

Opening Statement by

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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on policy matters related to the U.S. European Command area of responsibility in my capacity as Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs.

Before I begin, I would like to express my appreciation for the continued support from Congress, and this Committee, in informing and enabling the Department of Defense's efforts in this region. It is an honor to appear alongside General Cavoli, who is an outstanding colleague.

It has been more than a year now since Russia launched a full-scale invasion to destroy Ukraine as a sovereign state. This war of aggression created the worst security crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. This war not only violates not only the territorial integrity of Ukraine, it also threatens the security of Europe, the global economy, and the stability of the global community. Yet Russia's aggression has also galvanized the free world in response. Today, thanks to the courage of the people of Ukraine, supported by the United States and a broad coalition of Allies and partners from around the world, Russia has failed to achieve its objectives, and an independent Ukraine endures. In Europe, NATO is more unified than ever and just this month, Finland joined the Alliance as its thirty-first member. We hope Sweden will follow soon.

Our goal is to ensure that a free, prosperous, and democratic Ukraine is able to defend itself and deter further aggression. The President has been clear that we will support Ukraine for as long as it takes. To succeed, continued bipartisan support in Congress will be vital. The military assistance that the United States has committed to Ukraine is substantial—now more than \$32 billion worth since February 2022—but those resources reflect the American interests and values at stake. As Secretary Austin has said, our support for Ukraine's self-defense is an investment in our own security and prosperity.

In a crisis of this magnitude, which implicates our national interests and values, our security and prosperity, the United States must lead. We have done so, providing a bit more than \$35 billion in security assistance since Russia's full-scale invasion of 2022. When we do so with the necessary determination and purpose, our friends also respond. The truth of that principle is demonstrated by the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, the forum where we have rallied more than 50 Allies and partners to commit more than \$19 billion in security assistance to Ukraine—

including in the critical areas of air defense, armor, and artillery. Our Allies and partners have stepped up – indeed, when you look at security assistance for Ukraine as a percentage of GDP, the United States is just about in the middle among the top 20 donors.

In today’s hearing, I would like to put the urgent priority of the Ukraine war into a broader regional context and describe how the Defense Department approaches Europe as a whole. It’s an approach informed by our assessment of the threats posed by Russia now and over the longer term.

Russia seeks to degrade the independence of its neighbors and will use force to impose territorial changes and reimpose an imperial sphere of influence. Russia also seeks to fracture the NATO Alliance. Instead, its war against Ukraine has backfired by prompting greater Allied cohesion and a reversal of Sweden’s and Finland’s historical policies of non-alignment. Still, as the National Defense Strategy describes, Russia remains an acute threat to the United States and our Allies.

Despite the setbacks that Russia’s ground forces have faced on the battlefield in Ukraine, and Russia’s diminished stature around the world, I want to underscore that Russia continues to present serious risks in many areas. These include threats posed by Russia’s nuclear arsenal, its malign cyber and information operations, and its capabilities in counterspace and undersea warfare, among others. And while its conventional ground forces will be degraded for years, Russia’s air force and navy retain substantial capability. As a result, the Department remains focused on deterring Russia from attacks on the United States and NATO Allies, including conventional aggression, which would carry the potential for further escalation. While we respond to Russia’s war against Ukraine, we are also working with Allies to modernize capabilities, increase interoperability, improve resilience against attack or coercion, share intelligence, and strengthen extended nuclear deterrence.

The United States maintains considerable combat power in Europe and its surrounding waters through a combination of stationed and rotational forces. These forward-deployed forces deter aggression against NATO and work closely with our Allies to maintain security and stability in the Alliance.

After Russia’s invasion and purported annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Department, with the support of Congress, embarked on substantial changes to our posture in Europe. This involved billions of dollars of investments in

infrastructure improvements, building partner capacity, rotational presence, exercises and training with Allies, and prepositioned equipment.

We also expanded our access, basing, and overflight permissions in Europe, especially on NATO's eastern flank. Put simply, congressional support made it possible for the United States and Allies to respond quickly to Russia's further aggression in 2022, and reinforce our Allies.

In addition, Congress has supported increased security assistance funding to our eastern flank Allies. Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and our response, has validated the significant investments and changes we have made since its initial invasion in 2014.

In response to Russia's February 2022 aggression against Ukraine, these investments enabled the United States to reinforce NATO's security faster and with more combat capabilities than any other NATO Ally. This included both repositioning stationed and rotational forces already in Europe, temporarily extending some rotational forces beyond their planned redeployment dates, and deploying additional forces from outside Europe. DoD also placed the entire U.S. commitment to the NATO Response Force on heightened readiness. DoD's force levels in USEUCOM will fluctuate as rotations and scheduled exercises continue, yet remain significantly higher than our already robust pre-crisis levels.

We are also engaging with our NATO Allies to ensure that the Alliance is prepared for modern challenges and can deter aggression from any adversary. In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Allies have deployed defensive land and air forces in the eastern part of the Alliance, and maritime assets across the NATO area. For the first time in history, NATO has activated its defense plans and deployed portions of the NATO Response Force in a deterrence and defense role. The Department will also continue working with NATO Allies and partners to build capacity along Europe's eastern flank, strengthening defensive capabilities to bolster deterrence.

