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Permanent Deterrence and Bolstered Alliances in an Era of Great Power Competition

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Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the implementation of the National Defense Strategy. I will offer strategic remarks today and submit more detailed work we've undertaken at the Atlantic Council for the record.

In an era of great power competition, the United States should adopt a more permanent deterrence posture – one that features a mix of permanent and rotational capabilities in Europe and Asia – and bolster its alliances as a strategic comparative advantage over our adversaries. If we are concerned about near-peer competition from Russia and China, the United States must invest not only in its own capabilities, but also in its global alliance structure.

Intense polarization within our nation and tumultuous relations within our alliances risk making the United States look vulnerable to our adversaries. While some of these divisions are real, the United States and its allies are more strategically aligned in grand strategy – enjoying the support of Republicans and Democrats – than they have been since 9/11, if not 1989.¹

Our nation and its closest friends agree that the great challenge of the 21st century will be the competition between the free world and authoritarian corrupt state-led capitalism, chief among them China and Russia. The National Security Strategy and the subsequent National Defense Strategy articulate this great power geopolitical competition clearly, but we still have work to do to implement policies to achieve this strategy. Specifically, while implementation is focused on China and Russia, we are not as focused on how to bolster our alliances as a key component of our strategy to compete effectively.

For the purposes of today, I will primarily focus on Russia.

To better address the Russian threat, the United States needs to bolster its military presence in Europe to establish what the Atlantic Council Task Force on US Force Posture in Europe calls “permanent deterrence,” especially in the Baltics, Poland, and the Black Sea region. Our allies need to be part of this new force posture with us, our policies need to prioritize arms and technology sales and transfers to our

¹ Damon Wilson, *Washington and Its Friends Are More United Than You Think*, Atlantic Council, January 2, 2019; <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/washington-and-its-friends-are-more-united-than-you-think>

allies, and any divisions among us cannot become opportunities for Russia to weaken NATO cohesion or resolve.

The Atlantic Council task force argues that Europe has once again become a central point of confrontation between the West and a revisionist Russia. Rather than the Fulda Gap, this time the confrontation takes place along the Suwałki Gap – and in the Baltic, Black, and Arctic Seas. “Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia is determined to roll back the post-Cold War settlement, undermine the sovereignty of former Soviet states, and overturn the US-led rules-based order that has kept Western Europe secure since the end of World War II and enlarged to countries of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. Moscow’s invasion and continued occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories, its military build-up in Russia’s Western Military District and Kaliningrad, and its “hybrid” warfare against Western societies have heightened instability in the region and have made collective defense and deterrence an urgent mission for the United States and NATO.”²

At the height of the Cold War, the United States deployed 300,000 personnel to Europe, including four divisions and five Brigade Combat Teams (BCT). In 2012, the US removed the last two heavy armor brigades, and withdrew all US tanks and other heavy vehicles. By 2014, the US Army retained two light BCTs and 65,000 US personnel stationed in Europe. US posture in Europe now emphasizes deterrence by reinforcement and the rotational presence of forward deployed combat units.

Today, NATO is in the midst of its greatest adaptation since the Cold War. And the United States has played its part, including through generous funding of the European Deterrence Initiative.

Last July’s NATO summit was at the same time among the most acrimonious and the most productive in recent history, bolstering the Alliance’s rapid reaction capabilities and hybrid warfare defense, and promising to extend the Alliance’s reach into the southern Balkans through further enlargement.³ Importantly, allies are making strides toward their defense investment pledges: since 2016, European allies have spent an additional \$41 billion in defense; through 2020, they will spend an extra \$100 billion; and their plans call for an additional \$350 billion through 2024. By 2024, Germany is projected to have the biggest defense budget in Europe.

Furthermore, the US-backed Three Seas Initiative is advancing cross-border infrastructure to wean Central Europe and the Baltics off of Russian energy dependency while providing alternatives to Chinese investment, making the region’s economies more resilient.

Despite these efforts, we face a formidable and evolving adversary. Ahead of NATO’s seventieth anniversary this April, there is more that can and should be done to enhance the Alliance’s deterrence posture in Europe.

Our task force agrees that significant enhancements to the existing US presence could and should be undertaken to bolster deterrence and reinforce Alliance cohesion consistent with the National Defense Strategy. We propose a package of permanent and rotational deployments, which would build on significant US capabilities already deployed in Poland and should be complemented by NATO Allied capabilities. Our recommended package would make elements of the current US deployment in Poland

² General Philip Breedlove and Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, *Permanent Deterrence: Enhancements to the US Military Presence in North Central Europe*, Washington, DC, Atlantic Council, December 2018, 1.

³ David Wemer, *Here’s What NATO Achieved at Its Brussels Summit*, Atlantic Council, July 12, 2018; <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/here-s-what-nato-achieved-at-its-brussels-summit>

permanent, strengthen other elements of that deployment by reinforcing the BCT deployed there with various enablers, assign another BCT on a permanent or rotational basis to Europe, reestablish a continuous rotational presence in the Baltic States, and increase the US naval presence in Europe. The task force members are confident this can all be done while maintaining NATO solidarity and enhancing burden-sharing among allies.

We must also bolster our presence in the Black Sea region, help our allies replace Soviet-era equipment, and continue to arm close partners including Finland, Georgia, Sweden, and Ukraine.

Even if we periodically differ with our allies, the US strategy should inevitably drive Washington to bolster and expand its alliances in the coming years. In an era of geopolitical competition, America's friends and allies are the United States' best competitive advantage. Viewing our alliances that way would compel consistent policies to lead our alliances to ensure coherent, united fronts in standing up to Russian and Chinese aggression.

In the case of Russia, there is no possible successful strategy to confront Putin's aggression without a strong NATO. The public questioning of our commitment to the Alliance is dangerous and only weakens our position. This body's strong support for NATO sends an important signal.

And for Europe, China is becoming a greater geopolitical reality as it comes closer via cyberspace, trade and investment, and now military presence close to Europe's shores. The United States should confront any Chinese challenge with Europe as well as our Asian allies by our side.

The current tensions between Washington and its European, Canadian, and Asian allies are well-documented, running from burden-sharing to trade. They are real. But these should not overshadow the shared challenge we face together: the coming struggle between a free world and great power authoritarians.

Unforced errors that unnecessarily divide Washington from its friends must be avoided, such as the trade tactics that have now seen Europe and Canada join common cause with Moscow and Beijing at the World Trade Organization.⁴ The United States should limit its trade challenges on national security grounds to our adversaries rather than our allies. Unnecessary division plays into the hands of Washington's geopolitical competitors.

The acceptance of Russia and China as the main geopolitical challenge of the 21st century leads to the conclusion that US interests are best served when Washington and its allies act in unison. The United States is much better positioned if it does not assume the burden of countering Beijing and Moscow alone. Implementing a National Defense Strategy focused on near-peer competition with Russia and China requires that we put our alliances at the core, not the periphery, of our strategy.

We have already seen what can happen when Moscow or Beijing engage in bilateral "negotiations" with their neighbors, using their power and leverage to extract concessions, lock weaker partners in exploitative economic deals, or even to rewrite borders.

The United States leading a global set of alliances can deter this threat.

⁴ Jakob Hanke, *EU and China break ultimate trade taboo to hit back at Trump*, Politico, November 21, 2018; <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-and-china-break-ultimate-trade-taboo-to-hit-back-at-trump/>