

STATEMENT BY  
DR. CELESTE WALLANDER  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

BEFORE THE 118<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
APRIL 10, 2024

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on policy matters related to the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) area of responsibility in my capacity as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

I would first like to express my appreciation for the support of Congress and the Committee enabling and informing the Department of Defense's efforts in this region. It is an honor to appear again alongside General Cavoli, who is an outstanding colleague.

In my testimony today, I will describe how the Department of Defense approaches Europe as a whole – specifically, how our posture and our partnerships across the continent enhance U.S. national security.

## **Security Environment**

With its unprovoked, full-scale invasion in 2022, Russia not only doubled down on violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine, but revealed its intent to bring us back to a “might makes right” international system that rewards aggression over cooperation.

For the last 75 years, together with our Allies and partners, we have defended the rules and norms of state behavior that have provided for the unprecedented peace and prosperity Americans enjoy. U.S. leadership and the credibility of our commitment to Euro-Atlantic security has deterred wars, kept the homeland safe, and provided stability that American jobs, supply chains, and trade depend on.

Today, as Russia's brutal war against Ukraine tragically continues into its third year, we are reminded how critical it is that the malign actions of our competitors and adversaries are not rewarded. Beyond Ukraine, Russia continues to threaten Euro-Atlantic security by exploiting fractures within sovereign states, interfering in elections, prosecuting cyber and disinformation campaigns, and disrupting integration efforts. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is attempting to leverage its economic and diplomatic power to weaken and fracture NATO cohesion and unity. The actions of both pose a direct challenge to Euro-Atlantic security and the global stability that underpins our own safety and prosperity.

In response to this challenge – and to ensure continued deterrence and defense of our collective security – the Department has enhanced its posture in Europe over the last two years. While we continue to respond to urgent demands from the battlefield in Ukraine, we are also looking at how to sustain our support and make Euro-Atlantic security indelible over the long term.

But we are not alone. I can report that – contrary to some outdated misperceptions – our Allies and partners in Europe are stepping up and sharing the responsibility of providing for collective defense more than ever before. Finland and now Sweden have joined the NATO Alliance and committed their highly capable militaries to the solemn principle that an attack on one is an attack on all. On both sides of the Atlantic, Allies are ramping up defense production. A record number of Allies are exceeding the 2 percent defense spending benchmark. Around twenty Allies – including Germany – are on track to meet the pledge of at least 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024. European Allies and non-NATO partners are providing aid to

Ukraine, training Ukrainian forces, and leading Capability Coalitions. Finally, our European Allies and partners are also standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us even beyond their borders. They are helping protect the free flow of commerce as part of Operation Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea, supporting our efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor in Gaza, and contributing to the coalition that will achieve the lasting defeat of ISIS.

Together with our Allies and partners in Europe, the Department is committed to reinforcing the lesson that aggression will result in costly failure. Our collective security and prosperity rely on that principle.

## **Ukraine**

In Ukraine, our strategic goal is to see a sovereign, independent, economically viable, and democratic Ukraine emerge from the war with the means to deter and defend itself against further aggression.

On the battlefield, Russian forces continue their assault along the front line in Ukraine's east and south, and continue to target civilians and critical infrastructure across Ukraine. But in the Black Sea, Russia has been compelled to disperse its Black Sea Fleet, as Ukraine inflicts considerable damage on Russian vessels and fleet headquarters in Crimea. The diminished presence of Russian naval forces has allowed Ukraine to increase grain exports to global markets, which is not only critical for Ukraine's economy, but for global food security.

However, Ukraine's military positions and its population centers will be put at serious risk without additional U.S. security assistance. Ukrainian forces need critical munitions such as GMLRS and 155mm artillery ammunition. Ukraine needs air defense systems and munitions to protect against Russian aerial attacks. In March, we were able to provide a limited package of assistance as a short-term stop gap thanks to contract savings, but it is nowhere near enough to meet Ukraine's battlefield needs. Without supplemental funding, DoD will remain hard-pressed to meet Ukraine's requirements.

