

**TESTIMONY OF GENERAL JAMES L. JONES, USMC (Ret.)**  
**THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**  
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, and Members of the Committee, thank you for convening this important hearing at this very challenging and consequential juncture in America's relations with Russia, and in world affairs.

We have all witnessed the most recent and dangerous developments in Syria where Mr. Putin, under the guise of fighting ISIL, is using force to advance his highly cynical campaign to prop up Bashar al-Assad. This action is merely the latest in a pattern of behavior emanating from Moscow that we had hoped ended with the Cold War. Unfortunately, as I came to learn during my tenure as National Security Advisor, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was an outcome neither cheered nor accepted by the current Russian president.

I would like to share with the committee my thoughts on three dimensions of the situation before us. First, I will describe my view of Mr. Putin's primary motivations, which go a long way toward explaining his actions in the Middle East, Europe, and Ukraine; second, I will touch on the strategy he is employing to achieve his objectives; and third I will conclude by sharing my own recommendations for steps that the United States and our allies should consider in response to Mr. Putin's activities.

**Putin's world view and domestic situation**

In 2009, I attended a breakfast meeting between President Obama and President Putin. I left that breakfast convinced of three things: first, Mr. Putin is a product of his upbringing in the KGB; second, he believes deeply that Russia was humiliated by the conclusion of the Cold War and is wholeheartedly committed to 'righting' what he sees as a historic injustice, the collapse of the Soviet Union. Third, he clearly believes that NATO is a great evil and that his interests are best served by weakening the transatlantic alliance and destabilizing his western periphery. These three views are reflected not only in Russia's revanchist foreign policy, but also in the country's lack of political and economic evolution under his tenure as President.

As national security advisor, we worked hard with President Obama and the Russian President at that time, Mr. Medvedev, on advancing the US-Russia relationship to a new paradigm. I genuinely believed that President Medvedev aimed to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic arc and was the kind of partner with whom we could achieve common goals. We made important progress including the START II treaty; convincing Russia to withhold its delivery of S-300 surface to air missiles to Iran during a key period of time; and achieving their cooperation on a range of non-traditional security challenges on regional matters such as Afghanistan and transnational crime. Unfortunately, upon returning to the Kremlin, President Putin reversed much of the modest progress we made during the Medvedev presidency, and moved Russia down a very different path, away from Euro-Atlantic integration of his predecessor.

President Putin has proven he remains a cynical cold warrior, deeply nostalgic for a Russian-centric sphere of influence. In addition, Russia's recent military involvement in Syria and increased cooperation with Iran, combined with greater political engagement across the Middle East, indicates Mr. Putin is upping its effort to increase Russian influence in that region as well.

Mr. Putin's strategic objective is equally clear: to reassert Russian power and prestige on his terms. International principles and norms of behavior are not in his calculus. He is willing to use force to achieve his objectives, including overturning internationally recognized boundaries and disregarding state sovereignty, illustrated by the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Given his ambitions and actions, Mr. Putin is far more interested in modernizing his military than reforming Russia's dysfunctional and corrupt political and economic systems. Low oil prices and western sanctions have negatively impacted the country's already fetid business environment and placed great strain on the Russian economy.

While Mr. Putin's poll numbers ostensibly remain quite high in Russia, particularly after the annexation of Crimea – it is difficult to know if these numbers are credible given the lack of civil society, free media, political opposition and independent institutions in Russia. But for now he is consolidating power effectively.

It remains to be seen if his popularity can survive the kind of significant economic downturn which Russia is experiencing. The country is now in full recession for the first time in six years. The World Bank forecasts Russia's economy will shrink by 3.8 percent in 2015.

Russia's political system and human rights situation has also degraded during Mr. Putin's return to the Kremlin. The Russian state actively persecutes homosexuals, has clamped down on media and free expression, has fostered an environment of hostility to what is left of the political opposition and free media, and operates a robust propaganda machine.

### **Putin's International Objectives and Modus Operandi**

Russia's aggressiveness abroad is not only a means of diverting attention from his domestic shortcomings; it emanates naturally from President Putin's world view and his desire to project power and influence. In my view, Putin aims to restore Russia as a major player in the international system; to leverage Russia's strengths and enemies' perceived weaknesses to his advantage; to harness a resurgent nationalism for his adventures; to sow division within the transatlantic alliance and on a larger scale, disrupt international order.

