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**Hearing on Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe: Where Does Putin Go Next After  
Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova?**

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Good afternoon. I want to thank the Foreign Relations Committee for the invitation to speak here today. Perhaps it is a bit unorthodox to find the president of one nation representing the interests of another before the United States Senate, but I think the distinguished members of this Committee understand why I have gone from being a president to serving one.

Ukraine and Georgia are on the front-lines of a fight that may seem far away from here. But Ukraine is what stands between America and Russian aggression. Ukraine earned its right to aspire to Western integration when it gave up over 1800 warheads — one-third of the Soviet nuclear arsenal — to help secure peace in post-Cold war Europe. Twice since, the people of Ukraine have taken to the streets to defend this right. Supporting Ukraine — including by giving them the arms they need to fight for their future and by supporting their efforts to build a viable, strong, Ukrainian democracy and state— is now imperative to American security.

The road-markers of Putin's reign are the gravestones of his critics and opponents. His years in power can be measured by the rollback of federalization, rights, freedom, and opportunity. Every marker we can think of in his timeline is about increasing control of Russia and the Russian-speaking world.

In September 1999, as director of the FSB, Putin sent troops into Chechnya. Three months later he was acting president of Russia. In August 2008, he invaded Georgia. Three months later the constitution was changed to ensure that when Putin returned to the presidency, it would be for a 6-year term.

Putin's military excursions are always the prelude to the centralization of his personal power. This has made Russia more unpredictable, and Europe and the United States less secure in economic and military terms.

We don't know yet what will follow the invasion of Ukraine. One year ago, as the corrupt regime of President Yanukovich fell, Russian forces moved into Crimea. Moscow later announced the annexation of the peninsula. Russian military and intelligence operatives stirred up unrest in the Donbass region of Ukraine, which grew into a full-blown war including the participation of tens of thousands of Russian regular forces. Russian involvement increased after

the downing of a Malaysian passenger jet by Russian air defenses that had been illegally brought into Ukraine in August 2014.

In September, President Poroshenko addressed a joint session of Congress with the request to provide Ukraine with defensive assistance. In bilateral talks with the US, Ukrainian officials have continuously submitted requests for assistance and defensive weapons. Ukraine has been provided some non-lethal assistance, including radars to help detect mortars, bulletproof vests, and some other basic aid and equipment.

But what will strengthen Ukrainian defense is lethal weapons — specifically, anti-tank weapons that can halt further Russian advance. When Russia knows there will be little cost to them to take the territory, they will take the territory. They will continue to establish facts on the ground that will give them a stronger position in the kabuki of future negotiations.

The arguments for withholding lethal aid are ones Georgia knows well: after the war in 2008, a de facto ban on arms sales to Georgia was in place. We couldn't even buy spare parts for our American rifles.

As then, opponents say that providing Ukraine with lethal weapons will provoke Russia to step up its military involvement and escalate the conflict. But this appeasement ignores that Putin's aim is to unseat the government in Kiev and fully destabilize Ukrainian democracy.

But adequate force can stop aggression: in the 1980s, shoulder-fired Stinger missiles raised the costs for the Soviets in Afghanistan so much that this was the single most decisive factor in the eventual defeat of the Soviet Army. As Putin's popularity soars post-Crimea, the one crack in his armor is the mounting, secret human cost of his war. To raise the cost for the Kremlin — on the frontline and at home — further advances have to come with the fear of increased casualties.

The importance of maintaining a joint position with the Europeans is also cited frequently. But Ukraine has little reason, historic or contemporary, to hope for German support. The United States should take the lead, empowering regional actors like Poland and other neighbors of Ukraine, joining with supportive nations like the UK and the Baltics to create a coalition to arm and train the Ukrainian army.

Ukraine must reform. I have focused today on the case for arming Ukraine because without this, there won't be a country to rebuild. But this is not to say its success will not be equally determined by fighting corruption, bringing the economy out of the shadows, increasing revenue to the state budget, and delivering better lives to the people of Ukraine.

American support of all those efforts, and support for the Ukrainian economy during the war, is critical. But time is short, and underneath the deception and the information war, the Russian plan could not be more transparent. They will seize more of the east and south of Ukraine; send defeated Ukrainian troops back to Kiev; and attempt to destabilize the social and economic situation enough that pressure mounts and the democratically-elected President and Government of Ukraine collapse or are overthrown.

Only the swift and immediate action of the US government to train and equip the Ukrainians, as well as providing them with economic assistance, can stop Putin's strategy to deconstruct Europe, the transatlantic architecture, and transatlantic aspirations.

Putin is willing to fight in ways we are not. Georgia is a country of 4 million people — and Putin sent tens of thousands of troops to invade our country. Since 2008, Russia has spent well over a billion dollars propping up the budgets of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2015, while the Russian state budget is being cut by 10% across the board, Russia's payments to South Ossetia have increased by 19%. Add to that the costs of military deployments to and arrangements with these regions. Add to that the costs of backing anti-European, xenophobic groups in Tbilisi to whittle away support for Euro-Atlantic integration under a government attempting rapprochement with an aggressive and bullying neighbor. Add to that the costs of the media and documentaries and reports Russia has funded to blame the 2008 war on Georgia and its NATO aspirations. The list goes on.

This is what Putin is willing to commit to ensure Georgia will not have a future that Russia does not dictate. He did this only to ensure that NATO could not offer Georgia a concrete pathway to membership. He did this so his narrative at home is secure.

And as Putin has made clear — Ukraine is a nearly divine cause for him. We understand only shadows of the billions of dollars he has spent to keep Ukraine in the "Russian world." According to UN, over 6,000 people have been killed in the fighting in eastern Ukraine. Up to 20% of the industrial capacity of Ukraine has been removed or destroyed. A million people have been displaced.

In the past year, Russia has also backed political parties, heavy propaganda, and sharp economic pressure to erode support for Europe in Moldova, hoping to change the political landscape even before their territorial conquests in Ukraine bring the Russian army closer to Moldova's door. And what Moldovans fear is that if Europe hasn't helped Ukraine — a far larger, richer, and more strategically important nation — Moldova will become a footnote of the regional conquest.

The price Putin is willing to pay, and to exact, is higher than we want to imagine.

In Georgia, in 2008, we fought because if we didn't fight for our sovereignty and our democracy and our independence, no one else ever would. It was, to be sure, an emotional choice — but also the rational one. We couldn't win a military war with Russia — but it is the ideological war that we believed needed to be fought, and won.

Fighting for our beliefs made many uncomfortable. Ukraine fights now for the same reason, and its Western friends are no less uncomfortable with their war. But make no mistake: Putin attacks Ukraine to weaken Europe, and to weaken NATO. When he makes the calculation that the time is right, he will cross the Article 5 line, probably in ways that are not expected. While we deliberate about definitions — Russian or Russian-backed, vacation or invasion — Putin will be fighting, and winning, an ideological war against the only force that has ever been able to contain and turn back expansionist Russian exceptionalism.

His war is a propaganda war. It is about controlling minds. And in that war, we have yet to begin to fight back to help empower the Russian people to look at their own country and their region — and to prevent the encroachment of the Russian narrative into our own politics and media.

It was not a NATO army that stopped the spread of Communism. It was a collection of strong ideals with an army standing behind it. America, the origin of many of these ideals, was always further away from the front, and thus more able to resist the seeming appeal of realist moral compromise. The same must be true today. A democratic, secure Ukraine is the last nation between revanchist Russia and America.