

Testimony

U.S. House Oversight Committee

Subcommittee on National Security

## **Defending U.S. Allies and Interests Against Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe**

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Mr. Chairman, the specter of war is haunting Europe once again. For several weeks now, Russian leader Vladimir Putin has deployed [150,000 Russian soldiers](#) as well as tanks, ships, artillery, and other weapons along several Ukrainian borders. Putin now has in place the forces needed to launch the largest invasion in Europe since 1939. If he decides to invade Ukraine again, completely unprovoked and without any justification, this war will likely be the deadliest in Europe since World War II. The consequences will be catastrophic, first and foremost for Ukraine, but also Russia as both armies will incur major losses. Many Ukrainian civilians will die. Ethnic Russians living in Ukraine also will die. President Biden rightly has promised coordinated action with our allies and partners to impose comprehensive economic sanctions against the Russian economy that will impact not just Russia's largest companies, but millions of Russian citizens as well. So, everyone will lose. Wars are also unpredictable events. Many past leaders have promised their citizens short, contained, and successful military interventions, only to be bogged down in long wars or to have them expand. The United States, Europe, and the world must be prepared for unintended consequences of Putin's new invasion of Ukraine that might drag other countries in the region into this conflict. Given these enormously, tragic stakes, Biden and other European leaders are rightly trying to engage Putin to persuade him to back down. We still don't know if Putin will attack or negotiate. No one knows except Vladimir Putin. He himself probably has not decided.

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### **Putin's Aims**

Some political leaders, elected officials, and analysts have argued that we could end this conflict overnight by just ending NATO's open-door policy. That analysis is wrong.

First, this argument assumes that Putin would credibly commit to a new agreement and stop threatening Ukraine's sovereignty. Why? He already has violated numerous European treaties and agreements that Moscow signed in the past, including most germane to this current crisis, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances for Ukraine. Why should anyone in Kyiv, Brussels, or Washington believe Putin will be more sincere this time around?

Second, Putin understands perfectly well that he has invented from scratch this alleged threat of Ukrainian membership in NATO. Give Putin credit; he has framed this crisis as one about NATO expansion, and unfortunately, many Americans and Europeans have accepted Putin's narrative. Putin of course knows fully well that NATO will not accept new members that have Russian soldiers occupying parts of their territory. That's why Putin invaded Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and now occupies parts of both countries. It's a tragic fact.

Putin also knows that the last major wave of NATO expansion took place two decades ago. He knows NATO's history and current defensive mission well. NATO never has and never will never attack Russia. Even Ukraine in NATO would not be a security threat to Russia, unless Putin planned to attack Ukraine. Nonetheless, by claiming this crisis is about some phantom, futuristic, and unfounded threat of NATO expansion, Putin has triggered a debate within the NATO alliance and within countries in the alliance about the merits of NATO's open-door policy. Too many are debating the merits of NATO expansion, some even going back to rehash alleged promises made to Gorbachev three decades ago. No one is discussing the annexation of Crimea. Many seem to have forgotten Putin's illegal recognition of the Georgian territories of

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Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. The assassination attempt and then unjust imprisonment of Alexei Navalny gets almost no mention at all these days. The massive Russian intervention in our 2016 and smaller but serious meddling in our 2020 presidential elections seems like distant history. And that's exactly how Putin wants it.

Third, while Putin has distracted the West with the shiny object of NATO expansion, he has continued to march forward on a much larger, destabilizing agenda of undermining democracy in his neighborhood. Democratic expansion, not NATO expansion, threaten Putin and his autocratic regime. He has said so very explicitly many times, including most recently in his joint statement with Chinese leader Xi Jinping: "Certain States' attempts to impose their own 'democratic standards' on other countries... Russia and China stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, intend to counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, oppose colour revolutions, and will increase cooperation in the aforementioned areas."

Since so-called color revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, Putin has deployed multiple instruments of power to undermine democracy and sovereignty in these countries. Similar Kremlin efforts can be traced regarding democratic institutions in Moldova and Armenia. Putin's massive military buildup on Ukraine's borders is just the latest tactic in this long-term campaign. Already, the threat of invasion has profoundly stressed the Ukrainian economy. Putin aims to overthrow the democratically-elected leader of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, and pressure Ukrainian democracy to collapse. He seeks a failed state in democratic Ukraine to make the argument for his successful state in autocratic Russia.

