



**Statement Before the  
Senate Armed Services Committee**

***“Attempted Coup in Montenegro and Malign  
Russian Influence in Europe”***

A Testimony by:

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Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to testify before you today alongside His Excellency Nebojša Kaludjerovic, Mr. Janusz Bugajski, and Mr. Damon Wilson regarding the attempted coup in Montenegro and malign Russian influence in Europe.

This testimony is informed by a study conducted in my capacity as a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies entitled "Recalibrating U.S. Strategy toward Russia: A New Time for Choosing," released in March 2017. It also draws from my previous experience working European security issues on the National Security Council staff and at the Department of Defense. Given the deep expertise of my fellow witnesses on Montenegro, I will focus my remarks on the broader Russia challenge, the response of the United States and Europe, and areas in need of Congressional attention.

### **Russia's Actions in Perspective**

The 2016 coup attempt in Montenegro was not the first, nor likely will it be the last, of Russia's attempts to undermine the sovereign right of a nation to freely choose its political associations—a right Russia itself affirmed in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and reaffirmed in the 1990 Charter of Paris. It represents a single data point on an irrefutable trend line of increasingly aggressive and opportunistic Russian behavior. To describe the incident as new or eye-opening would be to dismiss all that has come before it. This is not meant to minimize what occurred, but to put it in proper perspective. Given the pervasiveness and severity of Moscow's known offenses, we can no longer blame surprise or ignorance for inadequate and slow responses. The coup attempt serves to further reinforce what we should already know: more must urgently be done to better protect ourselves and our allies from Russia's systemic campaign to undermine the international system that would hold it accountable to the rule of law and deny its desired spheres of influence.

President Putin has amassed a robust global toolkit comprised of a variety of conventional and unconventional tactics, to include disinformation and propaganda, cyber attacks, economic coercion, political subversion and election meddling, deniable forces in the form of "little green men," nuclear saber-rattling, aggressive air and sea maneuvers, and other malign activities. These tactics are designed to circumvent U.S. and NATO redlines, confuse traditional response options, and use the virtues of the West against it. Russia has experimented with the application of these tactics in varying combinations and at mutable levels of intensity—leveraging just enough to create chaos and sow instability in an effort to undermine the international system.

What began primarily as a challenge along NATO's eastern flank has steadily expanded outward, subverting Western interests and influence in all directions. To the North, Russia has increased its military presence in the Arctic and laid formal claim to 460,000 square miles of Arctic ocean seabed.<sup>1</sup> To the East and South, Putin has employed military force in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. In Ukraine, he annexed Crimea and continues to sow violence in the country's east. Thousands of Ukrainians have died and over a million have been displaced. We must also not forget the 298 people, including one American, who were killed when a Russian-provided anti-aircraft missile brought down a civilian airliner in the skies over Eastern Ukraine. In Syria,

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<sup>1</sup> Carol J. Williams, "Russia claims vast Arctic territory, seeks U.N. recognition," *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 2015.

Russia's support for the Assad regime has extended the civil war, distracted from the fight against the Islamic State, and exacerbated human suffering. Russia is also a strategic ally of Iran and a key trading partner. Its interest in selling \$10 billion worth of arms to Iran—including T-90 tanks, artillery, aircraft, and helicopters—would increase Tehran's military capability at a time when its malign activities are already having significantly destabilizing effects across the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> In Asia, there is growing evidence that Russia is supplying weapons to the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> It is also expanding its military and energy cooperation with China and India; moves that seek to advance its interests while challenging the influence of the United States in the region.

Compounding all of this, Russia's attempts to confront the United States in the cyber and space domains could have dangerous implications for how Americans live and fight, according to former U.S. director of national intelligence James Clapper.<sup>4</sup> Its violation of the INF treaty and nuclear saber-rattling, likewise, raise worrying questions about Russia's commitment to strategic stability and to the norms that have preserved a certain degree of caution in public discussions related to nuclear weapons.