NATO's eastern flank, and Poland in particular, is a linchpin of our work to strengthen European deterrence and defense. Since 2017, the Department has maintained an enduring rotational presence in Poland and the United States continues to serve as the framework nation for the NATO Battlegroup in Poland. In addition, as announced by the President at the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, the United States has forward-stationed a Corps Forward Command Post as well as

an Army Garrison and sustainment capabilities in Poland, the first permanent stationing of U.S. forces on NATO's eastern flank.

With our planned level of rotational and forward-stationed forces and pre-positioned equipment, Poland will continue to host the majority of U.S. forces along the Eastern Flank, providing substantial host-nation infrastructure and logistical support.

In the Baltics, while our Allies have enhanced their contributions to NATO Battlegroups in the region, DoD has enhanced its rotational deployments to each Baltic country to provide a persistent presence, demonstrating the flexibility and combat credible nature of U.S. forces.

As announced at the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, DoD will maintain a rotational Brigade Combat Team (BCT) headquartered in Romania. This additional rotational BCT will maintain the ability to deploy its subordinate elements across NATO's Eastern Flank to defend the Alliance.

In the South Caucasus, Russia continues its belligerent occupation of parts of Georgia and maintains a force presence in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgia is a key partner and NATO-aspirant and we remain committed to helping reform its military and strengthen its deterrence and defensive capabilities. The United States works with all three regional partners to strengthen ties, build resilience against Russia's aggression, advance Euro-Atlantic integration, and support ongoing efforts to achieve peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In countries with historic ties to Russia, there has been a significant shift as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine -- possibly the greatest geopolitical shift since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the election of President Maia Sandu in December 2020, Moldova has taken brave steps toward Europe, and recently has committed to robust, accelerated defense reforms in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Armenia has sought to decouple itself from Russia's traditional influence and align more with the transatlantic community. The Republic of Cyprus has bravely denied Russia's warships the ability to replenish or refuel at its port facilities. With regard to these and other countries, the Department welcomes their partnership, intends to engage and listen to their security needs, and help develop ways to address their challenges.

The Black Sea region is also a focus for enhancing U.S. and NATO presence to strengthen deterrence and defense. In recognition of the strategic importance of the region, we are continuing to explore ways to promote political engagement,

regional security coordination, and democratic resilience among our Allies and partners. We must work to uphold international norms, and advance economic development and trade among the regional states. Turkiye has demonstrated its geostrategic significance as an important NATO Ally, including by scrutinizing passage of Russia's warships through the Turkish Straits, maintaining its strict adherence to the Montreux Convention. Turkiye also has significant modernization and acquisition requirements for its air force, which are needed to maintain NATO interoperability in order to support NATO and U.S. security objectives.

In the Western Balkans, we are closely watching Russia intensifying its efforts to increase instability and to stymie NATO's influence, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina through its support for Republika Srpska entity President Milorad Dodik.

In Belarus, Russia has co-opted the current regime as a key enabler of its war against Ukraine. Russia used Belarusian territory as a launching pad for its full-scale invasion, continues to deploy its forces for training missions, and recently announced plans to deploy nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory. As long as the Lukashenka regime continues to facilitate the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine and violently represses the Belarusian people's democratic aspirations and human rights, the United States will continue to impose costs on regime institutions and elites.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is also active in the region, pressuring NATO Allies and partners alike to accept infrastructure and telecommunications deals that could threaten their security. We are mindful that the PRC and Russia collaborate across a variety of arenas to undermine the global stability. We recognize the PRC is taking lessons from our support of Ukraine, and we continue to monitor its cooperation with Russia. However, it is clear that PRC influence in Europe has waned significantly in recent years, due in part to its support for Russia's war against Ukraine. We continue to work closely with European Allies and partners to share information and best practices on countering the threat posed by the PRC.

We also continue to develop policies surrounding the interconnected challenges in Europe and beyond, which the United States cannot address alone. These include complications posed by climate change, cyber and hybrid threats, terrorism and violent extremism, and rapid developments in technology; combined with acute and distinct threats emanating from state and non-state actors alike. The

Department will think differently about the requirements for deterrence and defense, including how to create advantages for ourselves and our Allies and partners, and dilemmas for our competitors.

This work is only possible with consistent congressional backing and stable funding. Congressional support for U.S. forces deployed in the U.S. European Command area of responsibility, as well as funding for defense initiatives across Europe, and Ukraine's security assistance have been, and will continue to, remain critical to achieving U.S. national security objectives.

Russia has used brutal force in an attempt to rewrite history, and change the face of Europe. In the process, Russia's actions have brought to light the stark contrast between our democratic values and the Kremlin's autocratic, violent vision. The Department of Defense, in conjunction with other U.S. Government departments and agencies, NATO Allies and partners, in close consultation with Congress, will continue to work for a secure and stable Europe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I appreciate your continued support to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, and civilians in the Department of Defense who work every day in service of the American people.