritime situational awareness; crisis response; and theater cooperation, with the basing of U.S. Air Force unmanned aerial vehicles, among other force posture assets.

Additionally, for 68 years, the United States has maintained a military presence in Spain, highlighted by the 33rd anniversary of the U.S.-Spain bilateral Agreement on Defense Cooperation. Spain hosts more than 3,000 U.S. military, civilian, and contract personnel in Rota and Morón, and these strategic bases support operational deployments throughout Africa and the Middle East. Spain actively promotes security in North and West Africa, and is a significant contributor to NATO, EU, and UN peacekeeping missions.

Portugal remains a staunch transatlantic ally with linguistic ties in West and South Africa and remains a strong U.S. partner and reliable NATO Ally whose forces deploy in small but meaningful capacities in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Mediterranean, the Baltics, and Africa. We also deeply appreciate our presence on the Azores, which continues to host forces at Lajes Field.

Greece

In October 2019, the United States and Greece signed a historic update of our Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA), paving the way for a possible expansion of our basing relationship with Greece, at a time of uncertainty in the region. Our presence at U.S. Naval Support Activity (NSA) Souda Bay, Crete, with 650 U.S. personnel, is the cornerstone of our basing relationship. Souda Bay is critical for strategic access and support to regional operations. It is the largest deep-water port in the Mediterranean, hosting approximately 240 NATO ship visits per year, and serves as an air and sea logistics hub and Ballistic Missile Defense trans-loading point for U.S. forces assigned to USEUCOM. Since last year, Souda Bay is also the homeport for USS Hershel “Woody” Williams, an expeditionary mobile base. The Government of Greece has also been flexible with permissions to deploy U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) assets from Souda Bay for crisis response. The MDCA update has facilitated possible future expansion of activity at Larissa Air Base, where we currently are temporarily basing MQ-9s,; and it supports the rotational training of U.S. Army Europe’s (USAREUR’s) 3rd and 4th Combat Aviation Brigades at Stefanoviko Army Base. The MDCA also grants the United States preferential access to the Port of Alexandroupoulos, which our forces utilize for the movement of equipment to support major exercises in Europe.

Turkey

Turkey is an important Ally on NATO’s Southern Flank. Turkey contributes to coalition missions, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo, and is on target to reach 2 percent of GDP defense spending by 2024. We continue to reiterate the importance of Turkey remaining grounded in NATO security structures and to encourage deeper cooperation among fellow Black Sea countries Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Georgia to deter Russian aggression in that region.

The United States has been clear in discouraging Turkey's procurement of the S-400 and the risks of a long-term Turkish defense relationship with Russia. We believe the S-400 procurement undermines the NATO Alliance, introduces risks to U.S. and NATO defense technology, and runs counter to Allies' pledges to reduce dependency on Russian equipment. Furthermore, Turkey's procurement prompted its removal from the F-35 program. We continue to press Turkey not to retain the S-400.

The Balkans

In the Balkans, Russia is pursuing a strategy designed to hinder the region's Euro-Atlantic integration through disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, political subversion, and economic manipulation. Russia discourages recognition of Kosovo, exerts pressure on Serbia to accept Russian military equipment, spreads anti-Western disinformation in Montenegro and North Macedonia, and seeks veto authority to suppress Bosnia and Herzegovina's self-stated goals for Euro-Atlantic integration, without regard to the Dayton Peace Accords. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased its malign influence in the region, pressuring NATO Allies and partners alike to accept infrastructure and telecommunications deals that could violate their sovereignty. Russia and the PRC have also utilized COVID-19 pandemic relief and vaccine diplomacy in the Balkans to garner favor, engage with key leaders, and advocate for politics that run counter to Euro-Atlantic integration.