Russia's malign influence has also crossed an ocean to strike at the heart of U.S. democracy with its interference in the 2016 presidential election. This brazen action shows that Putin is only becoming more emboldened with time and growing increasingly comfortable taking risks. Efforts to minimize or downplay Russia's attack against the United States only increases the likelihood that similar and more ambitious election interference will occur in the future, including against our closest allies in Europe. Efforts to "move on" or ignore the incident do not serve long term U.S. interests.

### **Understanding Russia's Motivations**

Why is Russia seeking to undermining the existing international order by sowing instability abroad? The answer is simple: It wants to and it can, while reaping more rewards than consequences.

First, it wants to for a variety of reasons that reflect a combination of: (1) Putin's domestic political calculations; (2) a desire to right historical wrongs borne of the "humiliation" that ensued following the end of the Cold War; (3) longstanding distrust of Western intentions, especially as it relates to NATO enlargement, that engender a zero-sum world view in which American's gains are seen as Russia's losses and vice versa; and (4) the need to protect a geopolitical sphere of influence that is seen as central to Russia's own security.

Second, Moscow is now more able to act on these motives than in the past due to a mix of

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<sup>2</sup> "Russia and Iran in talks over \$10 billion arms deal: RIA," Reuters, November 14, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-iran-arms-idUSKBN1390UM>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/04/24/russia-is-sending-weapons-to-taliban-top-u-s-general-confirms/?utm\\_term=.639d8c8b979f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/04/24/russia-is-sending-weapons-to-taliban-top-u-s-general-confirms/?utm_term=.639d8c8b979f).

<sup>4</sup> Tess Owen, "US Spy Chief Warns of Space Wars, North Korean Nukes, and Cyber Threats," *Vice News*, February 9, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/us-spy-chief-warns-of-space-wars-north-korean-nukes-and-cyber-armedgeddon>.

growing strengths inside Russia and growing weaknesses inside the West. Russia, for its part, has partially recovered from the collapse of the Soviet Union. High energy prices in the 2000s helped stabilize the economy, and Putin's consolidation of political power has minimized domestic opposition that might otherwise constrain a confrontational foreign policy. Moscow's reinvestments in its armed forces since 2008 have helped Russia reemerge as a formidable military power. Though not a peer competitor to the U.S. military, the Russian military does enjoy local superiority across the span of its western borders in Europe. This, combined with the creative employment of niche capabilities and a low bar for the use of force, allows Russia to play to its advantages and yield considerable bang for its buck—especially since destabilization is a comparatively limited and achievable goal.

For the West's part, we have failed to adequately invest in the health of our democracies, institutions, and defenses. The end of the Cold War lulled Western societies into complacency and promoted a misguided faith in the sustaining power of good intentions absent proper upkeep. Russia has exposed and exploited the cracks in our foundation, likely with more success than even it thought possible.

Russian disinformation campaigns, for example, benefit from domestic political efforts to delegitimize or demonize the free press and intelligence agencies. Russian attempts to break Western unity is abetted by populist narratives that cast doubt on the efficacy of our alliances and institutions. Russian political and economic coercion is helped along by the ease with which assets can be held in obscurity in developed democracies and by illiberal trends that spurn transparency and oversight while rewarding corruption. Russian military threats and posturing are made more threatening by Europe's lack of defense investment and military readiness. And Russian manipulation and whataboutism is legitimized by Presidential statements that draw moral equivalencies between the West and Russia. Instead of educating our publics—who have largely forgotten why NATO and the European Union were created—on the importance of the international order and the value of our alliances, some in our own societies are eager to turn public unawareness into anger in exchange for short term political gains. Sadly, Russia can only look at this and laugh.

