

**Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland
Opening Statement
on “Update on U.S.- Russia Policy”
U.S. Senate
Committee on Foreign Relations
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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our shared concern about the build-up of Russian forces on Ukraine’s borders and in occupied Crimea.

First, let me review what we are seeing: Over the past six weeks, Russia has stepped up planning for potential further military action in Ukraine, positioning close to 100 thousand troops around Ukraine’s Eastern, and Northern borders as well as from the South via the Crimean Peninsula. Russia’s plans and positioning of assets also include the means to destabilize Ukraine from within, and aggressive information operations in an attempt to undermine Ukrainian stability and social cohesion, and to pin blame for any potential escalation on Kyiv and NATO nations.

Russia's military and intelligence services are continuing to develop the capability to act decisively in Ukraine when ordered to do so, potentially in early 2022. The intended force, if fully mobilized, would be twice the size of what we saw last spring, including approximately 100 Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs), or nearly all of Russia's ready ground forces based West of the Urals.

We don't know whether Russian President Putin has made a decision to attack Ukraine or overthrow its government but we do know he is building the capacity to do so. Much of this comes right out of Putin's 2014 playbook but this time, it is on a much larger and more lethal scale. So despite our uncertainty about exact intentions and timing, we must prepare for all contingencies, even as we push Russia to reverse course.

Now to what we are doing: First, we are engaging Russia at all levels to urge Moscow to pull back, and settle any concerns with Ukraine or with the Trans-Atlantic community through diplomacy. The President sent CIA Director Burns to Moscow with that message in early November; Secretary Blinken engaged FM Lavrov last Thursday; NSA

Sullivan and I have been active with Russian counterparts, and [today] President Biden gave that message directly to President Putin.

We are also warning of severe costs and consequences, including deploying far harsher economic measures than we have used before, if Russia chooses the path of confrontation and military action.

Second, we are engaging intensively with President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian government to strengthen their defenses, support their preparedness, and help them fight disinformation, while also urging national unity and vigilance in the face of Russian efforts to divide or provoke them. The United States' commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence is unwavering.

Third, during Secretary Blinken's meetings at NATO and the OSCE last week and in countless bilateral meetings at all levels, we are working with Allies and partners to send a united message: Russia must deescalate, pull back its forces and return to negotiations. But if Russia attacks Ukraine, we will be united in imposing severe consequences on Moscow for its actions, including high-impact economic measures we

have refrained from using in the past. At NATO, SACEUR and national military authorities are also preparing advice on necessary steps to improve resilience and harden defenses in Allied territory.

None of us seeks a confrontation or a crisis. Diplomacy remains the best route to settle the conflict in the Donbas and address other grievances. The Minsk agreements offer the best basis for negotiations, and the U.S. is prepared to support a revived effort if the parties welcome that.

More broadly, President Biden continues to believe that a more stable and predictable U.S.-Russia relationship is in both our interests. We will continue to have deep disagreements with the Kremlin on human rights, Mr. Navalnyy's treatment, press and NGO freedom, Belarus, cyber threats, election interference, detaining American citizens, embassy staffing and many other things. President Biden has and will continue to raise all these issues with President Putin.

And yet, when the United States and Russia work together, as we do now on Iran and in the nascent strategic stability talks, we offer our

citizens and people everywhere the prospect of a safer future. But what we could and should do together will be put at risk if President Putin chooses more aggression against Ukraine.

While I have you captive, I want to thank this committee for moving so many of our State Department nominees out of committee in recent weeks, and even getting a few confirmed. But with 85 nominees pending consideration before the Senate, American diplomacy remains at quarter power at Main State and around the world. At this time of myriad security challenges, every empty slot diminishes our global influence and creates space for our adversaries to fill. As Christmas and the New Year approach, the Senate could give American diplomacy no greater gift than to get our folks confirmed and off to work. Thank you.

I look forward to your questions.