

ISSUE BRIEF

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Russian Aggression Prevention Act of 2014: Time for American Commitment to Transatlantic Security

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In light of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the Moscow-backed instability in eastern Ukraine, several U.S. Senators have introduced the Russian Aggression Prevention Act of 2014. The goal of the legislation is to advance a strategic U.S. response to deter Russian aggression toward Ukraine and other states in Europe and Eurasia. The bill focuses on what the U.S. and NATO can do militarily in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to ensure that Russian aggression is checked.

Deterring threats and defending NATO allies from Russia would be far easier than liberating them from Russian control. At a time when the U.S. needs to reaffirm its commitment to transatlantic security and the NATO alliance, the Russian Aggression Prevention Act would help improve NATO's security while checking Russian aggression.

U.S. Leadership Needed in NATO

The bill calls on the Administration to reaffirm America's commitment to transatlantic security, strengthen NATO's capabilities, and place pressure on America's NATO allies to invest more in defense. The bill also calls on the U.S. and NATO to do more to provide military support to Poland and the Baltic states.

As an intergovernmental alliance, NATO is only as strong as its member states. Russian defense spending has increased 31 percent since 2008, but during this same period defense spending in Europe decreased by 15 percent. Europe's unilateral self-disarmament has a detrimental impact on the alliance's ability to deter, defend, and defeat a potential adversary. This is not sustainable.

NATO is completely unprepared to deal with Russian aggression on its borders. There is a case to be made for more permanent NATO assets to be deployed in CEE. In fact, the U.S. has more permanently based military personnel in the Netherlands than it does in all of CEE.¹

Forward Basing of U.S. Troops

In the case of the basing of U.S. troops in Europe, what the bill suggests is too little, too late. The bill calls for the U.S. to immediately halt current and planned redeployments of U.S. troops from Europe. The problem is that the vast majority of President Obama's force reductions from Europe announced in 2012 have already been completed. For example, the deactivation of the 170th and 172nd Brigade Combat Teams took place in October 2012 and October 2013, respectively. The A-10 squadron was deactivated in June 2013.

Those who are calling for the return of U.S. forces from Europe fail to understand the economic and security interests—not to mention the treaty obligations—the U.S. has in the region. Military forces in Europe give policymakers options and allow them to respond to a crisis in a timely manner. The 600 troops recently deployed to the Baltics and Poland are deploying from U.S. bases in Italy. The additional

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F-15s and F-16s (along with their crews, maintenance staff, fuel, spare parts, etc.) deployed to CEE from U.S. air bases in England and Italy. Without this forward presence in Europe, these deployments would have been costlier and would have taken longer.

U.S. Missile Defense Policy After Russia's Actions in Ukraine

The bill calls on the Administration to accelerate the implementation of European and NATO missile defense efforts. Russia's actions also underscore the importance of maintaining U.S. missile defense resources. The geopolitical realities of the Russian aggression in Ukraine present an opportunity to assess how the current missile defense plan can be improved and where it would be suitable to add capabilities to it.

In 2009, the Obama Administration cancelled President George W. Bush's plan to deploy two-stage ground-based midcourse defense (GMD) interceptors to Poland and highly capable X-band radar to the Czech Republic. Instead, the Obama Administration proposed a four-phased missile defense plan, the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), consisting of two missile defense sites in Poland and Romania and forward-deployed radars. Phase four of the EPAA—deployment of SM-3 Block IIB interceptors capable of shooting down medium-, intermediate-, and intercontinental-range ballistic missiles—was unwisely cancelled last year. There is also a concern expressed by the Government Accountability Office in a recent report that the missile defense system could see additional costs and delays.²

Helping the Ukrainians Defend Themselves

The bill calls for the limited arming and supply of limited defensive military items for Ukraine. Ukraine does not enjoy the security guarantees afforded to NATO allies, but the U.S. has several military options available that do not include the immediate deployment of American forces into Ukraine.

Every country has the inherent right to self-defense. The U.S. military and its allies have the ability to help organize, train, and support Ukrainian forces so that Ukraine would be better able to defend its territorial integrity. But this type of effort takes planning and time to be effective. Supplies, equipment, or small arms should be sent only with some measure of confidence that the materials would help to stabilize Ukraine's situation and not simply fall into Russia's hands or those of Russian loyalists.

America Needs a Strategy, Not a Reaction

In order to ensure that NATO can defend CEE allies and deter Russian aggression in the region, the U.S. should:

- **Establish a permanent military presence in the Baltic region.** It is time for NATO to scrap the 1997 agreement with Russia, which limits the basing of NATO assets in CEE. This would offer more opportunities for joint military training and demonstrate U.S. commitment to transatlantic security.
- **Reiterate America's commitment to NATO's Article 5.** It should be made clear to Russia that any armed aggression toward a NATO member would immediately cause the U.S. to call for NATO to invoke Article 5 of the 1949 Washington Treaty.
- **Maintain pressure on America's European allies to invest in defense.** In practice, America can do little to force European countries to spend more on defense. However, this should not prevent the U.S. from expressing displeasure at the failure of many European allies to invest enough in defense.
- **Commit to a robust ballistic missile defense in Europe built in a timely fashion.** CEE countries view NATO's ballistic missile defense system as a fundamental part of the alliance's

1. Edward Lucas and A. Wess Mitchell, "Report No. 35: Central European Security After Crimea: The Case for Strengthening NATO's Eastern Defenses," Center for European Policy Analysis, March 25, 2014, p. 3, <http://www.cepa.org/sites/default/files/The%20Case%20for%20Strengthening%20NATO's%20Eastern%20Defenses-%20%282%29.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2014).

2. Andrea Shalal, "U.S. Missile Defense System Could See Added Costs, Delays: Report," Reuters, April 1, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/02/us-usa-missiles-report-idUSBREA3102M20140402> (accessed May 7, 2014).

defense. It is essential that the Administration uphold missile defense commitment to America's allies in Europe, especially after its loss of credibility following the abrupt cancellation of the third site in 2009.

- **Explore realistic options for supporting the Ukrainian armed forces.** Prior to further Russian aggression against Ukraine, the U.S. should send an appropriately structured team of military planners to work with Ukraine's general staff. This would allow the U.S. to assess the requirements of the Ukrainian military while evaluating the effectiveness of any possible U.S. defensive military hardware.

American Leadership Needed

America's European partners not only value but also rely on American leadership in times of crisis and turmoil. As Russia becomes more aggressive, the Obama Administration needs to demonstrate real American commitment to the transatlantic alliance. Friend and foe alike in the region will be closely watching America's actions in the coming weeks.

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