

“Defending U.S. Allies and Interests Against Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe”

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Subcommittee on National Security (Committee on Oversight and Reform)

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Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Grothman, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the privilege to provide testimony today. I served 38 years in the United States Army, concluding as Commanding General, US Army Europe (2014-2017). I now serve as the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) in Washington DC. A native of Florida, I currently live in Frankfurt, Germany. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony on the situation in Ukraine, which is informed by my military experience, living in Europe, and a recent visit to Kyiv as part of a delegation led by the Atlantic Council to meet with President Zelenskyy and other senior Ukrainian government officials and Members of the Rada.

Russian forces are like a boa constrictor around Ukraine. If the Kremlin can bring about a collapse of the Ukrainian economy and the Ukrainian government, it will not have to attack or worry about sanctions. The Kremlin’s aim is to present Ukraine as a failed state, to collapse the government, to force concessions, and ensure Ukraine never becomes an integrated member of the West within the European Union or NATO. If they can do this by applying constant pressure on Ukraine’s borders without attacking, which they are doing now, then this approach will continue indefinitely. Putin also seems intent on applying maximum pressure on the West in this self-manufactured crisis, in hopes that Ukraine or NATO will eventually make concessions. But while the West seeks to avoid conflict — and is continually surprised that a leader would threaten to initiate a large-scale war in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century — Russia is in a wartime mindset.

At the same time, however, the Russian General Staff is putting in place all the assets needed to give President Putin multiple options, including launching an attack if necessary. Based on the current deployments, and the language coming from the Kremlin, I believe that a new offensive within the next two weeks is very possible but not inevitable. I do not, however, see anything that gives me optimism at this point. There are no signs of de-escalation from the Kremlin, only escalation. Russian naval ships continue to arrive in the Black Sea, and while they could have paused in Tartus to signify the Kremlin’s willingness to de-escalate, they stayed only very briefly on their way to the Straits. The Kremlin has already moved more than 100,000 well-equipped troops to the Ukrainian border in the east and north, including in Belarus. Thousands of Russian troops and military capabilities have been in Crimea and Donbas since Russia’s illegal and illegitimate invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Russia has developed advanced electronic warfare capabilities, and other so-called hybrid capabilities, to create ambiguity and slow response times.

I think we will know more in the next ten days. In a way, it feels like we are watching a slow-motion train wreck happening before our eyes and we cannot seem to stop it. Make no mistake, Putin is driving that train.

I also think we need to recognize that Belarus is a key part of this entire crisis. I believe that President Lukashenko will be gone by this summer, and that the Kremlin will send him into retirement and replace him with their own guy. What we are seeing now is the next phase in the process of bringing Belarus formally and finally into the Union State with Russia. This has long-term implications for Putin remaining in power and the increased threat posed by Russian troops being permanently stationed in Belarus, next to the very vulnerable Suwałki Corridor.

What would a new Russian offensive look like? The most recent intelligence reports suggest that it could occur before or, more likely, shortly after the conclusion of the Beijing Winter Olympics, once all Russian ships currently underway from the Baltic Sea arrive in the Black Sea, and after the conclusion of the Russia-Belarus military exercises in Belarus.

I do not believe that a massive assault on all fronts or single, large-scaled attack towards Kyiv is likely as it will generate too many Russian casualties and is not actually necessary to achieve the Kremlin's strategic aims. A new offensive is more likely to be a continuation or expansion of the current conflict, particularly along the coasts near Odesa and the Sea of Azov. This could include series of rolling, limited objective operations to (1) demonstrate that the Kremlin is not deterred by NATO, (2) further weaken the government of Ukraine, (3) limit Russian casualties, (4) facilitate support and logistical sustainment of operations, and (5) frustrate Western decision-makers with actions below some perceived threshold of violence in an attempt to avoid sanctions. The Kremlin could also pause the pressure, wait, and resume operations — the same pattern it has employed since 2008 in Georgia.

Cyber strikes would be used to disrupt command and control, blind Kyiv from the actual situation at the Front, and disrupt transportation and air/missile defense. Disinformation efforts would be used to panic/confuse the public, start another refugee crisis, and create a “provocation” as a pretext for Russian attack. Cruise missiles from the Russian Black Sea Fleet and long-range rockets from land forces would target Ukraine's anti-ship weapons, ammunition storage sites, command and control nodes, and transportation hubs, similar to 2014. I anticipate amphibious operations along the coast lines of the Sea of Azov and Black Sea and probably sabotage and attempted assassinations inside Ukraine.

At stake is not only the European peace order, but U.S. national security interests. The transatlantic alliance remains the bedrock of Euro-Atlantic stability and security, and is the most successful military alliance in history. These are endangered if Putin can enlarge Russia's territory and expand his sphere of influence at will. A failure of deterrence would further open the door to the ‘Russian way of war’ against more of Europe with cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, aggression in the air and maritime domains, targeted assassinations and kidnappings on European soil, and the weaponization of Russian-controlled energy resources. A new influx refugees into Western Europe would have destabilizing effects across Europe, which in my view is one of the Kremlin's intended outcomes. And in the long-term, even as the United States increasingly views China as the pacing threat, it cannot hope to compete with Beijing if the threat of instability in Europe continues or Allies begin losing confidence in the transatlantic alliance.

I think the Biden Administration is doing a good job on many fronts, especially in diplomacy and bringing together Allies, and I support each of the Administration's military moves thus far. But

we need a strategy for the entire Black Sea region that addresses all elements of U.S. and Alliance power (diplomacy, information, economy, as well as military/security cooperation), including repairing the damaged relationship with Turkey. At present, we are unable to use the single greatest piece of leverage we have — Turkey’s sovereign control of the Straits, codified in the 1936 Montreux Convention, would allow Ankara to close the Bosphorous and Dardanelles to Russian ships — because we do not have a healthy relationship with Turkey, our Ally since 1952.

