



**Statement before the  
Senate Armed Services Committee**

***“RUSSIAN STRATEGY AND MILITARY  
OPERATIONS”***

A Testimony by:

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Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to speak to you this morning as well as join with my fellow panelists to discuss the evolving nature of Russia's growing military threat which geographically stretches from the Kola Peninsula in the Arctic to the Mediterranean coast of Syria.

Russia is back as a geopolitically destabilizing state actor. After experiencing a period of relative peace and security in Europe over the past 25 years – and with the exception of the brutality of the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s – the transatlantic community believed that these twenty-five years were the new, post-modern norm. Unfortunately, I believe we will come to view this post-Cold War period as an exceptional moment of security that has now passed. We have returned to balance of power politics where Russia – with increasing frequency – uses military means to achieve its political objectives. The transatlantic community's response to Russia's invasion of its neighbors – and indeed its first talking point – is to take the military option immediately off the table. The West then seeks to establish a diplomatic course guaranteed to ensure the intractability of the very problem that Russia has created, eventually hoping to “reset” its troubled relationship and achieve agreements on broader strategic issues.

The Kremlin is reconstructing a 21st Century version of the Iron Curtain which is designed to achieve a new grand international bargain with the West – Yalta 2.0 if you will – that assures a Russian sphere of influence in Europe and the Middle East. This curtain, like its 20th century predecessor, seeks to block the perceived contagion of democracy and reform while returning Russia to internationally recognized great power status. This curtain denies military access to the West through the construction of new and a revitalization of former Russian military bases; ensures the continuous exercising of air, land and sea capabilities at full combat readiness; rapidly mobilizes substantial Russian forces in a short period of time; deploys a variety of hybrid economic and political tactics which are at its disposal; and employs an effective counterfactual strategic communications campaign.

This 21st century curtain also has a built-in, Kremlin-controlled thermostat: President Putin can turn up the heat as he has done in eastern Ukraine, and, when it is needed, he can turn down the

heat and shift to a different portion of the curtain as he is now doing in Syria. The West will continue to react to the Kremlin's actions rather than pro-actively shape and deter them.

Russia's military modernization in the Arctic is a perfect example of how this new curtain or, as I suggest in a new CSIS report – an ice curtain – has been formed. Russia has held three major military exercises in the Arctic over the past 24 months. The first instance was a simultaneous exercise around the Kola Peninsula which was part of the larger, Zapad 2013 military exercise, which demonstrated a more streamlined command structure, more efficient tactical units and the ability to deploy a large scale, complex military operation that is coordinated with other areas of operation. This exercise demonstrated that Russia has a larger spatial definition of its theatre of operations, extending from the Arctic to the Black Sea.

The second exercise, in September 2014, was the largest post-Soviet military exercise and was held in the Russian Far East. Preceded by a snap military exercise, Vostok-2014 involved over 100,000 servicemen and a complex display of air, maritime and land components. This exercise was partly conducted on a new military base in the Russian Arctic New Siberian Islands and Wrangel Island which some analysts believe simulated Russian forces repelling a U.S. or NATO invasion. This exercise focused on rapid mobilization, combined operations and demonstrated use of both conventional and unconventional forces. The third and culminating exercise occurred in March 2015 when President Putin announced a snap military exercise that consisted of 45,000 Russian forces, 15 submarines and 41 warships at full combat readiness in the Arctic. This extraordinary exercise tempo, the three-fold increase in Russian air incursions over the Arctic, Baltic and North Seas over the past twelve months and Russia's announcement that it will have a total of 14 operational airfields in the Russian Arctic by the end of this year, 50 airfields by 2020 and a 30 percent increase of Russian Special forces in the Arctic suggests that the Arctic has emerged as a major theatre of operations for Russia. Defending against future military threats, the Arctic region has now been included in Russia's amended military (December 2014) and maritime (July 2015) doctrines and will be coordinated by a new Russian Northern Fleet-United Strategic Command for the Arctic.

The conclusions that we draw from Russia's military behavior in the Arctic over the past 24 months are that Russia is increasingly able to project significant anti-access/anti-denial capabilities in the Arctic, the North Atlantic and increasingly in the North Pacific while demonstrating the ability to rapidly deploy both conventional and nonconventional forces throughout the theatre. What is perhaps most disturbing has been Russia's focus on enhancing its nuclear deterrent in the Arctic which it has simulated massive retaliatory attacks in the Barents Sea. Our Norwegian and British allies have also witnessed a surge in Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic.

From the Arctic, Russia's military presence increases along the new ice curtain south to the Finnish – Russian border. Russia has returned to its abandoned military base 50 kilometers from the Finnish border where the first Russian infantry brigade has arrived with 3,000 soldiers anticipated at the base. The curtain proceeds to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, home of the Russian Baltic Fleet, where vessels from the fleet have delivered fighter jets and Iskander missile launchers capable of launching both conventional and nuclear missiles. Russia has recently installed new S-400 missile batteries and increased its force presence. The arming of Kaliningrad is part of a 19 trillion ruble plan to increase the share of modern weapons in the Russian armed forces' arsenal from 10% to 70%.

The curtain transitions from ice to steel on the Belarussian-Polish border where, despite recent protests and opposition from Belarussian president Alexander Lukashenko, President Putin has ordered Russian officials to work with their Belarussian counterparts to construct a military base in Belarus. Russia already has functional radars and a navy communications facility in Belarus, as well as a number of fighter jets, but this would be the first military base constructed since the end of the Soviet Union. It would be used to station SU-27 fighters.