Fourth, even more ambitiously, Putin seeks to unite a single Slavic nation of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus which he thinks was unjustly divided after the collapse of the Soviet

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Union. (Of course, it was not the West, but the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus who signed an accord in December 1991 dissolving the USSR.) In a recent long historical article, Putin explained why Ukrainians and Russians are from one nation or one people. He wants to unite them again, even if through coercion or force. On this goal, Putin seems to understand the limits on his capabilities. Complete occupation of all of Ukraine is beyond his means. But triggering further internal division, including between Russian ethnic communities in eastern Ukraine and the rest of the country, could serve as a pretext for future rounds of annexation. The Russian parliament just passed a non-binding resolution calling for the recognition of the People's Republic of Donetsk and the People's Republic of Luhansk, exactly what Russia did regarding two breakaway republics in Georgia in 2008. Putin described what was happening to ethnic Russians in Donbas as genocide. Remember, protecting Russians, after all, was the Putin's excuse for annexing Crimea in 2014.

Fifth, more broadly, Putin aspires to first weaken and ideally destroy European multilateral institutions and continental norms about democracy and human rights. In Putin's view, the post-Cold War settlement from thirty years ago was unfair to Russia (or more precisely, Putin's perceptions of Russian national interests.) Although he understands well the low probabilities of such outcomes, Putin seeks the end of NATO and the European Union, and more immediately the weakening of unity within both organizations, especially NATO. Over the last several years, Putin personally, as well as Russian state-controlled (traditional and social) media, Russian money, and Russian non-governmental and religious actors, have cultivated ties with European and American leaders, groups, and media who share Putin's populist, orthodox, nationalist ideology. Putin understands well that the fight today between autocracy and democracy is not only between countries but within countries, including our own.

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Of course, Putin wants to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and interrupt current military cooperation between Ukraine and NATO countries. But his revisionist agenda is much larger than that. For as long as he rules Russia, Putin will continue to normalize annexation, deny sovereignty to neighbors, undermine democratic regimes, ideas, and societies, and undo the liberal international order.

### **The Biden Response**

It is hard to negotiate with an autocratic leader driven by ideological aims. Putin is worried about what the Russian history books fifty years from now will say about his efforts to reunite the Slavic nation and revise the post-Cold War order. He is not that concerned about Sberbank stock prices next month. Putin also has been in power for over two decades. He no longer listens to advisors; he thinks he knows everything. He also lives a rather isolated life, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, spending most of his time at his compound outside of Moscow, which creates even fewer incentives for government officials or business leaders to influence his decision-making. And while Putin does monitor closely public opinion polls, the Russian system of government today is an autocracy. In making his decision to invade or not, or deciding what kind of new invasion to launch – from limited airstrikes to a full-scale ground war – Putin is not worried about “saving face” before his generals or the Russian society. He can spin victory anyway he desires.

Internationally, apart from Xi, Putin no longer thinks he has peers in the world. He most certainly does not care about losing the respect of President Biden or European leaders. And he believes his aggressive, belligerent foreign policies have been successful, or not as costly to his interests as threatened by the West. This combination of factors makes him a very difficult interlocutor for President Biden.

That said, President Biden and his administration have deployed a smart strategy of coercive diplomacy in trying to dissuade Putin from invading Ukraine again. First, the Biden administration rightly expanded military assistance to Ukraine. While the U.S. has had military trainers and advisors to Ukraine, Biden has signaled clearly and rightly that the United States will not send combat soldiers to Ukraine. That's why it's important for the U.S. and our allies to provide Ukrainians with the ability to defend themselves and make a Russian invasion more costly. The Biden administration should continue to provide more military and economic assistance both immediately and in the long run, including more sophisticated anti-aircraft and missile defense weapons systems that would not be useful in an imminent attack, but will be valuable in the years to come as Putin continues to threaten Ukraine. The Biden administration also should continue to encourage other allies to provide military assistance. Countries who do not want to supply lethal weapons should be urged to provide much-needed economic assistance to help Zelensky mitigate and ameliorate serious pressure from the Russian military buildup.

