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**Russia's Malign Influences in Europe:
Moscow's Strategy to Dismantle the West**

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Chairman John McCain, Ranking Member Jack Reed, and members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the growing threat from Vladimir Putin's Russia to European security and our trans-Atlantic alliance.

I will begin by outlining the fundamental threats posed by the Kremlin and then place the Balkans in this broader strategic context. Moscow is engaged in a global Shadow War in which the primary goal is to dismantle the West and project Russia as a pole of power on an equal global footing with the United States. Europe is the core battleground of this struggle for dominance, in which Moscow does not recognize the independence or integrity of any targeted state.

Moscow's Objectives

Putin's Russia is engaged in a concerted campaign to restore a Moscow-centered bloc, undermine the stability of several regions stretching from the Arctic to the Caspian Basin, weaken NATO as a security provider, and devolve the European Union. There are three main components of Moscow's anti-Western offensive.

1. Russia defines itself as a distinct "Eurasian pole of power," defending itself against Western encroachment, proud of its anti-Americanism and authoritarianism, determined to delegitimize the Western democratic model, and intent on playing a vanguard role among governments that reject political influence from Washington and Brussels.
2. A key Kremlin goal is to reverse US influences within the wider Europe. This would help Putin exert leverage over the foreign and security policies of key states. Unlike during the Cold War, there is no accepted division of Europe into Western and Russian spheres. Instead, numerous states are coerced or enticed

either to join the Russian zone, turn neutral, or oppose US policy. Moscow pressures former Soviet republics to relinquish their Western aspirations, promotes conflicts within and between the Balkan states, fosters and exploits disputes over occupied territories in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, and subverts members of both NATO and the EU.

3. While its goals are imperial, Kremlin strategies are flexible. A diverse assortment of weapons are deployed to disarm the adversary, whether energy, business, trade, corruption, blackmail, cyberspace, espionage, politics, religion, ideology, disinformation, proxy conflicts, or outright warfare.

Russia Targets Europe

Moscow views both NATO and the EU as threats to its expansionist ambitions. NATO's commitment to collective defense obstructs Russia's revisionism and its "divide and conquer" policy. EU standards of legality and transparency challenge Russia's opaque business model. Western political and human rights standards undermine Russia's autocratic political model. Hence "Brexit" and other problems within the EU are welcomed by Moscow as they divide the Union, encourage bilateral deals with Russia, and limit further enlargement.

Moscow benefits from political, ethnic, and social turbulence in Europe. Lucrative business deals and campaign donations enable the Kremlin to corrupt and influence targeted officials. Democratic regression or the upsurge of nationalist populism favors Russia's objectives by weakening state institutions and deepening EU divisions. Putin appeals both to leftist anti-Americans and ultra-nationalist Euroskeptics to foster turmoil. During election cycles Moscow aims to discredit politicians that do not favor its interests. This can involve blackmail, fabricated news reports, and disclosure of stolen personal communications.

Moscow's Balkan Dimension

The Balkans are viewed in Moscow as Europe's "soft underbelly" where latent conflicts are enflamed, potential new allies courted, and economic opportunities exploited. Russia possesses four main channels of influence in the region: energy, corruption, nationalism, and propaganda.

1. Moscow fosters energy dependence by tying Balkan countries into energy projects, including gas supplies, pipelines, and refineries. Energy dependence can undergird diplomatic and political compliance by exposing countries to blackmail and coercion.

2. Political leaders and businesspeople are corrupted to favor Russia's interests and to either remain neutral or support Moscow's positions in its foreign policy offensives.
3. Local nationalisms are promoted to stir conflicts between rival nationalist projects, undermine support for NATO, the US, and EU, and strengthen Moscow's role as mediator. This enables the Kremlin to retard the region's progress toward Western institutions.
4. The Kremlin engages in propaganda offensives through local media, internet, and social networks to enhance Russia's prestige and undermine state institutions. Its messages are designed to appeal to Euroskeptic, anti-American, and ultra-conservative elements in which Russia poses as the defender of traditional values.

Moscow aims to disqualify the West Balkan states from NATO and EU membership. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, it encourages the Serb entity government to keep the country divided. In Kosova, it uses the Serbian minority to uphold the specter of partition and blocks Kosova from entering the UN. In Macedonia, it manipulates internal turmoil and the country's obstructed path toward NATO and the EU to gain political influence.

The coup attempt in Montenegro during national elections in October 2016 was reportedly organized by Russian military intelligence operatives to prevent the country from attaining NATO membership. The plot was uncovered in time or it could have led to mass bloodshed in Podgorica. While the Russians evaded arrest, Montenegrin courts have begun trials of suspected Serb nationalist participants, including members of the pro-Moscow opposition. Tellingly, the Serbian government has been helpful in Montenegro's efforts to investigate the plot. Belgrade realizes that Serbia could face a similar scenario of destabilization if it decides to loosen its links with Moscow.

We must better prepare for future violent scenarios. The Montenegrin putsch attempt could be a trial run and a warning to the region. Moscow's next conspiracy is likely to be more sophisticated and broad-based, whether by inciting Serbian leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina against the Muslim population, engineering ethnic clashes between Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia, or provoking Serbian-Montenegrin conflicts. If it serves his interests, Putin would not be averse to

igniting a regional war to test NATO resolve, distract attention from Russia's interventions, and undermine Western integration.

Western Responses

US and EU officials have claimed that there is no zero-sum competition with Russia over the allegiance of any European country. In reality, the contradiction between a country's freedom to choose its international alliances, which the West espouses, and limitations on state sovereignty, on which Moscow insists, lies at the core of the current struggle. While Putin remains at the helm, Western policy must be geared toward long-term support for the independence and integrity of countries throughout the Wider Europe.

In the Balkans, current security challenges are not primarily military but political, ethnic, economic, financial, and informational, particularly where local disputes can be ignited through outside subversion. The US and NATO must prevent conflict by identifying vulnerabilities, promoting interstate cooperation, bolstering energy diversification (including gas supplies from Azerbaijan), combating Russian subversion, and furnishing steps toward NATO entry.

Paradoxically, Moscow's attack on democratic elections in the US and Europe awakened a new sense of realism about Putin's Russia, dispelling illusions about common interests. Washington must grasp the leadership role just as it did during the Cold War, because Europe remains divided and is perceived by Moscow as weak and indecisive. If the US forfeits its role we could witness regional crises that shatter European stability and damage the NATO alliance.

Conclusions

The US and NATO need to be armed for the Shadow War with Moscow. In addition to deterrence, the most effective form of defense is offense with a focus on Russia's numerous vulnerabilities: economic, political informational, and cyber. The Russian Federation faces prolonged internal decay because of its structural, economic, and demographic failures. To deceive its citizens the Kremlin engages in foreign adventures: when it cannot provide bread it offers circuses. The Trump administration can craft an enduring legacy by reversing the Kremlin offensive in Europe and rebuilding a more resilient trans-Atlantic alliance. This would raise the stature of the United States as the most effective international leader and make America stronger and greater.

Lastly, I would like to include my recent co-authored book with Margarita Assenova for the record. Entitled *Eurasian Disunion: Russia's Vulnerable Flanks*, it provides a comprehensive analysis of Moscow's strategies and ambitions toward Europe and the United States.