### **Military Action**

Strengthening and modernizing the Russian military has been central to Mr. Putin's ambition of reasserting Russian power on the world stage. Russia is presently halfway through a ten-year, \$700 billion defense modernization initiative that is projected to result in the acquisition of 1,100 helicopters, 100 ships (including 24 submarines), 2,300 tanks, and 2,000 artillery pieces. While President Putin has looked to protect the military from budget cuts due to low oil prices, there are signs the modernization process may be forced to move at a slower pace.

Even so, U.S. military leaders fear these new capabilities are being used to pursue an anti-access/area denial strategy against NATO, particularly in the Baltic Sea region from Kaliningrad; in the Black Sea region from Russia's buildup in Crimea; and now in Syria from its deployment of anti-aircraft capabilities. There is growing concern within the alliance that Putin is using a series of capability deployments in these sensitive areas to raise the risk, or perceived risk of US or coalition military action in these regions. We see this in Syria, where Russia's deployments are geared not toward fighting ISIL but rather toward protecting the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad. I believe that the Russian President's deployment of combat aircraft and sophisticated air defenses – which are not needed to fight ISIS - are intended to deter the US-led coalition from establishing a no-fly zone in northern Syria.

In addition to investments in Russian military equipment, large-scale Russian military exercises, some conducted on very short notice are a cause for concern. Russia has held major exercises in the Arctic, joined with China in naval drills near our Japanese allies, and held major exercises which included tens of thousands of troops on NATO's eastern flank. Indeed, in March 2015, Russia held an exercise intended to simulate the invasion of Denmark and the Baltic states.

In some cases, exercises have been used to mask long-term Russian troop deployments, such as in Syria last month and in Eastern Ukraine, where US European command has estimated there may be as many as 12,000-Russian troops. Russia's use of so-called 'volunteers' or little green men – which ostensibly offer Moscow plausible deniability – is another element of the Kremlin's so-called 'hybrid warfare tactics.' We have been alerted by Moscow that such 'volunteers' may find their way to Syria very soon.

There is real concern among allies in northeast Europe that a snap exercise could be used as the pretext for Russian forces to suddenly conduct a small-scale incursion into NATO territory that would create a *fait accompli*, or risk all-out war with Moscow. This would be a direct challenge to Article V of the Washington treaty, and potentially end the principle of collective defense which is the very heart of NATO's founding treaty. Given the growing anti-access capabilities described above, that cost could be high indeed if we and our allies are unprepared for such an outcome.

There have also seen the deployment of more aggressive and more capable Russian naval forces. As stated by the Commander of US Naval Forces Europe, the Russians are constructing an "arc of steel from the Arctic to the Mediterranean. Starting with their new Arctic bases, to Leningrad in the Baltic and Crimea in the Black Sea, Russia has introduced advanced air defense, cruise missile systems and new platforms." As evidenced by recent Russian naval activity, Mr. Putin is focusing his naval capability on addressing the perceived advantages of NATO navies. He is signaling to us that the maritime domain is contested.

Finally, there are increasing reports that Russian military aircraft are violating NATO airspace with their transponders off, raising the risk of civilian aircraft accidents while violating the sovereignty of our treaty allies. NATO intercepted some 400 Russian aircraft flying over Europe in 2014 and numbers suggest that 2015 will exceed that total. And of course, just this week we saw Russia violate the airspace of our Turkish allies.

Russia's advanced cyber capabilities are also a source of grave concern for the US and its allies. We have seen Russia employ its impressive cyber capabilities against Estonia, a treaty ally. We must be alert to Moscow's willingness to use this tool to achieve its political goals.

### ***Energy Action***

Mr. Putin's strategy does not rely on military power alone. He seeks to maintain European dependence on Russian gas and continues to use that dependence as a weapon; he deftly applies a 'divide and conquer' strategy to undermine Europe's cohesion. We see this in particular through the Nord-Stream pipeline, which connects Russia directly to Europe while bypassing Ukraine. Also in Russia's gas pricing tactics which reward its friends and punishes its opponents. The members of this committee understand that Mr. Putin's incursion in the Crimea is, among other things, about exercising political power through the control of energy, and about brandishing the threat of energy scarcity to intimidate and manipulate vulnerable populations. The greater the gap between global supply and demand, the more destructive the energy weapon will become.

