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Opening Statement of Chairman Stephen F. Lynch Hearing on “Defending U.S. Allies and Allies and Interests Against Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe” February 16, 2022

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us for today’s critically important and timely hearing. Today, the Subcommittee on National Security will examine Russia’s continued aggression and destabilizing activity in Eastern Europe.

As we all know, since late 2021, Russia has amassed more than 150,000 troops along Ukraine’s borders and now has the country virtually surrounded—including from Russian-occupied Crimea, which it seized and annexed illegally in 2014. Yesterday, President Biden warned that a Russian invasion of Ukraine remains “distinctly possible.”

President Biden has rightly assessed that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would be, “the most consequential thing that’s happened in the world, in terms of war and peace, since World War Two.” Let that sink in: a Russian invasion of Ukraine would be the most consequential thing that’s happened—in terms of war and peace—since World War II.

By holding Ukraine hostage unless the United States and NATO surrender to his demands, President Putin threatens the fundamental principles of sovereignty, self-determination, and territorial integrity, that have helped to preserve global peace and security and that form the basis of the rules-based international order. Or, as Secretary of State Antony Blinken astutely described it, “the idea that one nation can’t simply change the borders of another nation by force.”

There is one person, and one person only, who is responsible for the current situation in Eastern Europe, and that person is Vladimir Putin. The United States does not want war with Russia. NATO does not want war with Russia. Neither do we want Russia to go to war with Ukraine. But it is in our strategic and national security interests to help support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and President Biden has been absolutely clear that if Russian troops cross over the border, the United States will respond decisively and impose swift and severe consequences.

I will conclude with one final point: the diplomatic engagement we have seen in recent weeks between the United States, NATO, and Ukraine, has been unprecedented. **President Biden and his Administration are leading from the front to restore America’s global standing in the world and to strengthen our transatlantic alliances after four years of chaos and division under the former President.** As a result, Russia’s aggressive actions in Eastern Europe have achieved the opposite of what Putin wants—a closer and more unified NATO alliance.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses about their assessments and policy recommendations for the current situation in Eastern Europe, and I will now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Grothman, for his opening remarks.

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