



**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 Senator Roger Wicker, Chairman**

The Commission will come to order, and good morning to everybody. Welcome to today’s hearing on the “Growing Russian Military Threat in Europe.”

This is the Commission’s second hearing of this Congress. Our first hearing, on April 26, rightly focused on human rights abuses within Russia. Today’s hearing will examine Russian actions beyond its borders – specifically Moscow’s use of military force to further its ambitions.

The mandate of the Helsinki Commission requires us to “monitor the acts of the signatories which reflect compliance with or violation of the articles of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” also known as the Helsinki Final Act.

Even a casual observer of international affairs would recognize that Russian military aggression has posed a tremendous threat to the European security order in recent years. The Russian leadership has chosen an antagonistic stance, both regionally and globally, as it seeks to reassert its influence from a bygone era.

The actions taken by the Russian leadership under this aggressive posture have without any doubt violated commitments enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and other agreements. To name three key examples:

1. Russia has breached its commitment to refrain from the threat or use of force against other states;
2. Russia has breached its commitment to refrain from violating their sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence; and
3. Russia has breached its commitment to respect other states’ right to choose their own security alliances.

Many of Russia's neighbors have faced Russian military aggression in recent years. Ukraine and Georgia have both seen important parts of their territories forcibly occupied, including the illegal attempted annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russian forces continue to be present in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, against the wishes of the governments of those countries.

In addition to its direct aggression toward its neighbors, Moscow has also made it a priority to undermine the effective functioning of several conventional arms control agreements and measures for confidence and security building. These measures, to which Russia is a party, include:

1. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which limits heavy ground and air weapons in Europe and provides information on current arms holdings, including their location;
2. The Open Skies Treaty, which provides for mutual unarmed aerial reconnaissance of member states; and
3. The Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, which provides for information exchanges, on-site inspections, and notifications of the military activities, arms, and force levels of OSCE participating States.

These agreements – along with others, such as the INF Treaty, which Russia is also violating – together form an interlocking web of commitments that have proved fundamental to the stability of the post-Cold War European security architecture. They were designed to enhance military transparency and predictability, thereby increasing confidence among the OSCE participating States.

Unfortunately, the actions of the Russian leadership in recent years have demonstrated that Russia sees little value in the transparency and predictability that have kept the peace in Europe.

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I would like to make one more point. I want to reiterate my dismay regarding the tragic death of American paramedic Joseph Stone on April 23. Mr. Stone was killed while serving his country as a member of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine when his vehicle struck an explosive – likely a landmine – in separatist-controlled territory, an event that also injured two other monitors.

This is the first time in the history of the OSCE that a mission member has been killed in the line of duty, and make no mistake, Mr. Stone's death was directly related to Russia's aggression towards its neighbors. Had Russia not invaded Ukraine in the first place – and had it lived up to the Minsk agreements, and ceased supporting, directing, funding, and fueling separatists in this

region – there would have been no need for the monitoring mission to continue. Once again, I extend my condolences to Mr. Stone’s family and friends.

I also want to take this opportunity to call for an end to the harassment faced by these brave monitors on a daily basis, and I urge all sides to provide the observers with unfettered access.

We have put a photograph of OSCE monitors in the room as a reminder of the continuing challenges faced by these brave monitors as they carry out their extremely important mission.

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Our hearing today has three objectives. We will:

1. examine Russia’s undermining of European security, the OSCE, and its arms control agreements and commitments;
2. assess whether it will be possible to move Russia back toward compliance with its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act and the associated OSCE agreements, and if so, how to get there; and
3. finally, explore how we can maximize the value of these agreements and the OSCE as a whole going forward.

I am grateful to the members of our distinguished panel for their willingness to provide expert views on these topics, and I look forward to our discussion today.