

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
March 5 - 12, 2014

1. [Increased U.S. Cooperation with Ukraine](#) (03-12-2014)
2. [Spokesman: F-16 Augmentation Continues U.S.-Poland Partnership](#) (03-12-2014)
3. [Hagel, Israeli Defense Minister Discuss Red Sea Operation](#) (03-07-2014)
4. [The Importance of IMF Reforms to Support Ukraine](#) (03-07-2014)
5. [Obama Says Proposed Crimean Referendum Illegal](#) (03-06-2014)
6. [DOD Supports U.S., Allied Response to Russia-Ukraine Crisis](#) (03-06-2014)
7. [Syria Spillover: The Growing Threat of Terrorism and Sectarianism in the Middle East and Ukraine Update](#) (03-06-2014)
8. [President Putin's Fiction: 10 False Claims about Ukraine](#) (03-05-2014)

1. [Increased U.S. Cooperation with Ukraine](#) (03-12-2014)

Fact Sheet

Ukraine is facing a moment of historic challenge and historic opportunity. In the coming months, the Government of Ukraine will need to take steps to restore economic stability and to conduct free, fair, and inclusive presidential elections to allow the Ukrainian people to choose their own future.

During Prime Minister Yatsenyuk's visit to Washington today, we discussed specific steps the United States is taking to support Ukraine at this critical time, including the \$1 billion loan guarantee we are working with Congress to provide, and the package of technical and other assistance we are preparing, to meet Ukraine's priority needs. Specific U.S. assistance measures and initiatives discussed today include the following:

Reaffirming our Partnership

We intend to resume activities of the Strategic Partnership Commission at the Ministerial level with the goal of deepening the U.S.-Ukrainian Strategic Partnership in the areas of nuclear security and nonproliferation, political dialogue and rule of law, energy security, security cooperation, and science and technology.

March 12, 2014

The Department of Commerce will organize a U.S.-Ukraine Business Summit in Washington, DC that will bring together senior-level USG and GOU officials, U.S. companies with investments in Ukraine, and leading economic and legal experts on the Ukrainian market, to discuss how to increase economic growth in Ukraine and deepen our bilateral commercial relationship.

The Department of Commerce, working together with the State Department and USTR, will develop an Innovation Council that will focus on creating the eco-system required to accelerate entrepreneurship and develop the legal culture and infrastructure for innovation in Ukraine.

Special Envoy for International Energy Affairs Carlos Pascual will visit Kyiv this month for a meeting of the Energy Security Working Group, which will focus on efforts to boost Ukraine's energy security, including energy efficiency and the development of alternative energy sources.

The Department of Defense will hold U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Defense Consultations with Ukrainian counterparts in Kyiv within the next month.

A senior-level Department of Commerce delegation will travel to Kyiv to conduct relationship-building with key GOU officials, streamlining future bilateral work on market access cases, pending investments, and means for addressing systemic issues affecting our bilateral commercial relationship.

We will hold a meeting of the bilateral Trade and Investment Council through the U.S. Trade Representative's Office to address barriers to trade and investment and explore expanding commercial ties, boosting the investment climate.

Immediate Assistance

Support for the May presidential elections. The United States will double its planned assistance to support electoral law reform to improve election administration, provide election monitoring, and promote robust involvement by a strong and independent civil society and media.

Department of Defense (DoD) personnel will organize a Humanitarian Assistance Planning Conference with the Ukrainian Armed Forces. DoD will provide Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Support for asset recovery efforts. Department of Justice and FBI teams are already in Ukraine to provide strategic advice and capacity building to locate the proceeds of corruption looted by former officials. The State Department also will offer additional assistance and technical expertise for bilateral and multilateral efforts to facilitate Ukraine's efforts to recover these assets located in overseas financial institutions.

New technical support to help Ukraine with immediate economic management challenges. The United States is providing expertise to help the Ukrainian Ministry of Finance and Central Bank navigate near-term economic challenges. The Department of Treasury has already deployed an expert advisor and the United States stands ready to provide additional assistance to meet Ukraine's near-term economic and financial management needs.

Enhancing People-to-People Contacts

The Department of State will expand funding for the inaugural year of the U.S.-Ukraine Fulbright Science and Technology Education Program ("STEP"), a pilot project that will fully fund the travel

and studies of a select group of Ukrainian graduate students at U.S. universities in the 2014-2015 academic year.