The final piece of the equation is that Russia's current incentive structure appears to encourage more action rather than less. In other words, it is reaping more rewards than consequences. Consider, for example, that Ukraine and Georgia's progress toward NATO membership appears indefinitely stalled; Russia now controls Crimea; transatlantic cohesion is straining under the growing political divisions; and Assad has been pulled back from the brink. Meanwhile, Putin is more popular at home than ever. Sanctions have proven a convenient scapegoat for greater structural problems within Russia's economy. And Russia's status as an international power player has been renewed. Russia's pattern of provocative behavior will not change until the West imposes greater consequences—until Moscow sees more risk than reward.

## **U.S. and European Response**

Following Russia's 2014 aggression in Ukraine, the United States and its allies imposed diplomatic and economic sanctions against Russia and quickly established an enhanced and

persistent air, land, and sea presence in Eastern Europe to reassure nervous allies. All of these measures have evolved from their initial formulation.

The U.S. sanctions levied against Russia in response to its seizure of Crimea and continuing support of violence in Eastern Ukraine were matched by the European Union, along with every non-EU member of NATO (with the exception of Turkey) and major non-NATO partners Australia, Japan, and South Korea. It is the participation of partners and allies that has given the sanctions their bite. The trade in goods between the EU and Russia in 2015, for example, totaled \$222 billion. This is compared to \$22 billion between the United States and Russia. In late December 2016, President Obama authorized additional U.S. sanctions in response to Russia's cyber operations aimed at the presidential election. President Trump could rescind these sanctions, imposed by Executive Order, at any time. Should the United States unilaterally pull its support, the international sanctions regime would likely collapse in short order.

In the security realm, NATO agreed to assurance and deterrence measures at the 2014 Wales Summit and the 2016 Warsaw Summit that aimed to enhance alliance readiness against all threats. These efforts include additional force presence in NATO's east, enhanced training and exercises, prepositioned equipment, and military infrastructure improvements. The most recent commitments have transitioned the alliance from reassurance-focused measures to those that seek to establish a longer-term credible deterrence in NATO's east. This includes, among other things, expanding the number of troops in each Baltic State from a company-sized force (approximately 150 troops) to a more capable battalion-sized force (approximately 1,000 multinational troops); updating war plans; reconfiguring prepositioned equipment to support war plan requirements (as opposed to training and exercises); standing up a rapid reaction force that would be able to quickly surge reinforcements in a crisis; establishing eight reception and staging centers along NATO's eastern flank to receive those reinforcements; updating alliance threat assessments; improving logistics to reduce barriers to the freedom of movement for troops and equipment across Europe; and reinvesting in the defense capabilities needed for territorial defense (vice expeditionary operations).

Much of the U.S. contribution to broader NATO assurance and deterrence efforts—known collectively as the Readiness Action Plan—has been funded by the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and conducted under the auspices of the Defense Department's Atlantic Resolve mission. ERI was initiated in fiscal year (FY) 2015 as a \$1 billion appropriation within the Defense Department's Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget.<sup>5</sup> Former President Obama's FY 2017 budget request proposed quadrupling ERI funding to \$3.4 billion, up from \$789 million in FY 2016, in acknowledgement of the threat Russia poses to U.S. interests in Europe.

Despite continuing to reside in the one-year OCO budget, ERI is now considered a multi-year effort aimed at enhancing the U.S. presence, capability, and readiness in Europe after decades of decline. The most recent defense authorization bill would further expand ERI to a total of \$4.8 billion, allowing for additional prepositioned equipment and infrastructure investments. ERI does

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<sup>5</sup> White House, "Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners," June 3, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support->.

### A Reinforcement Model for Deterrence in Europe

NATO's conventional deterrence strategy in Europe is based upon a reinforcement model that depends on: (1) small, yet capable, tripwire forces; (2) rapid-response forces that can be mobilized on short notice; and (3) the ability to get follow-on forces to the fight quickly. While much of the alliance's focus has been on ground forces, the United States and its allies would also be expected to surge air and naval forces to the region in a crisis, both of which add significant capabilities to counter Russia.