Second, President Biden rightly has deployed U.S. soldiers to our frontline allies in this crisis, Poland and Romania. This action is designed to deter a possible spillover from a Russian invasion of Ukraine. A next step by Biden and NATO allies should be to deploy to the region, or at least place on high alert, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which was created

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in 2014 to act as “spearhead force” of the NATO Readiness Force (NRF). This current crisis seems like the exact mission for which the VJTF and the NRF were established.

Third, Biden and his administration have successfully coordinated with allies and partners to put into place a comprehensive set of economic sanctions against Russian companies, sectors, and individuals that could be implemented immediately in response to a Russian invasion. Biden rightly has communicated the extent of these sanctions to Putin directly. (Earlier in the crisis, some of us argued that these sanctions would be more credible if they were announced in public, making it harder for some countries to renege on implementing them if Putin invaded. Others, wrongly in my view, have called for preemptive sanctions. The Biden administration has taken a different approach: no public disclosure and no preemptive sanctions. At this moment, it is no longer in our national interest to argue about these tactical issues. Unity is more important.)

Fourth, Biden and his team have succeeded in maintaining a high degree of unity among our NATO allies and partners, an outcome that probably has surprised Putin. Yes, there are some minor fissures on tactics. But the degree of unity is more impressive. Paradoxically, after a difficult stretch in the history of the NATO alliance, Putin’s threat of invasion has helped to forge greater unity in the transatlantic community. And no single event will prove better the necessity of NATO today and the wisdom of past expansions than a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Fifth, Biden and NATO allies also took the courageous decision to respond both verbally and in writing to Putin’s draft treaties, signaling a willingness to negotiate about substantive issues of European security. No one likes to negotiate with hostage-takers, but sometimes one must. To date, Putin has not signaled a clear answer to Biden and NATO’s proposals. He might

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just move forward with his invasion plan. But if he does signal a willingness to negotiate, there is work to be done on enhancing European security that can be pursued on a reciprocal basis and without compromising American core principles and values. In Appendix One of this testimony, I attach my recent *Foreign Affairs* article that outlines in greater detail some ideas for how to enhance European security.

The core elements of Biden's basic strategy for addressing this crisis have been put in place. There are not many more policy levers that can be pulled in the short term. The ball is now in Putin's court. The one remaining element of implementing this strategy should focus on explaining to Americans as well as to the rest of the world the real cause of this crisis as well as potential solutions. President Biden took a major, important, and much-needed step towards this end by addressing the American people yesterday. Biden delivered a very strong, confident, and clear statement explaining the stakes in this crisis and what he is prepared to do and not do to avoid war. Biden and his team need to keep that up. They need to keep refuting Putin's framing of this crisis, keep describing their strategy, and above all else keep explaining to the American people why the stakes are so high. This is not a dispute over Ukrainian membership in NATO, as Putin wants you to believe, but a battle over the future of the entire international order. Biden and his team need to reiterate that Putin is the only leader threatening war. Biden is fighting for peace. Unfortunately, there are too many public voices in the United States and Europe blaming Biden for this conflict. Anti-war protestors should be mobilizing to denounce Putin, not Biden. In the U.S. and Europe, it is striking to compare the millions who mobilized to protest the U.S.-led war against Iraq compared to the lack of protests against Putin's march towards war today.

In Europe, Hitler started World War II first through annexation in 1938 and then unprovoked military invasion in 1939. Japan followed a similar playbook of annexation and

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unprovoked, preemptive war, including eventually against us in 1941. After that horrific global war, international leaders came together to try to prevent future world wars by codifying treaties and norms against annexation and unilateral, unprovoked, preemptive wars. Obviously, the ambitions of world leaders who crafted that international system in 1945 have not always been met. But a third world war in Europe has not occurred since 1945. Nor has any country annexed territory of another European country until Russia's illegal seizure of Crimea in 2014.