The Global Undergraduate Exchange Program will double the number of Ukrainian students for the 2014-15 academic year.

Over 50 additional future leaders of Ukraine will be eligible for short-term exchanges and professional experiences in the United States in critically important fields.

The United States will establish an Alumni Innovation Grant Competition for Ukrainian alumni of U.S. Government exchange programs to allow the best alumni to launch ideas that will benefit their country's future

Related Sites:

[Obama, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk After Their Meeting](#)

[Statement of G7 Leaders on Ukraine](#)

[NATO Deputy Secretary-General Calls Moldova Valued Partner](#)

2. Spokesman: F-16 Augmentation Continues U.S.-Poland Partnership (03-12-2014)

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall Jr.
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 12, 2014 – A dozen more F-16s and 300 personnel based at Aviano Air Base, Italy, will augment the U.S. aviation detachment at Lask Air Base, Poland, a Pentagon spokesman announced today.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced last week that the United States would augment the aviation detachment in light of the situation in Ukraine, and Army Col. Steven Warren provided details today in a meeting with reporters.

Warren said 12 F-16 Fighting Falcons and associated personnel from the 555th Fighter Squadron at Aviano are expected to arrive in Poland by the end of the week. "This enhancement marks another milestone in the rotational deployment of U.S. military aircraft that we began in late 2012," he added.

Hagel met with Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak on March 9 to consider options for locations, with U.S. European Command deciding on the number of aircraft, Warren told reporters earlier this week. Previously planned rotations will continue, he said today, with this augmentation serving as an addition to those already scheduled.

"It's consistent with the enduring partnership between the U.S. and Poland," Warren said. "Augmenting this aviation detachment was a deliberate choice to demonstrate to our allies that U.S. commitments to our collective defense responsibilities are credible and remain in force. The work we're doing with Poland does just that."

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

Related Articles:

[U.S. Will Beef Up Air Operations in Poland](#)

[Hagel Ends Poland Trip with U.S., Polish Airmen](#)

[3. Hagel, Israeli Defense Minister Discuss Red Sea Operation \(03-07-2014\)](#)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Mar. 7, 2014 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel spoke with Israeli Defense Minister Moshe "Boogie" Yaalon yesterday afternoon and received a briefing on Israel's interdiction operation in the Red Sea that seized a suspected Iranian shipment of advanced weapons bound for terrorist organizations operating in Gaza.

In a statement summarizing the phone call, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said the secretary congratulated Yaalon on the operation's success and reiterated the U.S. commitment to holding Iran accountable for its destabilizing activities in the region, "even as we continue efforts to resolve our concerns over Iran's nuclear program through diplomacy."

"Secretary Hagel made clear that illicit actions by Iran are unacceptable to the international community and in gross violation of Iran's U.N. Security Council obligations," the press secretary added.

The Defense Department and the Israeli Defense Ministry have been in consistent touch on Israel's interdiction operation, Kirby said, coordinating extensively through military and intelligence channels.

"The secretary and the minister pledged to continue this close consultation as Israel completes its final inspection of the vessel," he said, "and reaffirmed the strength of the U.S.-Israel defense relationship."

Biographies:
[Chuck Hagel](#)

Related Sites:
[DOD News Release](#)

[4. The Importance of IMF Reforms to Support Ukraine \(03-07-2014\)](#)

This blog post by Anthony Reyes, the new media specialist at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, was published on the Treasury Department website on March 6.

The Importance of IMF Reforms to Support Ukraine
By Anthony Reyes

Given the events unfolding in Ukraine, the important role the United States has in providing economic support for the Ukrainian government, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and our international partners, has become even more urgent. While delivering a statement on the ongoing situation in Ukraine today, President Obama highlighted this issue by calling on Congress to quickly approve IMF legislation that would enable the United States to do just that:

"Today, once again, I'm calling on Congress to follow up on these words with action, specifically to support the IMF's capacity to lend resources to Ukraine and to provide American assistance for

the Ukrainian government so that they can weather this storm and stabilize their economy, make needed reforms, deliver for their people, all of which will provide a smoother pathway for the elections that have already been scheduled in May.”