Despite these efforts, there are positive signs in the region. We celebrated North Macedonia's first anniversary of its NATO accession this March. Although ethno-nationalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina try to undermine state institutions, representatives of the three constituent peoples have made forward progress on cooperation with the EU and NATO, especially through their NATO Reform Program process. After devastating earthquakes in

Croatia this past year, countries across the region, including both Kosovo and Serbia, responded with aid. Balkan countries have made real progress on interoperability and NATO targets, even in the midst of budget shortfalls due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are especially proud that U.S. European Command has provided more than \$4 million in rapid COVID-19 assistance to Balkan nations, which have been hit hard by the pandemic, and that the COVAX mechanism, to which the United States pledged \$4 billion, is helping vaccinate the people of the Western Balkans. These countries have also relied on their decades of U.S.-facilitated training in defense support of civil authorities to combat the disease.

The Department continues to strengthen our history of investment in the region. The U.S. presence in NATO's Kosovo Force helps maintain a safe and secure environment in and freedom of movement for Kosovo's citizens, enabling an environment where political dialogue to normalize Kosovo-Serbia relations can advance, and supporting stability and security throughout the Balkans. Our allies and partners in the region share our commitment to enhancing global security and have consistently contributed to NATO-led and other international missions. We leverage the U.S.-Adriatic Charter, a regional security forum, to increase cooperation between Western Balkan countries. In addition, we rely on the National Guard's U.S. State Partnership Program (SPP) to develop long-term expertise in the region, improving our collective ability to train, collaborate, and defend against various threats, including COVID-19.

Our defense cooperation on reforms and institutional capacity building to bolster shared priorities, such as military medical efforts or counterterrorism, remain fundamental to the Department's approach in the region. We will continue to leverage our toolkit to eliminate regional militaries' dependence on Soviet legacy systems and support modernization and integration of NATO-interoperable equipment. The Department continues to support our Balkan

allies and partners through education, training, and security cooperation initiatives, while also expanding into new areas of cooperation, such as in the cyber domain. Malign actors' reckless and adversarial actions in the Balkans have reinforced our commitment to improving the cyber defense capabilities of our allies and partners.

Israel

Israel is a major strategic partner for the United States. On January 15, the Department announced that the United States will shift Israel from the USEUCOM area of responsibility to the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility. This will open up additional opportunities for cooperation with our USCENTCOM partners, while maintaining strong cooperation between Israel and our European allies and partners.

Our strong defense relationship with Israel is supported by the appropriation of \$3.3 billion in foreign military financing and \$500 million in missile defense assistance this fiscal year. In the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding, the Administration agreed to request this level of support from Congress through fiscal year 2028, for a total of \$33 billion in foreign military financing and \$5 billion in missile defense assistance. I want to thank Congress for this longstanding bipartisan support to our defense relationship with Israel.

The Department bolsters Israel's defense through joint exercises, co-development of a multi-tiered missile defense architecture, and supply of advanced weapons and technology – proving our commitment to Israel's Qualitative Military Edge. The United States' longstanding support of Israeli ballistic missile defense programs includes co-development and co-production of the David's Sling and Arrow-3 missile defense systems. In 2020, the Missile Defense Agency and the Israel Missile Defense Organization cooperatively planned and successfully executed two critical flight tests – an Arrow-2 interceptor flight test in August 2020 and, in December

2020, a series of David's Sling Weapons System intercept tests in an advanced system configuration against threats simulating cruise missiles and theater ballistic missiles. Our defense policy dialogues are also extensive and cover the full range of global and regional challenges we face together.

Conclusion

The Department is committed to revitalizing the NATO Alliance and our partnerships in Europe and with Israel to promote a stable and open international system. Our objective is to ensure our broad and deep network of alliances and partnerships endure. The United States will continue to take an active role in the region by maintaining a ready and capable force, investing in NATO, and promoting a network of like-minded allies and partners.

This work is only possible with consistent congressional backing and stable funding. Your support for our allies and partners in Europe, and for Israel, is invaluable. Congressional support for U.S. forces deployed in the USEUCOM area of responsibility, as well as funding for defense initiatives across Europe, have been, and will continue to be, critical to achieving U.S. national security objectives.

The Department of Defense, in conjunction with other U.S. Government departments and agencies, regional institutions, and regional allies and partners, in close consultation with Congress, will continue to ensure that Europe remains whole, free, and at peace.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I appreciate your continued support to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, guardians, and civilians in the Department of Defense who work every day in service of the American people.