

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator John McCain
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee
Tuesday, April 28, 2015
“United States Security Policy in Europe”**

The Committee meets today to receive testimony on United States security policy in Europe. I’d like to thank each of our witnesses for appearing before us:

- Admiral James Stavridis, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe;
- Ian Brzezinski, Resident Senior Fellow at the Scowcroft Center at the Atlantic Council; and
- Dr. Stephen Sestanovich, George Kennan Senior Fellow for Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Just like the United States, Europe confronts a diverse and complex array of crises that are making the world a more dangerous place. Already this year, radical Islamists attacked Paris and Copenhagen. Last week in the Mediterranean, over 700 migrants perished tragically in a shipwreck fleeing the conflict and instability of North Africa. And then there’s Russia.

In 2012, the Defense Strategic Guidance argued that the changing global security environment offered a chance to “rebalance the U.S. military investment in Europe” while building a “closer relationship” with Russia. The Obama Administration eliminated two heavy brigades stationed in Europe and pursued its so-called “reset” policy toward Russia. However, just two years later, Russia’s invasion and dismemberment of Ukraine should remind everyone of the true nature of Putin’s ambitions and the fragility of peace in Europe.

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. policy toward Russia was based, on a bipartisan assumption that the Russian government sought to integrate peacefully into the international order in Europe and to forge a constructive relationship with the United States based on mutual national interests. The events of the past year have overturned that assumption. For the first time in seven decades on the European continent, a state has sent its military forces across an internationally recognized border and forcibly annexed the sovereign territory of another state. Now, American strategy must adjust to the reality of a revisionist Russia that is undergoing a significant military modernization, and that is willing to use force not as a last resort, but as a primary tool to achieve its neo-imperial objectives.

In Ukraine, Russia has continued to violate the February ceasefire agreement. Rather than comply and withdraw from Ukraine, President Putin has maintained sizable numbers of artillery pieces and multiple rocket launchers in Ukraine. According to the State Department, the Russian military has deployed additional air defense systems near the front lines in eastern Ukraine, the highest amount since last August and a disturbing sign that another offensive may be imminent.

In response, it is not that the United States and our European allies have done nothing; it is that nothing we have done has succeeded in deterring Putin's aggression and halted his slow-motion annexation of eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian people don't want U.S. or Western troops to fight for them; they are simply asking for the right tools to defend themselves and their country. Senator Reed and I, along with members of this committee on both sides of the aisle, have called on the Administration to provide defensive lethal assistance to Ukraine. Unfortunately, the President's continued inaction, for fear of provoking Russia, is seen by Putin as weakness and invites the very aggression we seek to avoid.

Of course, there is no military solution in Ukraine, but there **is** a clear military dimension to achieving a political solution. As three major think tanks wrote recently: "Assisting Ukraine to deter attack and defend itself is not inconsistent with the search for a peaceful, political solution—it is essential to achieving it. Only if the Kremlin knows that the risks and costs of further military action are high will it seek to find an acceptable political solution."

The failure to raise the costs to Putin's aggression in Ukraine only increases makes it more likely that this aggression could expand to places like Moldova, Georgia, the Baltic states, and Central Asia. This is even more worrisome in light of Russia's increasing emphasis on nuclear weapons. Putin has personally presided over nuclear weapons drills in recent months, deployed Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad capable of carrying nuclear warheads, and claimed the right to deploy nuclear weapons on the Crimean peninsula. Russia continues to violate the INF Treaty as nuclear weapons become more prominent in its military doctrine.

Equally concerning, Russia's military build-up also appears designed to deny the United States and NATO access to key parts of Europe, especially the Baltic and Black Sea regions, as a way of trying to make U.S. security commitments to our allies too costly to fulfill. Russia is clearly learning from China in this regard.

Russia's intensifying military activity and contempt for international law also extends to the Arctic, where it has stood up a new military command, with more

troops and aircraft, military infrastructure, and increased military exercises. One exercise last month included nearly 40,000 troops and more than 55 ships and submarines. The Administration needs to address this problem as the United States assumes the chairmanship of the Arctic Council over the next two years.

In response to the broader challenge that Russia poses to security in Europe, here too, it is not that the United States and NATO have done nothing: We have created a modest rapid reaction force; increased air policing and sea patrols; expanded training and exercises; and deployed small numbers of additional forces to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The problem is, the actions we have taken seem inadequate to the scope, scale, and seriousness of the challenges we face. I would especially highlight the fact that too many of our NATO allies continue to fail to provide for their own defense. Despite promises at the Wales Summit to “reverse the trend of declining defense budgets,” soon Poland and Estonia may be the only other allies meeting our alliance’s commitment to spend two percent of GDP on defense.

None of us want a return to the Cold War. But we need to face the reality that we are dealing with a Russian ruler who wants exactly that, especially as a way of enhancing Russian relevance amid systemic demographic collapse and economic crisis. The reason for maintaining a U.S. strong military presence in Europe is the same as ever: to deter conflict and aggression. We forget this lesson at our peril.

Ultimately, we must lift our sights and recognize that we are facing the reality of a challenge that many had assumed was resigned to the history books: a strong, militarily-capable state that is hostile to our interests and our values, and seeks to overturn the international order in Europe that American leaders of both parties have sought to maintain since World War II. I hope today’s hearing will help us to better understand the magnitude of this challenge, and what to do about it. I thank each of our witnesses for joining us today and look forward to their testimony.