



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

**Hearing on “The Growing Russian Military Threat in Europe:  
Assessing and Addressing the Challenge”  
Wednesday, May 17, 2017  
Room 208/209, Senate Visitors Center (SVC)**

**Opening Statement of Representative Michael Burgess, Commissioner**

In 2014, Russia used military force to breach the borders of Ukraine and annex Crimea. Despite an official ceasefire, known as Minsk II, Russia’s actions and non-implementation of the ceasefire have produced a frozen conflict that has killed at least 10,000 people. This aggression directly violates the guiding principles of the Helsinki Final Act, including sovereign equality for member states, refraining from the threat or use of force, ensuring the territorial integrity of states, and non-intervention in internal affairs. In addition, Russia has been engaging in overt and covert subversive action in the media and in cyberspace domestically and across international borders in order to further an aggressive agenda.

Russia has either violated or completely ignored provisions of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the Open Skies Treaty, the Vienna Document, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This posturing clearly indicates Russia’s unwillingness to cooperate with its European neighbors to improve security. In fact, Russia views its security as directly proportional to the insecurity of its European neighbors.

Vladimir Putin wants NATO to fracture and international organizations, such as the Helsinki Commission, to weaken in order to create the necessity of a new order that is not predicated primarily on Western influence. Putin is rebuilding Russia’s national identity through military action. This activity is hurting the basic freedoms and human rights of Russian citizens, as well as threatening Russia’s contiguous neighbors and NATO members.

Recently, an American paramedic serving on the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine was killed when his vehicle struck an explosive in separatist-held territory. This death was entirely preventable. Continued Russian military aggression in this region only increases the likelihood that more innocent lives will be taken. We must find a way to limit Russia’s military aggression and bring balance back to the region.