



**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 Chris Smith, Co-Chairman**

Good morning and thank you to Chairman Wicker for convening this important hearing to examine Russian military aggression in the OSCE region.

Russia today stands in violation of the central commitments of the Helsinki Final Act. These commitments include respect for the territorial integrity of States, fundamental freedoms, and the fulfillment in good faith of obligations under international law. In violating these commitments, Russia is threatening the foundations of European security and recklessly endangering the lives of millions.

One such victim of Russian aggression is Joseph Stone, the 36-year-old American medic who was killed by a landmine while on patrol in separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine with the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. If it weren’t for Russia’s unjustifiable aggression toward Ukraine’s sovereignty there would be no need for such a monitoring mission. And yet, day after day, OSCE monitors put themselves in harm’s way to try to reduce the tensions created by the reckless conduct of Russia and its proxies in eastern Ukraine. It is a conflict that has already claimed over ten thousand lives, and sadly is guaranteed to claim more.

Russian aggression is not a localized phenomenon—it threatens the entire region. Moscow has seized sovereign territory by force, threatened to use tactical nuclear weapons against other countries, harassed U.S. and Allied military assets, and abandoned key transparency measures and commitments. These actions are unacceptable.

In the face of such provocations, the United States must leave no doubt that we stand behind our Eastern European and Baltic Allies. There is no time to waste: we must ensure the confidence of our friends at this critical juncture.

One way to do this is to continue building a credible conventional deterrent to Russian aggression alongside our allies, in particular Poland and the Baltic States. I have consistently supported robust funding for the European Reassurance Initiative. With the support of this initiative, since 2014, NATO members have held over 1,000 military exercises in Europe. ERI has allowed the U.S. to participate more extensively in such exercises and increase its deployment of soldiers and military assets in allied countries. Furthermore, it has helped us to build the capacity of our partners and generally make our commitment to European security felt. These kinds of activities must be sustained and expanded to ensure that we are ready to counter any threat at any time.

This hearing will give us an opportunity to learn what more the U.S. can do on this front, both bilaterally and within NATO. In particular, I look forward to Dr. Carpenter's testimony about the extent of the challenge posed by Russian aggression in the OSCE region; Mr. Rademaker's thoughts about the implications of Russia's flouting of its arms control and transparency commitments; and Ambassador Pifer's perspective on developments in Ukraine and what they mean for the region. I will also be interested to hear from our witnesses about the role of the OSCE in all of this.

To all our witnesses, I thank you for your time today.