Tragically, we may be on the precipice of a new major war in Europe which possibly might include more annexation. And if Putin gets away with it -- invading a country without cause and annexing more territory -- he will be setting a dangerous precedent for other countries with territorial claims and alleged arguments for uniting divided nations. Biden and his administration must continue to do all that it can to dissuade Putin from invading. But they also must continue to explain to the American people why the stakes of this potential conflict matter to American security and values, not just in Europe, but throughout the world.

### **The Long Game: The Need for a Pershing Moment**

When discussing great power competition, my former Hoover Institution colleague George Shultz often recalled the utility of “a Pershing moment” – a bold, offensive move that interrupts defensive diplomacy, compels your interlocutors to recalibrate their assessments of your resolve, and convinces them to pursue cooperation rather than confrontation. For Reagan's Secretary of State, the decision to deploy Pershing missiles in Europe in the 1980s radically altered dangerous dynamics in U.S.-Soviet relations. To be sure, these deployments strained transatlantic relations, especially in Germany, where mass demonstrations sought to stop this

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Washington initiative. But the “Pershing moment”, in Shultz’s view, demonstrated to Moscow Reagan’s commitment to stop playing détente defense and his credible commitment to go on offense. It also gave the U.S. a new tradable chip in US-Soviet arms control, which proved vital in negotiating the INF Treaty, one of the most successful arms control agreements ever.

If Putin does not invade and negotiations over Europe’s security architecture proceed, then the U.S. and our European allies must not breathe a sigh of relief, forget about Russia, and pivot back to previous preoccupation. They instead should find their own “Pershing moments”. In Asia, the successful launch of AUKUS – a major trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – feels like a “Pershing moment” for China and Asia. Biden needs a similar big offensive initiative for Russia and Europe.

In the early months of 2021, Biden and his team were playing too much defense while hoping that Moscow and Washington would settle into a stable and predictable partnership, so that they could focus exclusively on the China challenge. That didn’t work. As Bob Kagan wrote nearly a decade ago, Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire. Nor can they focus on a single country, region, or issue, but must devise strategies for dealing with all great powers, since all powerful, autocratic countries most certainly are implementing strategies to deal with the United States.

Because a move as offensive, kinetic, and disruptive as Pershing deployments in the 1980s is probably beyond existing capacities and proclivities, the Biden administration instead should stack up a few mini-Pershing moments that demonstrate resolve, stop simply responding to Putin’s bad behavior, and puts the free world back on offense.

One mini-Pershing moment could be the launch of a sweeping, comprehensive plan to reduce European energy dependence on Russia. In 2008, I helped to draft the transition memo on Russian policy for the incoming Obama administration. We had 5 major goals, one of which was

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European energy independence. Since then, important steps have been made, but nothing nearly bold enough, including creating new gas supply routes from the U.S. via LNG ports and other exporters, increasing major investments in Ukraine's energy sector, and continuing advancements across the continent in renewable energy development.

A second mini-Pershing moment could be a massive influx of U.S. and Western advisors, resources, and diplomatic attention to Ukraine to bolster security, state capacity, markets, and democracy. Ukraine is the new West Germany in our current standoff between democracy and dictatorship in Europe. But Washington, Brussels, and Berlin do not engage with Ukraine to same depth and multi-dimensional way that we did with West Germany after the Cold War. Similar eventually to German unification, a thriving, stable and free Ukraine will be the most effective means for reunification and a vital instrument for inspiring small d democrats in Europe's remaining autocratic world.

A third mini-Pershing moment could be a major rethinking of resources regarding the ideological war with Moscow. For decades, Putin has invested heavily in new instruments – RT and Sputnik, cyber theft, NGOs and religious organizations, bots, and military intervention – to propagate his conservative, illiberal ideas. In today's ideological competition between illiberal autocracy and liberal democracy, both Xi Jinping's China and Vladimir Putin's Russia have made major investments in tools for propagating their worldviews and explaining their policies. The United States has not. It's time to catch up. We have been playing defense – combatting disinformation – instead of executing a more forward-leaning strategy to generate content as well as support the spread of liberal, democratic ideas. Smaller moves, such as appointing a Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, should be followed by changes such as a restructuring – or dissolution – of the USAGM, a reinvigoration of public diplomacy, more

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funding for student and cultural exchanges, better utilization of new digital technologies, and a radical rethink for supporting democracy and human rights around the world, including the creation of what I call an International Platform for Freedom (IFP).