With Congressional support, we can put into place a sustainable approach to strengthening Ukraine. We can help Ukraine develop a strong defense industrial base of its own, one that is less reliant on the provision of equipment from others.

Meanwhile, we are organizing our Allies and partners into new, multi-national coalitions focused on key capability areas – to support Ukraine's air force, ground-based air defense, artillery, maritime security, and armor requirements. These are accompanied by three enabling coalitions – on information technology, demining, and drones. These coalitions will streamline assistance and create more efficiency. Over a dozen Allies and partners have signed up to lead or co-lead these coalitions. Several Allies have committed to their coalition leadership roles as part of their bilateral, long-term security commitments to Ukraine.

Through continued U.S. leadership in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, Allies and partners have now committed approximately \$44.3 billion in security assistance to Ukraine.

## **Russia**

Turning to Russia, which has absorbed enormous costs as a result of its war against Ukraine, Russia has probably spent up to \$211 billion in direct financial outlays to equip, deploy, maintain, and sustain operations in Ukraine. The war has cost Russia an expected \$1.3 trillion in previously anticipated economic growth through 2026. Russia's armed forces have suffered at least 315,000 casualties in the fight.

Despite those setbacks, however, I want to underscore that Russia continues to present serious risks to European and U.S. security in several areas. These include threats posed by Russia's nuclear arsenal, its malign cyber and information operations, and its capabilities in counterspace and undersea warfare, among others. As a result, the Department remains focused on deterring Russia from attacks on the United States and NATO Allies, including conventional aggression.

## **U.S. Posture in Europe**

Last year I testified that, in response to Russia's February 2022 aggression against Ukraine, the United States reinforced NATO's security faster and with more combat capabilities than any other NATO Ally. This included both repositioning stationed and rotational forces already in Europe, temporarily extending some rotational forces beyond their planned redeployment dates, and deploying additional forces from outside Europe.

This rapid response was enabled by the billions of dollars of investments in infrastructure improvements, building partner capacity, rotational presence, exercises and training with Allies, and prepositioned equipment DoD has implemented – with the support of Congress – since Russia's invasion and purported annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The Department continues to make long-term investments to improve our ability to operate from – and rapidly reinforce – locations across NATO's Eastern Flank. As demonstrated by our rapid reinforcement in 2022, such long-term investments pay dividends on our ability to rapidly surge additional forces in times of crisis, enhancing our deterrence and defense posture across the Eastern Flank.

Over the last two years, DoD has continued to backfill the bulk of the additional forces surged to Europe in 2022 and has continued to enhance our deterrence and defense posture alongside our NATO Allies. Beyond the enhancements on the Eastern Flank I will detail below, we are transitioning from F-15C/Ds to F-35 squadrons in the UK and adding engineer and air defense capabilities in Germany and Italy. We have also added Space Component Headquarters, a Theater Medical Command, and additional sustainment capabilities to Europe.

Working closely with our State Department colleagues, we also continued our steady progress on agreements with Allies. In 2023 alone, the United States concluded Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) with Czechia, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden.

As we continue to transition from our initial crisis response to a more sustainable posture aligned to the threat, the Department has also adapted to meet the enduring missions – such as security

assistance to Ukraine – we have taken on. We established a purpose-built three-star headquarters, the Security Assistance Group-Ukraine (SAG-U), to address those requirements and continue to provide force protection – including Patriot air defense – for that mission. To reaffirm the United States’ commitment to Euro-Atlantic security, and to enable DoD to support and sustain an enhanced presence and level of operations in Europe, in July 2023 the President authorized DoD to activate members of the Reserve Components, in limited numbers, to support Operation Atlantic Resolve. While this authority does not increase DoD’s current presence in Europe, it allows the Department to better plan its force rotations over the long term.