The curtain has been fully constructed in Ukraine where, in March, Russia had an estimated 29,000 soldiers in occupied Crimea and has substantially increased its Black Sea Fleet, adding a new base in the city of Novorossiysk and plans 30 additional vessels by 2020. The curtain extends through eastern Ukraine where it is estimated that there are currently 12,000 Russian troops stationed and where the pro-Russian separatists have fully integrated in the Russian

command structure. Russia has also commenced construction of a new installation on the Russian-Ukrainian border near the town of Soloti, which is expected to contain munitions and ordnance depots, training facilities, as well as barracks capable of housing several thousand troops.

From Ukraine, the curtain extends through Transnistria where the Kremlin has roughly 1,500 troops stationed as “peacekeepers.” Following the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, Russia has considerably strengthened its military presence and extended its territorial gains, via South Ossetia and Abkhazia, coming within 100 kilometers of the main highway which divides Georgia. The curtain then extends to the rest of the Caucasus through Armenia where Russia has reinforced its position with nearly 5,000 troops, S-300 missile batteries, tanks, and a fleet of fighter jets and attack helicopters. And, in real time, we are currently witnessing the Russian military build-up in Syria and the first use of Russian cruise missiles in combat.

How can the U.S. and NATO respond to this new curtain of ice and steel?

The National Defense Authorization Act is a very good point of departure and I wish to commend the Committee’s bipartisan resolve to seek to assess this challenge and identify capabilities gaps. For too long we discounted Russia’s military capabilities and did not take their pronouncements and threats seriously. We can no longer afford this luxury.

But simply assessing the problem is woefully insufficient. Painful budget and force posture decisions must now be taken. We cannot “reset” this challenge and we cannot get back to business as usual.

The West has forgotten how to conduct effective deterrence in the modern age against a sophisticated adversary. Deterrence is as effective as the credibility on which it stands. American credibility to militarily deter Russia is at an all-time low. U.S. redlines no longer have meaning following the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime and the constant diminishment of our negotiating position over Iran’s nuclear program. Moreover, the U.S did not support Ukraine by providing it lethal military assistance to defend itself despite the fact that the U.S. provided Ukraine with written bilateral security guarantees.

The United States did, however, immediately and positively respond to requests for U.S. forces from the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania when requested last spring without pondering the decision for months. This act strengthened U.S. and NATO's Article 5 credibility. Yet these actions were viewed as temporary measures to change President Putin's behavior in Ukraine. This temporary posture has not achieved its objectives and therefore a new and more durable deterrence posture is required.

The U.S., along with our NATO allies, will continue to gain credibility by stating clearly and without hyperbole what we intend to do and then do it immediately. When NATO talks tough about Russia's actions in the Northern Europe but halves its air policing presence in the Baltic region, we undermine our own credibility. When we announce that NATO will deploy 5,000 soldiers in 48 hours, we do it; we do not explain why airlift is in short supply and why adequate forces cannot be generated.

U.S. leadership – in NATO and bilaterally – must create a long-term and durable response to Russia's new ice and steel curtain. U.S. and NATO forces, accompanied by significant air and maritime components, must increase their presence on NATO's northern and eastern flanks. The U.S. should seriously consider sending a third combat brigade to Europe to reinforce both flanks while engaging European allies to increase their force presence as well. NATO must initiate the repositioning of military equipment in the region (not simply for exercise purposes), and immediately address shortcomings in secure communications and infrastructure needs as well increase the number of regional exercises to ensure the ability to rapidly deploy. It is time for a comprehensive review of the U.S. force posture in Europe for the next five to ten years.

It is for these reasons that the outcome of next year's NATO Warsaw Summit is so critical. If NATO simply decides to review the decisions of its last summit, the Alliance will have failed to address its most significant security challenge since the end of the Cold War. It is no accident that President Putin has turned down the temperature on the conflict in eastern Ukraine as he turns it up in Syria. In addition to demonstrating that there will be no further international regime change on Putin's watch and to prove to President Obama that Russia is not a regional but a global power, Russia's military involvement in Syria (and the resulting flood of refugees

and migrants fleeing to Europe) continues to fuel divisions within NATO that the threat from the “south” – fully aided and abetted by Russia – is greater than the threat from the East for which Russia is fully responsible.

Finally, as much as the U.S. and NATO must do more to deter future Russian military aggression, we must also be fully cognizant of the devastating impact of Russian influence inside NATO countries that could inhibit allies from taking collective action against Russia. As Russia dominates the media, financial and energy markets of some of our NATO partners, we will find NATO collectively less able to respond. This requires as much attention by the U.S. and NATO as does militarily deterring the Kremlin.

President Putin gave a speech to the Valdai International Discussion Club last fall entitled, “The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules?” The Kremlin rejects the international rules and of the post-World War II order, rules regarding territorial integrity and transparency that Putin’s Soviet predecessors accepted. The question is will the U.S. and its allies accept Putin’s new rules and new curtain so President Putin can achieve his grand bargain, or is the West willing to challenge and fully reject this construct, like it did during the Cold War era. NATO was born in 1949 as a response to the building of an Iron Curtain; it is up to this generation of leaders to decide how they will respond to a new curtain of ice and steel.