Critics will look at this list of mini-Pershing moments and yell overreach. We can't do it all, some argue, so let's focus on China and Asia and abandon Europe. We failed to do it all, others argue, so let's disengage and focus on problems at home. The U.S., so it is assumed, has entered the declining twilight years that all previous great powers have experienced as well.

They may be right. But both scholarship and intelligence estimates suggest we are not very good at predicting long-term trajectories about power or ideas. Historical ebbs and flows of American power and global democratic ideas over the last hundred years still leave open the hypothesis that they may be wrong. Similar arguments were made in the 1930s and in the early 1970s. We now know that those predictions were premature. Instead of hoping they are erroneous a third time, let's develop and pursue a strategy for proving them wrong.

## Appendix 1

### How to Make a Deal with Putin

### Only a Comprehensive Pact Can Avoid War

BY MICHAEL MCFAUL

FROM *FOREIGN AFFAIRS*

February 11, 2022

Vladimir Putin has the world on edge. The Russian president has deployed more than 100,000 troops on Ukraine’s borders and threatened “military-technical” measures if NATO continues to cooperate with Kyiv. He unilaterally drafted two extraordinarily aggressive treaties in December designed to constrain the organization and its members. They contain demands that are such nonstarters—most centrally, closing NATO’s open door to Ukraine and prohibiting organizational forces and weapons in nations that joined after May 1997—that they read more like predicates for war rather than sincere overtures for negotiations.

Nonetheless, U.S. President Joe Biden and NATO provided detailed written replies in January, attempting to start a dialogue with the Russian leader. If Putin spurns these offers, war is likely. But Moscow has not yet wholly rejected negotiations. Conquering Ukraine would be no cakewalk, and Putin understands that killing thousands of people from a nation he describes as “part of Russia” would be hard to explain to his citizens, especially if the Russian military also suffers major casualties. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said the United States’ response to the initial proposal contained “a kernel of rationality,” and Putin is still speaking and meeting with Western leaders, including Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

If Putin does agree to negotiate, then Biden and his team should not just offer defensively minimal concessions to freeze the crisis. Instead, in concert with allies and partners, Biden should seize the diplomatic offensive and counter with a comprehensive, grand bargain for enhancing European security. Call it “Helsinki 2.0.” This agreement could refresh and modernize the Helsinki Accords signed during the Cold War, which stabilized the continent even as U.S.-Soviet competition grew in other parts of the world. It could resuscitate and amend defunct arms control agreements and provide a bigger framework for European security, and in the process help solve the issues surrounding Ukraine.

Convening a major summit to renegotiate European security will give Russia an international platform that Putin does not deserve. But that symbolism shouldn't stop Biden, NATO leaders, and other European democracies. The Helsinki Accords recognized the Soviet Union as a superpower, and that affirmation helped persuade Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to make concessions. Putin also likes attention, and the West should be prepared to offer cheap pageantry not only to prevent a new Russian invasion into Ukraine but also to repair Europe's broken security architecture. The United States and Europe must have the courage to move beyond defensive patchwork fixes and instead pivot to bold, aggressive initiatives to make the continent safer.

### **BIT BY BIT**

On the surface, the 1970s were not an auspicious time for Soviet-U.S. compromise. Many observers believed the Kremlin's power was rising and Washington's was falling. Communists were taking power in parts of southeast Asia and southern Africa. Tension between the world's main blocs was running high.

But in the middle of the decade, Canadian, Soviet, U.S., and European diplomats set aside their broad and fundamental disagreements to discuss an issue of shared concern: European security. After several years of negotiations, they produced and signed the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which codified ambiguous issues left over from World War II. At the heart of the accords was a central compromise: Western states de facto recognized the borders that resulted from Soviet conquests after World War II, and in return, the Soviet Union agreed to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or beliefs, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, and joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) tasked with implementing these obligations. The Soviet Union and the West also tacitly agreed to disagree on the precise definitions of government accountability, human rights, economic rights, and non-intervention in internal affairs. Ambiguity, they showed, is sometimes necessary for effective diplomacy.