While delivering testimony at two Congressional hearings this week about the President’s budget for Fiscal Year 2015, Secretary Lew took time to explain the economic assistance we are planning to provide Ukraine and the vital role of the IMF in that effort. Here is what he said at the [House Ways and Means Committee hearing](#) today:

“... The United States has developed a package of bilateral assistance focused on meeting Ukraine’s most pressing needs. This package will include \$1 billion in loan guarantees and IMF quota legislation, which would support the IMF’s capacity to lend additional resources to Ukraine and help preserve continued U.S. leadership within this important institution at a critical time.

“While the United States will not increase our total financial commitment to the IMF by approving the 2010 reforms, it is important to note that for every dollar the United States contributes to the IMF, other countries provide four dollars more.

“At a time when the U.S. is at the forefront of international calls in urging the Fund to play a central and active first responder role in Ukraine, it is imperative that we secure passage of IMF legislation now so we can show support for the IMF in this critical moment and preserve our leading influential voice in the institution.”

Treasury Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe and Eurasia Daleep Singh also urged Congress to boost the resources of the IMF at a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing today. As [Bloomberg News](#) reports, Singh said, “For the United States to continue playing a leading role in international support efforts for Ukraine, centered on the IMF, one of the most significant steps we can take is to pass the 2010 package.”

To learn more about Treasury’s work with the IMF visit [here](#).

[5. Obama Says Proposed Crimean Referendum Illegal \(03-06-2014\)](#)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama said a proposed March 16 referendum on the future of Crimea that is being supported by Russia would be illegal.

At a White House briefing, President Obama said, “Any discussion about the future of Ukraine must include the legitimate government of Ukraine.” The proposed referendum would violate the Ukrainian Constitution and international law, he said.

“In 2014, we are well beyond the days when borders can be redrawn over the heads of democratic leaders,” he added March 6.

Earlier in the day, the 100-seat parliament in Crimea, a southeast region of Ukraine that borders Russia and faces a portion of the Black Sea, voted 78–0, with eight abstentions, in favor of joining the Russian Federation. The lawmakers agreed to hold the public referendum on March 16 to let the

Crimean people decide their future. Crimean voters would also be given the choice of remaining part of Ukraine with greater local powers.

The latest crisis follows closely on the February 27 invasion by Russian forces wearing ski masks and combat uniforms without markings, who seized the Crimean regional parliament, several government buildings and the airport. The Russian Navy, by mutual agreement with Ukraine, bases its Black Sea naval fleet in Crimea.

While condemning the proposed referendum, Obama also announced March 6 that the United States is imposing new visa restrictions on pro-Russian opponents of the new Ukraine government in Kyiv. The unspecified and unidentified number of people and entities subject to the visa restrictions were accused by the Obama administration of threatening Ukraine's sovereignty.

The visa bans will be imposed immediately by the U.S. Department of State. Officials will deny U.S. entry to those involved in human rights abuses in Ukraine and now to those associated with violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation.

"In addition, the president has signed an executive order that authorizes sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for activities undermining democratic processes or institutions in Ukraine," White House press secretary Jay Carney said in a prepared statement. The sanctions plan provides the legal framework for the U.S. Treasury Department to impose financial penalties on offenders specified in the president's executive order and carries with it a heavy financial penalty.

Carney said that these measures build on previous actions taken, including suspending bilateral discussions with Russia on trade and investment, suspending other bilateral meetings on a case-by-case basis, putting on hold U.S.-Russia military-to-military engagement, and an agreement among the Group of Seven advanced economies to suspend participation associated with the Group of Eight Summit in Sochi, Russia, in June. The United States is prepared to consider additional steps and sanctions, the statement said.

Obama told journalists the actions he has taken "continue our efforts to impose a cost on Russia and those responsible for the situation in Crimea. And they also give us the flexibility to adjust our response going forward based on Russia's actions."

The response from Washington is in coordination with the European Union, Obama says. The EU, meeting in Brussels March 6, strongly condemned actions taken by Russia to undermine the integrity of Ukraine and also indicated that any further action by Russia could bring more serious consequences.

"Any further steps by the Russian Federation to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to severe and far reaching consequences for relations between the European Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other hand, which will include a broad range of economic areas," the EU said in a prepared statement.