## **NATO**

Transitioning to NATO, which is central to our approach to Euro-Atlantic security, we are engaging with our NATO Allies to ensure that the Alliance is prepared for modern challenges and can deter aggression from any adversary. In response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, NATO has continued to adapt, strengthen its deterrence, and be ready to defend every inch of Alliance territory.

NATO is stronger today than ever. Over the last year, we welcomed Finland and, just last month, Sweden – two highly-capable nations – to our Alliance. As I noted, more Allies than ever are meeting the 2 percent of GDP benchmark. Non-U.S. NATO Allies collectively increased defense investments by 8.3 percent, reflecting a ninth consecutive year of increased defense spending that amounts to an additional \$450 billion for defense since 2014. At the Vilnius Summit in July 2023, NATO leaders approved three regional plans for the defense of NATO territory. The Defense Production Action Plan underscores a shared sense of urgency to ramp up the production of critical equipment and enable Allied deterrence and defense. The Department will continue working with NATO Allies and partners to build capacity along Europe’s Eastern Flank, strengthening defensive capabilities to bolster deterrence. We look forward to welcoming our Allies this summer to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty that established our Alliance. Allies will focus on implementation of the plans, pledges, and agreements leaders concluded at Vilnius. Critically, the Summit will be an opportunity to showcase for the American people and populations in Allied countries how NATO safeguards our shared security and values.

## **Europe**

### *Poland*

NATO’s Eastern Flank, and Poland in particular, is a linchpin of our work to strengthen Euro-Atlantic deterrence and defense. Since 2017, the Department has maintained an enduring rotational presence in Poland, and the United States continues to serve as the framework nation for the NATO Battlegroup in Poland. In addition, as announced by the President at the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, the United States has forward stationed a Corps Forward Command Post as well as an Army Garrison and sustainment capabilities in Poland, the first permanent stationing of U.S. forces on NATO’s Eastern Flank. With our planned level of forces and pre-positioned equipment, Poland will continue to host the majority of U.S. forces on the Eastern Flank while providing us substantial host-nation infrastructure and logistical support.

### *Baltics & Nordics*

Further north, the Baltic States are the first line of defense in the Eastern Flank. These nations continue to punch above their weight and have exceeded expectations by contributing nearly 3 percent of their GDP to defense spending in support of NATO and at least 1 percent of their GDP on support to Ukraine. They provide critical host nation support to NATO's forward land forces and to U.S. deployments in the region.

### *Eastern Flank*

Elsewhere on NATO's Eastern Flank, Romania and Bulgaria remain steadfast Allies and anchors of stability. In addition to the enhanced NATO presence in these countries, the Department continues to headquarter a division command element and a Brigade Combat Team (BCT) in Romania. This rotational BCT's subordinate elements retain the flexibility and ability to deploy across the Eastern Flank in support of the Alliance. The Black Sea region more broadly continues to be a focus area for the DoD in which we will promote political engagement, regional security coordination, and democratic resilience among our Allies and partners.

### *Türkiye*

Türkiye will continue to play a critical role in the USEUCOM area of responsibility. It has demonstrated its geostrategic significance as an important NATO Ally through its efforts to increase food security in the Black Sea, contributions to NATO missions, and diplomatic efforts to resolve long-standing disputes with Greece. The recent approval of Türkiye's F-16 modernization request will directly advance U.S. interests by preventing the deterioration of an Ally's military capabilities, strengthening NATO interoperability, and helping enable U.S. force projection with access to key regions in support of steady-state operations and contingencies.

### *Western Balkans*

In the Western Balkans, Russia is working to exploit ethnic and political differences to serve its goals of disrupting further Euro-Atlantic integration. In Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), the actions of Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik are destabilizing and jeopardizing decades of hard work to build lasting peace and prosperity based on the Dayton Peace Agreement. In Kosovo, KFOR continues to provide a stabilizing presence amid tension and violent incidents in the last year. We are watching this region with increasing concern and engaging with our Allies and partners in the region to encourage restraint and an emphasis on dialogue.

