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Russia, the West, and Ukraine: Time for a Strategy—Not Hope

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On February 28, Russian troops, aided by pro-Russian local militia, began violating Ukraine's territorial integrity by occupying important sites across the Crimean Peninsula. Under the pretext of "protecting Russian people," the deployment of Russian troops into Crimea demonstrates a blatant disregard of Ukraine's national sovereignty.

Russia's anachronistic irredentist behavior has no place in the 21st century. Understandably, Moscow's behavior has made many NATO partners nervous. Ukraine does not enjoy the security guarantees afforded to America's NATO allies, nor should the U.S. give any impression that it does. However, there are steps that can be taken to keep America's NATO allies safe while demonstrating to Russia that its behavior is unacceptable.

Ukrainian People Speak, Russia Reacts. After three months of mass street demonstrations, the Ukrainian people have succeeded in ousting their corrupt and incompetent president, the Kremlin-backed Viktor Yanukovich. On February 22, the Ukrainian parliament acted in favor of the people it represents: It granted amnesty to all political prisoners, brought back the constitution of 2004 (which

reduces the powers of the president), and announced an early presidential election in May.

Not content with the Ukrainian people looking West, Putin has indicated that he will protect ethnic Russians living in Crimea and Ukraine's other eastern provinces. In the past week, bellicose rhetoric on his part has been combined with major military training events in the region. This has culminated into what can only be described as an incremental military intervention by Russia into the Crimean Peninsula. Russia's parliament has even authorized the use of military force in Ukraine.

Early reports indicate that Moscow has reinforced its military installations in Crimea with thousands of personnel. These troops are backed by Crimean nationalists posing as local militia. Under a 2010 basing agreement, Russia can station up to 25,000 military personnel, 388 naval vessels, and 161 aircraft in Crimea. All of this means that Putin will attempt to do what he pleases in Crimea and claim that it is all legitimate. It is, however, a clear violation of Ukraine's national sovereignty.

The Failure of the Russian Reset and the Collapse of the Obama Doctrine. Russians respect strength and consistency, neither of which has been displayed by President Obama or his European counterparts. Russian behavior in Crimea was made possible by the failure of the Russian "reset," the disarming of Europe by European politicians, and the reduction and disengagement of U.S. military forces in Europe.

From almost the beginning, President Obama's foreign policy has been an empty shell masking a spectacular lack of American leadership on the world stage. This flawed approach, with a fundamental rejection of

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the notion of American exceptionalism, is amply on display in the Ukrainian crisis, where America's voice has barely been heard. As the latest developments over Crimea have shown, the Russian reset has spectacularly backfired, resulting in staggering complacency in Washington over Moscow's ambitions.

The Obama Doctrine has been a monumental failure because it fails to protect and advance U.S. interests. It is the antithesis of Ronald Reagan's bold approach, which was based on powerful American leadership on the world stage, including a willingness to firmly stand up to America's adversaries. Perhaps even worse, many of America's traditional allies are questioning America's resolve to transatlantic relations and NATO's security guarantee.

Time for a Real Strategy. The U.S. should do the following to send a clear message to Moscow:

- **Show U.S. commitment to NATO.** First and foremost, the U.S. should be reassuring those NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe that their defense is guaranteed and that spillover from any possible conflict will be contained. This could mean temporarily deploying assets to the region required to defend the territorial integrity of NATO countries near Russia. More importantly, it should be made crystal clear to Russia that any armed aggression toward a NATO member will immediately cause the U.S. to call for NATO to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.
 - **Enact sanctions on Russia.** This is a moment for strong U.S. leadership, with Washington implementing targeted sanctions aimed directly at Russian officials responsible for violating Ukrainian sovereignty, including freezing financial assets and imposing visa bans. The White House should make it clear that any Russian military intervention in Ukraine would pose a threat to the free world, not least in a country that sits right on NATO's border.
 - **Enforce the Magnitsky Act.** The Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act was passed by Congress in 2012 and denies U.S. visas to, and places financial sanctions on, Russian officials and individuals guilty of human rights violations. It should be swiftly enforced against any Russian officials involved in the incursions into Crimea and any human rights violations in Ukraine.
 - **Work with European partners.** The President himself should take the lead in urging European allies to adopt a robust stance against Russian expansionism and join the U.S. in a tough sanctions regime that will directly impact those in Russia's government involved in any aggression in Ukraine. Working with the EU would be hopeless. Instead, the U.S. should work bilaterally and multilaterally with key European countries, bypassing the Brussels bureaucracy when possible.
 - **Improve and deepen relations with Eastern Europe beyond defense.** In addition to showing a renewed commitment to NATO, the U.S. should look at other means to demonstrate its support, such as creating new opportunities for liquefied natural gas exports to its European partners, many of whom rely on Russia for 100 percent of their energy needs.
 - **Withdraw immediately from New START.** New START is a fundamentally flawed treaty that dramatically undercuts the security of the U.S. and its allies. It is an extraordinarily good deal for the Russians, as it significantly limits Washington's ability to deploy an effective global missile defense system. It does nothing at all to advance U.S. security while handing Moscow a significant strategic edge.
- Advance American Interests.** Recent events have confirmed what many already knew: The so-called Russian reset is dead. Furthermore, it is looking increasingly likely that part of Ukraine is now under de facto Russian control.
- America's leaders today should follow the example of President Reagan three decades ago: demonstrate American commitment to Europe, guarantee unparalleled American strength, and confront tyranny when it threatens American interests. With strength and consistency, Russia's recent actions could have been prevented or at least mitigated. It might be too late for Crimea, but the U.S. cannot allow the contagion to spread.
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