



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

**Hearing on “Russia’s Assault on Ukraine and the International
Order”**

Wednesday, February 2, 2022

2:30 p.m.

Room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Opening Statement of Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Rep. Steve Cohen

Thank you, Chairman Cardin, for scheduling this hearing and thank you to our panelists for helping shed light on the situation in Ukraine with Russia. The very fact that we are holding this critically important hearing is unbelievable. We are confronting the possibility of the largest land invasion in Europe since WWII with President Putin amassing over 100,000 troops and military equipment on the border of Ukraine – a country trying to escape the legacy of Kremlin colonialism.

Putin is threatening neighboring Ukrainians simply because they dare to pursue a path to democracy, accountable governance, and transatlantic integration. In doing so, the Kremlin wants to deny the sovereign nation the ability to exercise the will of its people. Let me make it very clear: the Kremlin’s rhetoric about Ukraine presenting a security threat to Russia is nothing more than a lie being used to force its own will onto an independent European state.

Moscow fears Ukraine’s success as a budding democracy, with its open market of ideas, vibrant media, and strong civil society, all things that Russia lacks. Putin fears a successful Ukrainian experiment will lead the people of Russia to demand the very things an autocrat like



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Putin is afraid of: transparency and accountability. That’s the only “danger” Ukraine presents to the corrupt clique of kleptocrats and oligarchs in the Kremlin.

Let’s not forget that Putin has been waging a war on Ukraine in Crimea and the Donbas since 2014, the year of the Revolution of Dignity when Ukrainians took to the streets in favor of European integration over submission to Moscow. Russia’s illegal occupation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula is a nightmare for those who speak out against Russia’s illegal presence there, and many Ukrainians continue to be persecuted for speaking out—particularly the indigenous Crimean Tatars. Thousands of Ukrainians have lost their lives defending their country against hostile Russian actions. We should not forget their sacrifices and we should hold the Kremlin accountable.

The Kremlin has time and again used Ukraine as a testing ground for operations—be it cyberattacks, weaponization of energy, or proxy wars—that it later used against others, including the United States. This is as much about Europe and the free world as it is about Ukraine. We must not forget the lessons history has taught us about the dangers of appeasing aggressors driven by egomania, a distorted perception of history, and lies.

It is my hope that this Kremlin-manufactured crisis can be resolved through diplomacy. A failure to do so will lead to the unnecessary loss of lives on both sides of this conflict and could lead to additional consequences in the region—both calculable conflicts and others that may now be unforeseeable. While I am neither a proponent nor an advocate for war, a free and sovereign Ukraine capable of defending its territorial integrity against current and future threats is at the crux of security for the whole of Europe. As friends to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, the



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United States and all of Ukraine's allies should stand firm and unified in support of this crucial goal. I use this opportunity to express solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and I know they will prevail. I look forward to hearing from all of our expert witnesses.