In the first two decades after the accords were signed, Europe saw an explosion of new security agreements and treaties, particularly after Soviet reformer Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. In 1987, he joined U.S. President Ronald Reagan to sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, eliminating a whole class of highly destabilizing weapons. In 1990, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty came online, substantially reducing the size of conventional forces deployed on the continent. The 1990 Vienna Document, signed by Canada, the Soviet Union, the United States, and most of Europe and Central Asia, expanded transparency about weapons and military training exercises.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia and the West continued to make deals that helped keep Europe secure. The 1992 Open Skies Treaty, which followed the Vienna Document, allowed signatories to fly reconnaissance missions through one another's territories to collect information on military activities. The ambitious 1990 Charter of Paris trumpeted that all European signatories would "build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations." It declared prematurely that "the era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended." The 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances for Ukraine sent Kyiv's nuclear weapons to Russia in exchange for promises that Moscow, the United Kingdom, and the United

States would respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act established mechanisms for the two parties to collaborate, marking a high point in cooperation.

But during the following decade, ties between the two sides deteriorated. Putin came to power in 2000, and he grew progressively more disappointed with the West as NATO further expanded in 2004; as Washington started a war in Iraq; and after the so-called color revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004. The West, meanwhile, grew disenchanted with Moscow after Russia launched the second Chechen war; grew more autocratic; invaded Georgia and recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries in 2008; annexed Crimea in 2014; and then supported separatists in eastern Ukraine, leading to ongoing war and thousands of deaths.

European security agreements from the previous two decades began to break down. Russia stopped implementing the CFE Treaty in 2007. Putin then violated virtually every European and international security agreement his Kremlin predecessors signed. The United States stopped meeting its CFE obligations in 2011, and under former President Donald Trump, pulled out of the INF and Open Skies treaties, as well. The Vienna Documents today do little to enhance transparency, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)—the successor to the CSCE—has become feckless in large measure because Moscow objects to its efforts to monitor elections and protect human rights.

## **GETTING TO YES**

After decades of division, it will be difficult—and maybe impossible—for Russia and the West to strike any security deals on Europe. They have little faith in each other and plenty of reasons for suspicion. But given the stakes, the world must try. If Putin signals a commitment to negotiate, Biden and his European partners should go big. After all, Europe's security architecture needs genuine repair and creative renewal.

They should start with steps toward revamping transparency, which will allow each country to keep tabs on the other's activities and better predict each other's actions. Right now, Russia, the United States, and Europe have less information about the deployment of rival soldiers and weapons than at any time since the end of the Cold War. A new grand bargain on European security could commit all signatories to more frequent monitoring of troop deployments, weapons deployments, and military exercises. The United States and Russia have learned how to successfully implement an obtrusive inspections regime from the New START Treaty, which limits the number of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles each country can deploy. New START is one of the few U.S.-Russian deals that still operates, and a broader agreement could share the treaty's obligations to short-notice inspections and close probing of weapon systems. Helsinki 2.0 could allow Russian inspectors to visit the sites of U.S. missile defenses in Poland and Romania, and NATO monitors could have similar access to Russia's Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad.

Moscow and Washington could further bolster transparency by rejoining, amending, and modernizing previously effective agreements, such as the Open Skies Treaty and CFE. To avoid dangerous miscalculations, both states must also work to revive the Vienna Documents. That means Russia and every NATO country should offer specified notifications about training and

impose new limits on the scale and locations of exercises, especially because exercise preparations can appear very similar to planning for an actual attack.

Diplomats should also dust off, modernize, and implement old ideas that never came to fruition. Russia and the United States failed to implement a 2000 memorandum of agreement on sharing data about missile launches, known as the Joint Data Exchange Center (JDEC), because of technicalities and mounting hostilities in U.S.-Russian relations. But an initiative of its kind between Moscow and NATO or among all OSCE members would enhance all of Europe's security (including Russia's) and could have better odds of succeeding.