While Russian troops occupy a sovereign country, including a major port, to stop Ukraine from receiving energy imports, Mr. Putin's rubles are being spent on campaigns to stop natural gas development in central Europe—all with a mind towards creating scarcity, dependence, and vulnerability among countries who are U.S. friends, allies, and trading partners.

Fortunately, Europe is awakening to the threat and is investing in redundancies, gas storage hubs, and interconnectors that reduce Russia's ability to hold countries hostage.

### ***Political Action***

An important part of Russia's foreign policy is to sow division within the western alliance and to undercut the cohesion of the Euro-Atlantic arc of economic and security cooperation. Moscow actively courts EU countries that are economically weak or dependent on trade with Russia in hopes of fracturing unity. This past summer Putin unsuccessfully wooed the newly elected Syriza government in Greece in the midst of ongoing discussions with the Eurozone over its economic rescue package in hopes of convincing Athens to vote against EU sanctions on Russia.

Russia has also built links to European party leaders on the far right and far left in order to foster close relationships at the political and financial levels, such as with the National Front in France. Mr. Putin has made a habit of sustaining old and corrupt alliances (such as with Syrian President Assad or Belarussian President Lukashenko). Just this week, President Assad noted the importance of the Russia-Iran-Iraq alliance at sustaining his regime.

State-controlled media outlets spread untruths primarily with the intent to undermine western diplomacy and messaging, mask Russia's aggressive intentions, and plant seeds of doubt within western publics. Russian television parrots the government's narrative that Russia is under attack from Ukrainian 'fascists,' a hostile NATO, and ISIL. The Russian government deliberately lies about Russia's activities in Ukraine and denies it has forces there, despite visual proof to the contrary. It has also obfuscated the role of Russian-backed rebels in downing Malaysian airlines flight 17, and has outrageously blocked a UN tribunal to get the facts. Let's not forget that 298 souls lost their lives in this unconscionable tragedy. Yet Russia thumbs its nose at the international community by blocking simple fact finding – a stunning example of how out of touch its behavior is with international norms and standards of justice. More recently, Russian has lied about the fact that Russian the air force is currently bombing U.S.-backed opposition groups in Syria, claiming instead that they are striking at ISIS despite evidence to the contrary.

## **Actionable Recommendations for Countering Russian Aggression**

In the face of the strategic environment I have described, I believe the United States should lead its allies in developing a three-pronged approach that includes economic, political, and security components.

### **Economic considerations:**

*Invest in North-South Energy Infrastructure in Europe:* To undermine Putin's use of energy as a political weapon, the U.S. should support the EU's development of energy, tele-communications, and transportation infrastructure along a North-South axis from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea. This North-South corridor would constitute the most strategically viable alternative to Russia's regional abuse of current energy supplies and supply routes; foster greater cohesion among Central and East European states; undermine Russia's monopoly on energy pricing; and severely inhibit its ability to use energy as a weapon. Along with my Polish colleague Pawel Olechnowicz, CEO of the Grupa Lotus, I have co-chaired an Atlantic Council report exploring this issue in greater detail. It includes a set of recommendation receiving strong support in Europe and the United States. There is much we can and must do to support the development of this critical infrastructure. I would ask your permission to make the report a part of the hearing record.

*TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership):* Energy security is instrumental for a transatlantic growth, prosperity, and security. The same can be said of successfully concluding TTIP. Europe and the US have the largest trading partnership in the world. Strengthening it serves our mutual interests and reaffirms the centrality of the transatlantic alliance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. TTIP also affords the U.S. a unique opportunity to author the rulebook and roadmap for 21<sup>st</sup> century advanced economies, which would stand in stark contrast with Russia's reliance upon crony capitalism.

*Maintain U.S.-EU Sanctions:* The sanctions regime that was implemented in response to Russia's illegal actions in Ukraine may not have altered Putin's strategic calculus in Ukraine, but they have raised a cost to his actions and left Russia economically isolated. The U.S. and EU should maintain Russian sanctions until full military and political implementation of the Minsk II agreement has been secured in Ukraine, and should also be prepared to increase sanctions if Minsk II isn't fully implemented (Moscow must be made aware that its support for rebels will incur increasingly costly penalties). Furthermore, Russia's full implementation of the Minsk II agreement shouldn't necessarily result in 'business as usual' either; Crimea-related sanctions should remain in place until Russian forces evacuate the Crimean peninsula and return it to Ukraine.

