**Statement of Ranking Member Adam Smith**

House Armed Services Committee Hearing: Military Assessment of Russian Activities and Security Challenges in Europe

General Scaparotti, I want to welcome you today. I look forward to your insights on the security situation in Europe and how we can confront the threat that Russian activities in the region present. I’m particularly interested in how we can enhance cooperation with our European partners and posture our forces to best address challenges.

Since our last hearing on the security challenges in Europe, the environment has grown no less complex. Our allies and partners continue to face homegrown terrorist threats, as demonstrated by last week’s tragic attack in London. The terrorism threat also continues to be compounded by an influx of foreign fighters. These threats to European security emanate primarily from instability in North Africa and the Middle East, and many European countries are committed to combating ISIL in those regions.

In the last year, the Russian Federation’s influence campaign aimed at undermining western democracies has expanded in scope, and Russia’s destabilizing actions have become more apparent. Russia purposely interfered with the 2016 U.S. elections and, as we have seen, Russia is also actively operating to influence European politics. Russian military modernization efforts continue and, as recently announced, the Russian military has stood up an information warfare unit.

Further, Russia continues to threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Its illegal occupation of Crimea continues, fighting between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine is ongoing, and progress toward full implementation of the Minsk agreements remains elusive. Through the FY2016 and FY2017 National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs), Congress authorized the Department of Defense to provide defensive lethal assistance to Ukraine, as a part of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI). What more can be done to address the conflict, deter Russian malign activities, and assist our Ukrainian partners?

The importance of working hand-in-glove with our European partners and allies is readily apparent, particularly as Russia seeks to undermine long-established international norms. Confronting common security challenges in Europe requires that we maintain close cooperation with, and support to, organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) and that we respond collectively to Russian aggression. This commitment should be reinforced at all levels of our government.

Our NATO allies stood by us after the United States was attacked on September 11th, invoking Article V of NATO’s Charter for the first time, and NATO members continue to work with us to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces. It’s also important to note that transatlantic security is a shared commitment and I’m pleased to see NATO member states have started to increase their budgetary commitments to meet the agreed target of spending two percent of GDP for defense. Calls for NATO members to meet this goal are not new and were incorporated as a pledge in the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration. Wise investments by NATO members will help to meet capability needs and to provide a strong collective defense.

It is also imperative that the United States continues to make necessary investments to deter Russian aggression and, together with its allies and partners, works to align the defensive posture accordingly. NATO countries have increased deterrence measures through an investment in multinational enhanced forward presence (eFP) battalions in the Baltic countries and a U.S.-led eFP battalion in Poland. Further, in the FY2017 NDAA, Congress authorized the Obama Administration’s request for $3.4 billion to fund the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) – now called the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). Going forward, it is important to strike the right balance regarding force presence, combined exercises, prepositioned hardware, infrastructure, and the building of partner capacity.

That said, I’d like to know how we might optimize forward deployments of U.S. forces to deter Russia without undermining strategic stability. It seems clear that there is strategic value in maintaining a perpetually forward U.S. presence, but do we have the balance right? While heel-to-toe rotational forces may satisfy EUCOM’s requirements, would permanent forces provide greater deterrent value, facilitate closer cooperation with partner countries, or yield commanders additional time and space for rapid response needs?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  I look forward to receiving the General’s testimony.