- The tripwire forces in the Baltic States and Poland are known as NATO's **Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)**, which began deploying in February 2017 and recently reached full operational capability. The eFP is comprised of four multinational battalions, or battlegroups, led by the United States (in Poland), the UK (in Estonia), Canada (in Latvia), and Germany (in Lithuania), with contributions from several other nations augmenting or in some cases rounding out the deployments by these framework nations. NATO's eFP framework essentially replaces the continuous U.S. deployments of company-sized elements to each of the Baltic States and Poland. The U.S. troop presence that was once thinly spread across the eastern flank is smartly being consolidated in Poland as the U.S.-led eFP battalion. Outside of the eFP framework, the United States has separately deployed to Poland elements of a rotational armored brigade, which will have other elements available for exercises and training elsewhere. Additionally, NATO has established eight **NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIUs)** in countries along NATO's eastern flank—the three Baltic States, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary—that will be able to act as rapidly expandable reception and staging centers for arriving reinforcements.
- The rapid response forces are comprised of NATO's **Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)**, an approximately brigade-sized multinational force led on a rotational basis by participating allies; headquarter elements comprising NATO's Rapid Deployable Corps; and other immediately available support elements found within the NATO Force Structure. The U.S. Army forces permanently stationed in Europe—the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (Stryker brigade) based in Vilseck, Germany, and the 173rd Airborne brigade based in Vicenza, Italy—would also be able to quickly respond in a crisis, along with the United States' rotational armored brigade, made possible by ERI. Given NATO's requirement for political consensus before deploying the VJTF, the U.S. forces would likely be the most readily available first responders in certain contingencies.
- The follow-on forces would be comprised of forces based in the United States that could relatively quickly fall in on the war-fighting equipment that has been prepositioned in Western Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium). These **Army Prepositioned Stocks** were added under the FY 2017 ERI. Follow-on forces could also potentially include the expanded **NATO Response Force**, including its Initial Follow-on Forces Group and its air, maritime, and SOF components, along with any allied national forces joining the fight.

not aspire to return the United States to a Cold War-era posture. It does, however, aim to allow the United States to better defend its interests and allies and to begin to contend with Russia's military advantages in Eastern Europe by taking steps deemed minimally necessary for credible deterrence. These steps are prudent given the security environment and are neither hostile nor provocative toward Russia, regardless of Moscow's reflexive cries to the contrary.

The sum total of the measures taken by the United States and its European allies since 2014 are a good start, but they are not enough to adequately manage the Russia challenge. Notwithstanding rotational increases made possible through ERI, the U.S. Army combat presence in Europe remains a full brigade strength below what it was in 2012—prior to renewed tensions with Russia. Defense spending among NATO allies (not including the United States) will collectively increase by 4.3 percent in 2017 with a total increase of \$46 billion since 2014, though arguably this can and should be happening more quickly in certain cases.<sup>6</sup> The European Union (EU) has held firm on sanctions (recently renewed through January 2018), though the \$11 billion, 745-mile Nord Stream 2 pipeline project remains a possibility—in violation of both the spirit of the sanctions and stated EU desires to diversify away from Russian gas supplies. Energy cooperation is likewise expanding between Russia and the increasingly autocratic governments in Turkey and Hungary.

Given that Russia's malign influence continues unabated and with growing ambition, the yardstick for measuring the success of the Western response can no longer be the ability to reach and maintain consensus around a NATO table. Rather, it must be tied to outcomes; i.e., changing Russia's behavior. There remains much that can be done to press the West's advantages vis-a-vis Russia without sparking a conflict or even coming close. It is time to draw a firmer line—to decrease our sensitivity to Russia's reflexive protests and increase the credibility of our threats and promises. As Lenin reminds us about the Russian attitude toward power, “You probe with bayonets. If you find mush, you push. If you find steel you withdraw.” A steel spine is required in defense of the international system that has served the United States and its allies so well over the past 70 years.