The Administration, and in particular the Department of State, deserves credit for leading perhaps the most comprehensive diplomatic effort I have seen since the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. Although differences in threat perceptions persist among some nations, every NATO country has agreed to reject the Kremlin’s demands. The Administration must continue to work closely with European Allies to become more unified in our assessment of the Russian threat and our response. This means continuing diplomatic efforts across Europe and finding a way to regain the initiative instead of always reacting to the Kremlin. We have to do this in a way that does not fracture the unity of our Alliance and European Union partners and by thinking bigger and more strategically, realizing that this is about so much more than Ukraine.

The Administration has also transitioned from passive deterrence (the threat of punishment after the fact, meaning deterrence failed) to active deterrence (demonstrated will and capability before the fact) with recent deployments to Allies on the Eastern Flank. Other Allies seem to agree, as evidenced by the heightened alert of the NATO Response Force, other nations delivering weapons, growth of the Air Policing Mission, and offers to deploy a new enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group to Romania. Even the German government, which has been at risk of forfeiting its hard-earned moral authority and credibility through its initial response to the situation in Ukraine, has said that Nord Stream 2 is “on the table” as an option for sanctions should Russia attack.

In the near-term, we should be doing everything possible to enable Ukraine to more effectively defend itself — something on the scale of the Berlin Airlift, but with the weapons and equipment that they need. We should assist with the preparation and training of Ukraine’s Integrated Air and Missile Defenses (IAMD), protection of cyber networks from attack, more counter-fire radar (which they have been using effectively for the last few years), more anti-tank weapons, more short-range air defense systems (Stinger and Avenger), and anti-ship capabilities. The Alliance should take the next steps required to deploy the NATO Response Force (NRF) to the eastern flank for exercises, integration into defense planning, and to reduce the time required for operations should combat spill over from Ukraine into a NATO Ally’s sovereign territory.

We must also be prepared to escalate horizontally to take the initiative from the Kremlin, to force them to look in other directions rather than being able to focus fully on Ukraine. I recommend ensuring the Ukraine has the capability to strike the Kerch Strait Bridge and/or the Russian Navy’s illegal base at Sevastopol. We should be prepared to challenge Russian operations in international waters of the Black Sea and international air space over the Black Sea. We should encourage Turkey to close the Bosphorous and Dardanelles Straits to Russian Navy vessels, in accordance with the Montreux Convention, which will require a significant diplomatic effort and assurance that Turkey will not be left alone when Russia inevitably strikes back against Ankara. And we should let it be known that we are prepared to quarantine the Russian Naval Base at Tartus, Syria.

The world is focused on what could happen in the next two weeks. But I think we should also be thinking about “what happens afterwards” — if Ukraine is overrun or partly overrun, or if Putin decides not to attack or is defeated, then what? Are we prepared for that? How long will we keep deployed troops forward? And maybe it is time to reconsider permanent stationing of troops along the Eastern Flank. I had resisted that in the past but I am changing my mind.

Thankfully, we still have our bases in Germany as our solid foundation in Europe for power projection, command and control, building readiness, and presence. We would be in a very difficult situation without the access and bases we have today in Germany.

I fully support the Administration’s plan to implement the strongest possible sanctions on Russia should the Kremlin launch a new offensive. But we need to take steps to ensure these threats of sanctions are taken seriously in the Kremlin. Therefore, I recommend that we start with preemptively freezing assets of select Russian oligarchs who have invested in the United States under questionable circumstances. I also recommend that we consider a “Ukrainian War Tax” that would help the collective West mitigate the consequences to our own economies from sanctions. It will not be popular but it will force civilian leadership to explain why this effort is important. It would also convey to the Kremlin that we are serious about sanctions, which might otherwise call our bluff. It would also prevent us from repeating one of our major mistakes during the 20 years in Afghanistan, which was never raising a tax to pay for the war and meant that most Americans were not involved and there was little pressure on Congress or the Administration to resolve it.

The West should also build an “offramp” for Putin without betraying Ukraine, our Allies, or any of our values but which could give Russia the opportunity to draw back forces and reduce the chances of a conflict. We should double-down on exercise transparency and offer to reestablish the mutual military special observer missions which existed during the Cold War. We should utilize the maximum transparency allowed by the Vienna Documents. I actually welcomed when I had inspectors from Russia and Belarus visit our exercises and our barracks in Europe. They could see our capabilities and the quality of our soldiers which, I believe, had a deterrent effect.

NATO members could also sign an agreement or make a public joint statement where member states guarantee Russia’s internationally recognized borders. We have already done this, in effect, for decades, and on the surface, it seems almost ludicrous for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia or other Allies to have to guarantee that they would never invade Russia. But maybe because it does seem so ludicrous, making a public event out of it might help counter the false narrative of Russia being threatened by NATO.

Of course, the Alliance should still keep communication channels open and maintain dialogue with the Kremlin in every possible venue and format. These exist already. But we must come with realistic expectations and a clear-eyed perspective about the nature of diplomacy with the Kremlin. They are not Boy Scouts. They use chemical weapons, poison, and murder against their own opposition, and they use cyber and disinformation to destroy lives, societal structures, and trust in our democratic systems. We should talk but we need to understand with whom we are talking.

Thank you to the Subcommittee for the privilege to present my testimony to you and for your distinguished service. I look forward to your questions.