

# US Policy and Strategy in Europe

Prepared statement by

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Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, thank you for this invitation to testify before you again. It is an honor to be here to talk about US Strategy and policy in Europe, and in particular I applaud your inquiry into US- Russian relations.

US-Russian relations are very much in the news these days. I believe it is appropriate given their importance; and I believe it is essential to look at these relations in a thorough, dispassionate way. That is what I hope we do today. There is much talk about a new start with the Kremlin, and given the right framework and circumstances I believe that has merit.

Our current vector in US – Russian relations is not a good one, and I believe if we do not find the right framework for engagement it will not improve. The key is that framework and how we proceed.

Russia is a great power with a proud history, the world’s largest country in terms of territory, and a player on the world stage. Russia possesses the world’s second most powerful military: a nuclear arsenal comparable to ours and conventional forces that are easily the most powerful in Europe. While its economy is stagnant and has been hit hard by the low prices of oil and natural gas, it is still the 12th largest in dollar terms. We cannot simply dismiss Russia as a declining and regional power.

Again, given the right framework it makes great sense for our government to have meaningful discussions with Russia at a number of different levels. We have much to discuss with the Kremlin. First, we would like to make sure our relationship does not deteriorate further. While we have more strategic matters to discuss, we need to address shared concerns about Moscow’s current practice of flying warplanes dangerously close, and at times without their transponders on, to American and other NATO planes and ships. Such incidents risk fatal accidents and even a clash between the U.S. and Russia. We need to re-establish substantive communication between our militaries in order to avoid such incidents, and when they occur, to move toward de-confliction.

If Moscow really wants to improve relations, progress on these questions should not be too hard to achieve. And, with an incremental approach and incremental successes, we can start to look for more substantial meetings to take on more difficult questions. Once we make progress in deconfliction we can address more global issues of mutual interest. Holding a summit to launch that dialog would signal a commitment by Washington and Moscow, and would provide an important opportunity to address an issue important for over half a century: nuclear disarmament. This area has been dormant for some time now. Of course, before we can move to new agreements on nuclear issues, it is important that Moscow moves quickly to cease its violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement.

Iran is another important area for discussion. Moscow and Iran have worked together closely in Syria. Iran even provided Russian warplanes a base for a brief period of time; yet at the same time Moscow worked with us and others in persuading Tehran to sign the agreement on its nuclear program. Our administration has indicated that it wants to take a second look and improve the terms of that agreement. Is Moscow willing to partner on this? Or does it prefer good relations with Tehran at the expense of stability in the Persian Gulf?

A third area to discuss is working with the Russians to counter Daesch, or the Islamic State of Iraq, and the Levant (ISIL), and other violent extremist organizations. If Moscow were a reliable partner against Daesch, the advantages are obvious. The complication, though, is that Moscow's military operation in Syria has devoted little attention to these extremists. It has instead been directed against our moderate allies and lately, as it works with Ankara, against the Kurds.

In addition, Moscow's saturation bombing against towns and cities has fueled refugee flows, exacerbating the refugee crisis in Europe. In fact, there has been very little overlap in our strategic objectives in Syria, and Moscow's principal objective in Syria is to shore up the weak, yet savage, Assad regime. If we back off active opposition to Assad – a serious concession to Mr. Putin – can we depend on Moscow to be a real partner in Syria and beyond against Islamic extremists?

We can add other issues to this possible dialog. Cooperation in dealing with drug trafficking and space exploration should also be on the table. There is ample opportunity that the Kremlin and the White House can achieve a great deal when our interests are similar and we work together.

We must however be realistic and not turn our eyes from places where Moscow is challenging our interests. President Putin has made clear that he wants to upend the post-Cold War order established in Europe. He and senior Russian officials have justified aggression in Ukraine by claiming a right to protect ethnic Russians and Russian speakers there; and they have said that this principle applies elsewhere. Their goal is to weaken NATO, the European Union, and the Transatlantic relationship.

Clearly there are two sides to every story, however, and over the past nine years, the Kremlin has committed multiple acts of aggression: in Georgia in 2008; in Crimea in early 2014; and since then an ongoing not-so-covert war in Ukraine's East. It has agreed to two ceasefires – Minsk I and II – and violated each repeatedly.

And Moscow has indicated, by actions and statements that if it succeeds in Ukraine, there could be future targets. All three of our NATO Allies in the Baltics – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – are worried. And two of them, Estonia and Latvia, with their large ethnic Russian populations, are concerned that Russia might try to use them as an excuse. Moscow sent this message when it kidnapped an Estonian intelligence official from Estonia on the same day that the Wales NATO summit ended in September of 2014.

We have a vital interest in stopping Moscow's revanchist policies before they move to other countries, especially our NATO allies in the Baltics. Yes, we can conduct negotiations with Moscow on global issues; but we also need to continue to strengthen NATO's presence along its eastern flank. The Warsaw NATO summit last summer took decisions to do that. The new Administration should endorse those decisions and reaffirm our Article 5 commitment to defend each NATO member under threat; and it should take the lead in enhancing NATO capacities to deal with hybrid war – the appearance of disguised Russian agents or little green men – in Allied countries. To underscore our commitment to the Alliance, I agree with the President's plan to meet first with his NATO colleagues before seeing President Putin.

Mr. Putin understands the value of negotiating from strength. We can demonstrate our strength by developing a more forward defensive force posture to deal with the Kremlin's challenges to Europe. Additionally, we should more fully support Ukraine against the Kremlin's aggression. In our past, we have

been reluctant to provide Ukraine with defensive weapons so as to better defend itself, our team should review that decision.

Part of this is maintaining the economic pressure on Moscow. Our, and Europe's, economic sanctions – which cost the Russian economy 1-1.5 of GDP in 2015 – were imposed as an incentive for Moscow to meet its Minsk commitments and withdraw from Ukraine's East, and as a deterrence against additional aggression. It would be a sign of weakness to ease those sanctions for anything less than Moscow's full compliance with Minsk, which means a full restoration of the internationally recognized border between Russia and Ukraine. The more trouble the Kremlin has conducting its war in Ukraine, the less likely it is to cause trouble for us with our eastern NATO partners.

The last six months have demonstrated that we must greatly improve our cyber defenses to block and deter the operations that the Kremlin has been conducting against us and others. The latest dump of documents via Wiki Leaks is another reminder of the need to raise our cyber defense. We also need to consider how we can respond to future cyber-attacks in ways – perhaps not public – that would deter future cyber aggression. This is another subject for discussion with Moscow -- once we strengthen our position.

The world and the United States have enjoyed extraordinary peace, stability and prosperity since the end of World War II and the Cold War. To take just one measure, in 1970 over two billion of the world's three billion people lived in extreme poverty. In 2015 less than one billion of the globe's nearly 7 billion people are in extreme poverty. An important reason for this is the peace and stability created by the great institutions that the U.S. created with its European partners at the end of World War II to include NATO and the European Union.

We have a vital interest in maintaining a strong NATO and vibrant Europe.

A dialogue with Moscow is possible. So too is cooperation. If the Kremlin is ready to work with us against Daesch or to improve the Iranian nuclear deal, we should be ready. But we should not be shy or hesitant about defending our interests when we are under challenge from the Kremlin. A policy of strength requires nothing less.