## **The Way Forward**

I, along with my co-authors, offer a comprehensive strategy for managing the Russia challenge in a CSIS report entitled “Recalibrating U.S. Strategy toward Russia: A New Time for Choosing.” This strategy seeks to strengthen Western institutions, contest Russia's aggression, and pursue cooperation where advantageous and feasible (such as in the areas of arms control and nuclear nonproliferation) without degenerating into endless accommodation.

Without recreating that work here, I wish to highlight a few of the high priority recommendations that Congress can advance:

- **Pass the Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017.** The Senate's overwhelming bipartisan support (98-2) for the “Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017” in Senate Resolution 722 on June 15, 2017, is a necessary and appropriate step that will ensure Russia continues to be

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen Mitchell, “NATO pledges to up defense spending after Trump pressure,” *The Hill*, June 28, 2017. <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/339832-nato-pledges-to-up-defense-spending-after-trump-pressure>.

held accountable for its aggressive and destabilizing actions; further deter it from undertaking similar acts in the future; and positively assert Congress's vital oversight role in matters pertaining to U.S. national security.

Beyond codifying the current sanctions regime, the Senate resolution seeks to dissuade those that would do business with the Russian intelligence and defense sectors, a vital element of the legislation that would both further punish Russia for its interference in the 2016 U.S. elections and inhibit the growth and development of its defense capabilities. The legislation also expands sanctions related to Russia's energy sector and further restricts access to debt financing; levies new sanctions against Russian actors engaged in corruption and human rights abuses, and those supplying weapons to the Assad regime or conducting cyberattacks on behalf of the Russian government; and, importantly, authorizes assistance to allies and partners in Central and Eastern Europe to counter malign Russian influence and disinformation. These are needed steps that will help provide the United States with leverage in managing the Russia challenge.

The U.S. Congress—Republicans and Democrats alike—must unite to send a clear message to Russia and others that our core democratic practices are not a playground for bullies and dictators—that we will punish and oppose any violation of our sovereignty and that of our allies and partners. The U.S. House of Representatives should take immediate action to pass a matching resolution.

- **Increase and optimize the U.S. conventional military presence in Europe.** U.S. forces in Europe today are not adequate to deter Russian aggression at a remaining level of risk that should be acceptable to U.S. policymakers or members of Congress. This does not mean that the United States should return to the massive Cold War-era military presence it once kept in Europe. There are reasonable steps, however, that could be taken to enhance the credibility of our deterrence in Europe. To start, The United States should forward station an armored brigade combat team and additional Army enabling units in Europe; restore a full-strength combat aviation brigade; retain at least six Air Force fighter squadrons in Europe with the ability to rapidly flow in more aircraft as necessary; and ensure a robust naval presence in and around European waters. There should be at least as many combat forces in Europe today as there were in 2012.

The European Reassurance Initiative—or rather its successor, the European Deterrence Initiative—will need to continue to be funded at similar or slightly higher levels and should be codified in the Defense Department's base budget, rather than be considered as part of the Overseas Contingency Operations account. This will provide greater stability and predictability to the Defense Department's Europe planning. The Russia threat is not going away anytime soon and the budget should reflect this reality.

- **Support Ukraine and other partners in the so-called grey zone.** The United States has committed more than \$600 million in security assistance to Ukraine – the cornerstone of which is train, equip, and advise efforts that help build the capacity of Ukraine's forces, while also advancing institutional reform. Ukraine will require additional support—conditioned on its continued progress in implementing necessary anticorruption and transparency reforms—across the spectrum of its security, economic, and governance needs.



Congress should continue the authorization of lethal aid to Ukraine as a signal of support for necessary policy changes that would increase the costs to Russia for any further aggression. Also needed is greater engagement with and support to the other vulnerable non-NATO partners in the Caucasus, Balkans, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe as a means to check Russia attempts to undermine their sovereignty and foment regional instability. Funding for State Department resilience efforts in Europe will be key.