Transparency, of course, is just one aspect of arms control. After Russia and the West agree to open their systems for inspections, diplomats will need to turn to the issue of control itself. They should begin by addressing the most destabilizing forces: the troops and weapons stationed on or near the Russian border. On a reciprocal and verifiable basis, all sides should pull these back, beginning with the massive Russian army mobilized around Ukraine today. They should also pull back their rockets. This may seem like a hard ask of Moscow, but Putin has already proposed that signatories not deploy land-based intermediate- and short-range missiles in areas where they can reach other signatories. Russian commentary has emphasized keeping all such weapons out of Ukraine. Their demand is reasonable as long as Moscow places similar restraints on short-range rockets that can hit Kyiv, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, or Warsaw.

The Biden Administration could also propose some limits on missile defenses in Europe. Washington could agree to refrain from deploying defense systems on the continent with capabilities against Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles in return for limits on Russian missile defenses in the European theater. This may sound like a big U.S. concession, but it's not. The U.S. interceptors that are currently deployed (SM3s) have no capability against Russian strategic weapons. The smartest place for interceptors that can defend the U.S. homeland against Russian or North Korean weapons (the Ground-Based Interceptor, or GBI) is Alaska, which is where they are mostly already located.

To better safeguard the United States and Europe from quick, devastating attacks, negotiators also must try to reduce the overall number of missiles—especially nuclear missiles. Ideally, both Russia and the United States would rejoin and credibly implement the INF treaty. To do so, Russia would have to agree to include its 9M729 missile in the agreement. If a complete ban on intermediate-range ground-based ballistic and cruise missiles in Europe proves impossible, negotiators could at least prohibit these kinds of rockets from being armed with nuclear warheads. Although this would be difficult to verify, negotiators should also try to restrict or ban the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe (including Russian territory west of the Ural Mountains).

Diplomats also must attempt to reduce the amount of conventional weaponry on the continent, going beyond either the original or adapted CFE treaties. If new limits on conventional weapons prove impossible, negotiators could consider more modest regional limits, such as in the Baltic or Black Sea regions. They should try to place limits in Europe on cluster bombs and cyberweapons, which can target civilians and critical infrastructure.

Finally, Western diplomats must insist again that Putin obtain permission before placing troops in other countries, which would keep Russia in line with agreements signed by its previous leaders. Putin will dispute who the legitimate host nation is in Crimea, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. But he might be persuaded to relinquish Russian claims of consent in certain breakaway regions, such as Transnistria in Moldova and Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine, if in return, NATO allies could drop a demand from the CFE treaty that placed constraints on Russian troop movements between different regions—or “flanks”—of Russia. (Of course, this new provision would not mean greenlighting buildups on the borders of other countries.) Such a deal is unlikely, but Western diplomats must affirm the principle of host nation consent.

## **AGREE TO DISAGREE**

Throughout the current crisis, Moscow has argued that every state’s security is connected to the security of others. In interviews and meetings with his Western counterparts, Lavrov has repeatedly cited Istanbul and Astana OSCE declarations, which proclaimed that “the security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all others” and that “each participating State has an equal right to security.” As part of his draft treaties, Putin proposed that no signatory “strengthen their security individually, within international organizations, military alliances or coalitions at the expense of the security of other Parties.”

The Kremlin is correct that every state has an equal right to security. But Russia’s behavior belies Lavrov and Putin’s rhetoric. Moscow has taken many actions “at the expense of the security of other Parties,” including cyberattacks against Estonia in 2007; military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine; annexing Crimea; and supporting a separatist war in Donbas. Putin cites Russian security concerns as a reason to bar Ukraine from joining NATO, but NATO soldiers and operatives have never killed anyone in Russia. By contrast, Moscow’s troops and intelligence officers have carried out assassinations in Berlin, London, and Salisbury. They also attempted to kill one of the most famous European opposition leaders, Russia's own Alexei Navalny, in the Russian city of Tomsk.

