

**Testimony Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**“U.S. Policy after Russia’s Escalation in Syria”**  
**Statement of Ambassador Victoria Nuland**  
**Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs**  
**November 4, 2015**

Thank you Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, members of this committee for the opportunity to join you and my colleague, Assistant Secretary Anne Patterson today.

While Syria is in Anne’s area of responsibility, the conflict there increasingly imperils Turkey, the EU and the rest of Europe as refugees stream out of Syria and head both north and south. Russia’s new direct combat role in Syria has exacerbated an already dangerous refugee outflow, straining even the most generous Europeans’ ability to cope.

Turkey currently hosts 2.2 million refugees and by its account, has invested over \$8 billion toward their care and well-being. This year, the Turkish Coast Guard rescued an estimated 68,000 individuals attempting dangerous sea voyages.

Since Russian combat operations began in Syria, Greece recorded its highest weekly migration flow of 2015, with approximately 48,000 refugees and migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece. More than 600,000 individuals have already entered Greece’s maritime borders this year, including 344,953 through the island of Lesbos, an island of just over 86,400 residents.

On Greece’s smaller islands, there have been occasions when the number of daily arrivals has exceeded the number of registered permanent residents.

The Western Balkans is also stretched thin from increased migration, primarily through Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia. These countries report an average of 5,000 to 8,000 migrants passing through their borders daily.

Most of the migrants and refugees are headed north toward Germany, which for the first 9 months of 2015 recorded 577,000 arrivals.

Inside Syria, just over the last month, the United Nations reports at least 120,000 Syrians have been internally displaced as a result of regime attacks, aided by Russian airstrikes. In less than two weeks, 52,800 people were displaced in northern Hama and southern Idlib alone.

These numbers validate what we already know: while Moscow asserts that its military action is directed at ISIL, the vast majority of Russian strikes target areas where the Asad regime has lost territory to forces led by the moderate opposition, in towns like Hama, Homs, Aleppo and Idlib.

Now Russia is fielding its own artillery and other ground assets around Hama and Homs, greatly increasing their soldiers' vulnerability to counterattack. And, Moscow has failed to exact any humanitarian concessions from Asad as the price for Russian support. The regime continues to barrel bomb its own citizens with impunity, perhaps even emboldened by Moscow's help.

None of this has been cost free for Russia. In pure economic terms, the price of its air campaign is estimated at \$2-4 million per day. This at a time when average Russians are feeling the pinch of a recession brought on by economic mismanagement, low oil prices, and sanctions applied for the Kremlin's last military adventure: Ukraine.

Russian casualties are also reportedly on the rise, although the Kremlin is again working overtime to mask them and silence the loved ones of the lost. And as the "dumb bombs" Russia is dropping inevitably hit the wrong targets, strikes reported in the media include: a market in Damascus, the Aleppo provincial headquarters, and an ammunition depot of the Free Syrian army.

Russia is paying a steep price to its reputation in the fight against terror.

That is why, for now, we have limited our military cooperation with Russia to the most basic aviation de-confliction to protect our own aircrews. Like our Allies in the international community, we are awaiting further evidence that Russia is sincere in its claims to want to fight ISIL and save Syria for the Syrian people, rather than simply protecting the dictator who bears direct responsibility for the country's destruction.

What would positive cooperation by Russia look like? First, Russia would turn its guns on ISIL and stop the carnage in and around Syria's western cities. As the price of its support, Moscow would insist that Asad ground the helicopters and planes he uses to drop barrel bombs on innocents on a daily basis. And it would urgently work with us, our Allies and UN envoy Steffan De Mistura to turn the statement of principles that Secretary Kerry, FM Lavrov, and 17 other ministers and institutions released in Vienna last Friday into a true ceasefire, and a parallel

political transition process that hastens the day that Asad's bloody tenure comes to an end. The quality of our cooperation with Russia in Syria depends on the choices Moscow makes.

In the meantime, as the Secretary has said, we will accelerate the work we are doing to support the moderate Syrian opposition and protect Syria's neighbors including those in my area of responsibility: Turkey and the countries of Europe.

In recent weeks, Turkey has increased its participation in the Counter ISIL Coalition, opening its bases to the U.S. and other Coalition members, and conducting air strikes on ISIL targets inside Syria alongside other Coalition aircraft.

As we accelerate our work with Turkey and other like-minded partners to rollback ISIL in northern Syria, a collateral benefit may be the creation of a space where Syrian civilians are free from Asad's barrel bombs as well as ISIL's atrocities.

A large number of Europeans have contributed aviation assets for strike operations in Iraq and are considering strike operations in Syria.

Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Turkey, and the UK are active co-chairs of Coalition Working Groups with the United States. The Dutch are co-leading on efforts to halt foreign fighter flows, along with many other members of the coalition, and the Italians are co-leading the effort to counter ISIL financing. At home, our EU partners are contributing by: strengthening their counterterrorism laws and intelligence-sharing capabilities; stopping foreign fighters; addressing radicalism; de-legitimizing ISIL ideology; reporting suspicious financial activities in European institutions; and, working with the U.S. to identify and act against ISIL financiers and recruiters.

We are also working with allies and partners to address the refugee crisis. We have provided Turkey with \$325 million in assistance, through UN organizations and NGOs, to support the operation of over 100 schools, provide shelter, essential household supplies, mobile registration centers, medical centers, safe spaces for children to learn and play, and cash assistance for vulnerable families.

We have also provided \$26.6 million to UNHCR for Europe programs, including for food, water, and legal assistance to refugees transiting Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia, among others; we have supplied grants, humanitarian commodities and donations of excess property and equipment totaling \$1.2 million to enhance the

humanitarian response in Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey; and, we have contributed \$600,000 to respond to Western Balkan requests for additional equipment and training in the area of border management.

As the Secretary's diplomatic efforts make clear, it will take leadership and resolve by dozens of countries and the Syrians themselves to end the bloodshed there. In Vienna last week, 17 assembled nations, the UN and EU reaffirmed the path forward to peace and a political transition. It remains to be seen whether Russia, Iran and the Assad regime will join us in walking it.

I look forward to your questions.