### **Political Considerations:**

*Maintain transatlantic solidarity:* A central tenet of a US strategy for countering Russia should be to strengthen transatlantic solidarity and cooperation. American leadership in this effort will be crucial and fostering a common vision for the alliance in the face of a new and more challenging operating environment

A second component of our political strategy should be a comprehensive public diplomacy campaign spotlighting the values that make the transatlantic community unique and conducive to human development: free and open markets; respect for human rights and democratic governance; and respect for the rule of law—values that stand in stark contrast to Putin's Russia.

A key source of Russia's influence is its predation of fragile governments and the exercise of corrupt practices. The U.S. must continue to support ongoing political reforms in Europe, particularly in countries on the NATO/EU periphery such as Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Balkan states that are currently seeking closer association with Euro-Atlantic institutions.

*Reaffirm NATO's open door policy:* NATO must prevent Russia from shutting its long-standing 'open door' membership policy. At next year's NATO summit in Warsaw, NATO should admit Montenegro (assuming it has met all political and military commitments). Doing so would counter Russia's growing influence in the Balkans and send a powerful signal that the vision of a united Europe, whole and free, remains viable. A similar effort should be made by Washington to unlock the tragic political conflict within the alliance that has prevented Macedonia from taking its rightful place as a NATO member.

**Security considerations:**

*Enhance NATO force presence in Central Europe:* The U.S. should rally allies around a permanent NATO force presence in Central and Eastern Europe, to include American forces. This will be controversial because some allies fear provocation of Russia, which will require careful American diplomacy. Given Russia's aggressive exercises and troop positioning on NATO's eastern flank, I believe we run a greater risk of conflict by NOT increasing NATO's presence in Central and Eastern Europe.

*Maintain funding for the European Reassurance Initiative:* I applaud the efforts of the U.S. Congress to fund the President's \$1 billion initiative to enhance the presence of U.S. rotational forces, air policing, and infrastructure in Central, Eastern, and Southeast Europe. This appropriation should continue, given the ongoing Russian threat to our allies, but U.S. political leaders should also press our allies to continue their own contributions to NATO's Readiness Action Plan.

*Make Resilience a core task of NATO:* A key element of Russia's strategy is the use of strategic surprise and hybrid threats to take advantage of weak states. Adding resilience as a core task would complement NATO's current core tasks of collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. An important component of building greater resilience should be enhancing NATO's cybersecurity capabilities and responsibilities.

*Provide security assistance to Ukraine:* I support the Administration's recent decision to send long-range counter-battery radars to Ukraine and believe we should take additional measures, such as providing the anti-tank missiles, intelligence support, training and counter-electronic warfare capabilities that have been requested by Kiev and mandated by the 2016 NDAA.

*Empower the SACEUR to make rapid troop deployments:* Russia's reliance on strategic surprise and hybrid warfare, illustrated by the seizure of Crimea, poses acute risks for our NATO allies such as the Baltic States. They in turn fear a Russian snap exercise that could potentially result in encroachment on their territorial sovereignty. To counter this threat, NATO must empower the SACEUR to employ his best military judgment and order rapid troop deployments in the interest of Alliance security.

With the Committee's permission, I would like to submit two items for the hearing record containing proposals by the Atlantic Council for steps the US government should consider in responding to President Putin's actions and assisting our friends and allies in eastern Europe.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, and members of the committee, let me close by saying that I have been deeply disappointed by Russia's actions in Syria, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe, and the negative effect these actions have had on the US-Russian relationship. I believe these actions merit the tough response I have outlined.

Having said that, President Putin will not be in power forever. There will be a Russia beyond him. The US and its allies should continue to make clear to the Russian people that they believe Russia has its rightful place in a united Europe, whole, free, and at peace, provided that Russia is willing to respect the sovereignty and free will of its neighbors, demonstrate a commitment to democracy and human rights, and respect the rules of the road in the international system.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.