### *Maritime*

In the maritime domain, we are increasing our forward-deployed U.S. Navy guided missile destroyers in Rota, Spain from four to six as announced by President Biden at the 2022 NATO Summit. This force posture change increases our combat credible deterrent against attacks on the North Atlantic Treaty area and improves our ability to reinforce NATO's maritime flanks in the event of a crisis.

### **Caucasus and Moldova**

There are also states beyond the NATO umbrella that remain vulnerable to Russia's malign influence, economic coercion, and aggression. Across the Caucasus and Moldova we are strengthening the sovereignty of our partners.

In Moldova, President Sandu has taken critical steps toward European integration. Moldova well recognizes the threat posed by Russia and is undertaking significant defense reforms based upon lessons learned from Russia's war against Ukraine.

Russia also remains determined to subjugate its neighbors by undermining stability and sovereignty in the South Caucasus. Moscow continues its belligerent occupation of twenty percent of Georgia's territory and maintains a force presence in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgia, a front-line state, is a critical partner and NATO-aspirant that we are committed to helping reform its military to strengthen its deterrence and defensive capabilities. We also recognize the important and courageous steps Armenia is taking to strengthen its own sovereignty. The DoD works with all three to strengthen ties, build resilience, advance Euro-Atlantic integration, and support efforts to achieve peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

### **Belarus**

In Belarus, Lukashenka's regime continues to enable Russia's war in Ukraine. Russia has uncontested use of Belarusian territory and resources to train, enabling Russian forces to reconstitute combat power for the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, Lukashenka's June 2023 announcement on the transfer of the Russia's non-strategic nuclear weapons to Belarus is exacerbating the increasingly tenuous security environment in Europe. The United States will nonetheless continue to ensure that the complicit Lukashenka regime in Belarus pays a severe economic and diplomatic price for both its support to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its violent repression of the Belarusian people.

### **PRC**

While Russia is the acute threat in Europe, the PRC is the Department's pacing challenge and presents a real challenge to Euro-Atlantic security. The PRC's investments in European critical infrastructure have the potential to directly impact NATO logistics, military mobility, and communications. We're also seeing the rapid advance of the PRC's space, cyber, and nuclear capabilities, which are particularly concerning as domains without borders. Finally, we are gravely concerned about the PRC's growing strategic partnership with Russia.

The only path to counter Beijing's malign behavior is in close coordination with our Allies and partners. European militaries are increasing their deployments to the Indo-Pacific region and deepening their partnerships with key U.S. allies in the region like Japan, Australia, and South Korea. We've also seen many European Allies join the growing chorus calling for maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

### **Transnational**

Finally, there are numerous transnational challenges that Europe and the United States must face together. The effects of conflicts in Gaza and the Red Sea are not isolated to the Middle East and we are engaging with our European Allies and partners on those issues. Terrorism and violent extremism remain enduring threats. Cyber and hybrid threats are evolving in their nature and application. All the while, climate change and rapid technological developments further

complicate the challenges we already face. The Department is continuously thinking about how our requirements for deterrence and defense evolve in response to these challenges and how policies should change to meet those requirements.

## **Closing**

To conclude, I want to emphasize how important Congress is to achieving our strategic objectives in Europe and to hindering those of our competitors and adversaries. Your reliable, stable, and consistent support and funding have been – and will continue to be – critical to ensuring deterrence and defense. It is my strong belief that helping our Allies and partners develop their defense capabilities is far less costly than the American lives that could be lost should we have to respond to aggression on our own.

The Department will continue to work closely with our Allies and partners, the rest of the U.S. Government, and in consultation with Congress to ensure Russia's actions will constitute a lasting strategic failure and further aggression is deterred.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department of Defense and I appreciate your continued support to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, and civilians who work every day in service of the American people.