A fixation on nonstarters—such as Putin’s demands for a NATO expansion moratorium, or the West’s insistence that Russia withdraw from Crimea—will make reaching a new security agreement impossible. But negotiators could make progress by focusing on other issues and then embedding intractable problems into a larger deal. Widening the aperture of the negotiations could create opportunities for deals that are currently not available. For instance, if Russia withdraws support for the so-called separatists in Donbas, then the United States could commit to not installing offensive missiles in Ukraine and not deploying missile defenses in Europe that can intercept Russian weapons. That kind of a trade is not available through the Normandy Format assigned to negotiate a Moscow-Kyiv peace settlement, which is limited to France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

Helsinki 2.0 must also include new provisions on individual security, human rights, and noninterference. Most obviously, signatories need to pledge not to assassinate other European citizens within or outside of their borders. The deal should also ban kidnapping; Belarus cannot down jets to arrest opposition figures. The signatories must all commit to improve their treatment of refugees. A new deal could also prohibit states from meddling in one another’s elections. That

means Moscow would stop funding or supporting indirectly political parties and candidates in other countries. Biden could commit to doing the same, since the United States does not do so now.

Individual countries, however, should not have the right to unilaterally declare that other countries are threatening their security or meddling in their internal affairs. Russia cannot claim that a pro-European government in Ukraine is by itself a menace to Moscow, or that U.S. statements defending human rights in Russia are tactics of regime change against the Kremlin. To sort through the legitimacy of complaints, the architects of Helsinki 2.0 should try to create an independent arbitration tribunal that can adjudicate security claims, akin to the World Trade Organization's mechanism for trade disputes. In today's polarized environment, such a tribunal would not be effective. But it would create an institution that could establish precedents, build momentum, and perhaps find value in the future.

Diplomats will not be able to solve every issue bedeviling relations between Russia and the West in Helsinki 2.0, just as they purposely did not try to resolve all U.S.-Soviet or European problems in the original Helsinki Accords. The negotiators must be ready to agree to disagree. To make sure that unresolved disputes do not derail the broader agreement, diplomats could note them in nonbinding, unilateral side letters. Writing down disputes may seem counterintuitive, but these letters can signal a state's future plans should major conditions outlined in the agreement change. They can also communicate principles to domestic constituencies that diplomats may need to win ratification. Side letters, for example, helped the United States and Russia agree on the New START Treaty in 2010. They gave Washington space to outline its objections to missile defense constraints and provided a way for Russia to spell out responses to U.S. missile defense expansions. In Helsinki 2.0, NATO and other European partners could make clear in a side letter that they refuse to recognize the annexation of Crimea or the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Russia could lay out its objections to NATO expansion.

## **MAKING TIME**

To launch these ambitious negotiations, all OSCE leaders—Biden and Putin included—could meet in Helsinki this year. The countries would then station special envoys there dedicated to hashing out a new agreement. Their work could be complemented by negotiations at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna, the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels, and in bilateral U.S.-Russian channels. Diplomats could aim to complete their final product by 2025, the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act.

These negotiations will invite criticism, so participating governments must be ready to explain why the exercise is worthwhile. For Biden and some European leaders, it will not be easy. Launching comprehensive discussions with Russia over European security rewards Putin's illegal, belligerent behavior. That is a fact. Some critics will dismiss such an initiative as appeasement. They will be echoing observers from the 1970s who charged that the West was forgetting about the Soviet Union's illegitimate military interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, tacitly recognizing the Kremlin's World War II annexations and neglecting the Soviet bloc's totalitarian repression. Those complaints were valid then, just as today's concerns are valid now.

But as U.S. policymakers must explain, the alternative is worse. In the absence of a new security deal, Putin will continue to stoke divisions, tensions, and conflicts both between and within countries in Europe and North America—even if he does not launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That doesn't mean Washington needs to compromise on core normative and security principles or offer unilateral concessions. In fact, it absolutely shouldn't—every paragraph of the agreement must be based on reciprocity and mutual interests. And by offering to negotiate a new grand deal, Biden would gain the moral high ground and make Putin's invasion of Ukraine look even more irrational and immoral.

The negotiations could also succeed even if they fail to yield a major agreement. Putin may hold off on invading Ukraine while diplomats confer, if only to see what he can get out of a deal. This delay may not comprehensively solve the issues surrounding Ukraine or Europe as a whole, but with thousands of lives at stake, kicking the can down the road would still be a tremendous service. Three years of peace is, after all, far better than three years of

war.

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