

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR ROGER F. WICKER
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

ROOM SH-216

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To receive testimony on the conflict in Ukraine (As delivered)

WICKER: Last Friday, February 24th, marked a solemn anniversary: one year since Russia's unprovoked, illegal, and brutal invasion of Ukraine. The courage and ingenuity shown by Ukrainian troops, many of whom were civilians before the war, continues to be nothing short of heroic.

Now, after a long year of bloodshed and sacrifice, the war has entered a crucial phase. Today's hearing is an opportunity to review the current conditions of the war and its possible trajectory, and to discuss policy recommendations to help Ukraine win.

I appreciated President Biden's visits to Ukraine and Poland last week. What I do not appreciate is the President's repeated failure to articulate U.S. goals and interests in Ukraine in a fashion that resonates with most Americans. Congress has appropriated over \$100 billion of taxpayer funding to assist Ukraine and more is likely to be needed later this year. So I would welcome our witnesses' views on why supporting Ukraine matters to the average American.

In my view, this is not a particularly difficult case to make. U.S. support to Ukraine helps a capable, motivated, and grateful partner nation restore stability to a region of the world that is critical for our interests. As they prevent chaos spreading further into Europe, the Ukrainian armed forces are also significantly degrading the military capability of our chief adversaries, Putin's dictatorship. Finally, our support for Ukraine sends a clear message to the Chinese Communist Party, that aggression will be met with resolve. Our allies in the Asia-Pacific understand the connection between projecting strength in Ukraine and deterring Chinese aggression. Japan, for example, just announced a \$5.5 billion aid package for Ukraine. American interests are being secured without U.S. boots on the ground and for a relatively modest cost.

And after a year of fighting, the oversight requirements Congress put in place seem to be working. Just last week, the three major independent U.S. watchdogs said they had not received any reports of major fraud regarding U.S. aid.

Further many allies and partners are helping us shoulder the burden. Britain, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and the Baltic states deserve special mention for their contributions. Unfortunately, there are some larger European partners who need to do much more, notably Germany and France. This war matters greatly to the United States, but it is being fought in Europe's backyard.

I believe some in the Biden administration have recognized that the "drip, drip, drip" approach to providing military assistance has prevented Ukraine from mounting a successful counteroffensive to bring this war closer to an end. And make no mistake: Ukrainian battlefield victories are necessary for a just peace. Vladimir Putin is a war criminal who only understands brute force. He will not negotiate until he is forced to do so.

I'd like to hear from our witnesses what more could be done to sharpen the military capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. We need to learn our lessons from the "slow roll" approach we have used to arm the Ukrainians thus far. The Ukrainians have continually surprised many in the West in their ingenuity and their will to fight.

We are at a pivotal moment in this war. This is an inflection point we cannot afford to waste as we go about work of defending the interests of the United States and our allies so that the 21st century is a peaceful, prosperous, and American-led century. I have repeatedly in this past year advocated for Ronald Reagan's concept of "peace through strength." In addition, Eisenhower said over 70 years ago, only with strength could we achieve the true task of this time: to "deter aggression and secure peace."

So, Mr. Chairman, I do agree with you that we must help our Ukrainian friends, that our help should be expedited. I do question whether the pace has been properly calibrated. But I thank you and I look forward to working with you in this mutual, bipartisan endeavor. And I thank our witnesses.