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“The Shootdown of Malaysian Flight 17 and the Escalating Crisis in Ukraine”

Testimony before a Joint Subcommittee Hearing

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats

Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade

U.S. House of Representatives

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Chairman Rohrabacher, Chairman Poe, members of the subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to present my views on the shooting down of Malaysian Flight 17 and the escalating crisis in Ukraine. I commend you for this timely and important hearing.

The views I express today are solely my own and do not represent those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not take policy positions.

The Situation Today

In my view, Russia is today the single greatest threat to peace in Europe. If the West does not confront this threat—that is, if we appease the Russians now—we will have to confront an even larger threat tomorrow, closer to home.

Members of this committee and your colleagues are fully aware of the situation in Ukraine. Russian support for the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk-- weapons, leadership, financing, organization, personnel, fighters -- is the only thing keeping the Ukrainian government from establishing security in southeastern Ukraine. Security is needed to find the remaining victims of the missile strike on the Malaysian airliner and to complete the investigation. Russian support allows the separatists to continue to impede those efforts.

In my view we must confront the Russian war against Ukraine. This aggression started with the quiet invasion of Crimea last spring. A sham, at-the-end-of-a-rifle referendum was followed by an illegal annexation. The international community should not allow that annexation to stand. Until that situation is resolved to the satisfaction of Ukraine, the Russian government should pay serious penalties to Ukraine for the temporary loss of income and illegally confiscated assets that would have come to Ukraine from Crimea.

The international community did not confront the Kremlin over Crimea. As a consequence, the Russians continued their aggression in Donetsk and Luhansk. The leaders of the separatist movement have become almost exclusively Russian, and Russian equipment flows across the border unimpeded. This equipment—including sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons—shot down the Malaysian airliner killing 298 people. No matter what individual separatist pushed the button to fire the weapon—let’s be clear, Mr. Chairman-- the tragedy is Russian responsibility.

Recommendations

What should be done.

First, human decency requires the return of the victims to their families. Further, experts need access to the crash site to complete the investigation. If the separatists continue to impede these efforts, the international community-- led by the Dutch, Australians and Malaysians; supported by other nations with victims on MH17, including the United States; and with the approval of the Ukrainians—should provide an armed, international security force to protect the investigators and allow them to find the victims and complete their investigation. That investigation should lead to criminal prosecutions of those found responsible.

Second, the international community, led by the United States, should provide Ukraine with the means to eliminate the separatist forces in their country. This means weapons, military advice, intelligence, and financial support to pay and equip their soldiers.

Third, the international community should follow the individual travel bans and asset freezes with harsh economic sanctions on entire sectors of the Russian economy to deter the

Kremlin from continued support to the separatists, to force them to close their border to weapons, fighters and military support, and to pressure them to return Crimea to Ukraine.

Fourth, the international community, led by the United States, should provide financial support to Ukraine as it simultaneously confronts Russian aggression and undertakes serious economic and political reform. The International Monetary Fund loans may have to be increased. Bilateral support will have to be expanded. Advice on economic reform—energy pricing and anti-corruption in particular—will be needed.

Fifth, the international community should respect Ukraine’s right to decide with whom to associate politically and economically. Western political and security institutions—specifically, the European Union and NATO—should be open to membership applications from Ukraine.

Mr. Chairman, it is a tragedy that it took the shooting down of a civilian airliner over Ukraine to force the international community to confront Russian aggression. If we don’t confront it now, it’s appeasement, and Russia will not stop at Donetsk.

Thank you. I am happy to answer your questions.

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