Obama also said that while these measures are being implemented, there are still diplomatic efforts that can be taken to de-escalate this crisis, including the use of unarmed monitors in Crimea from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State John Kerry was holding bilateral meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Rome in an effort to defuse the Ukrainian crisis.

Related Sites:

[President Obama's Call with Russian President Putin on Ukraine](#)
[White House on Visa Restrictions, Sanctions in Support of Ukraine](#)
[White House Briefing on Executive Order on Ukraine](#)
[State's Rubin at House Hearing on U.S. Policy Toward Ukraine](#)
[Kerry Remarks on Libya, Ukraine at Press Availability in Rome](#)
[European Council Heads of State, Government on Ukraine](#)

6. DOD Supports U.S., Allied Response to Russia-Ukraine Crisis (03-06-2014)

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Mar. 6, 2014 – The Defense Department is working to support the coordinated U.S. response to Russia's recent aggression toward Ukraine, and to help Ukraine and U.S. allies and partners in the region, DOD and administration officials said here today.

The United States is focusing diplomatic and economic pressure on Russia to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine, and senior administration and defense officials continue to engage with their Russian counterparts.

Secretary of State John F. Kerry is meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov today, for example, and this week the United States announced a \$1 billion package of economic assistance to Ukraine, and the European Union announced a \$15 billion assistance package.

This morning, President Barack Obama issued an executive order that allows the administration to initiate financial sanctions against Russian and Ukrainian individuals and entities that steal assets, engage in destabilizing activities, or take flight unlawfully. The administration also is imposing visa restrictions on those responsible for violating Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Defense Department is making substantial contributions to U.S. and international efforts in support of Ukraine. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey summarized the department's activities this morning in advance of their testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on the president's fiscal year 2015 defense budget request.

Hagel said he strongly supports the administration's efforts, including the steps Obama has taken to apply diplomatic and economic pressure on Russia, and the continued collaboration with European partners.

"Earlier this week, I directed the Department of Defense to suspend all military-to-military engagements and exercises with Russia. And yesterday, I announced a series of steps [the department] will take to reinforce allies in Central and Eastern Europe during this crisis," Hagel told the panel.

The steps include increasing joint training through the DOD aviation detachment in Poland, made up of airmen from the 31st Fighter Wing who train and work with their Polish partners at Lask Air Base in central Poland.

“I was advised this morning that [the partnership at Lask] continues to move forward,” the secretary said, adding that the department also will augment its participation in NATO's Baltic air policing mission. He told the House members that six F-15s have arrived in Lithuania within the past 24 hours.

In his remarks, Dempsey said he is deeply engaged in DOD support of the diplomatic approach to resolving Ukraine's crisis.

“I'm engaged with our NATO allies. I've spoken both yesterday and today with my Russian counterpart, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, and will continue to maintain that line of communication,” Dempsey told the panel.

Also this morning, on a White House background teleconference with reporters, senior administration officials discussed details of the new visa restrictions and the executive order released today in support of Ukraine.

“Since the Russian intervention in Ukraine, you have seen us work on several lines of effort to mobilize international unity, to condemn the Russian intervention, to impose cost on Russia for debt interventions so they are isolated politically and economically [and] to provide additional support for the government in Kiev,” a senior administration official said.

The best way to make sure the rights of Ukrainians and ethnic Russians are being protected is to use international monitoring, he said.

“A monitoring team from the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] has arrived in Ukraine [and] moved out to different parts of the country. The team has an important set of experiences and capabilities to ensure that basic rights are being protected. We believe that that monitoring mission should expand into Crimea and can be the basis for a way of deescalating the crisis,” the official added.

Representing broad international unity, the North Atlantic Council, European allies and G-7 countries all have condemned Russia's aggression, he added, and the United States has suspended preparatory meetings for the G-8 in Sochi, Russia.

The United States also has cancelled discussions associated with deepening trade and commercial ties with Russia, the official noted, “and with today's actions we take an additional step to impose costs on Russia and those who are responsible for violating Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

The executive order gives the United States flexibility to target individuals and entities responsible for violating international law and Ukrainian sovereignty, the official said.

“We are also imposing certain visa restrictions that further impose a cost on individuals responsible for the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the official said.

The senior administration official added, “There are individuals who have had their visas pulled or will be banned from visas, and those individuals -- who I won't give names or numbers -- do include Russians and Ukrainians.”

Such actions should send a strong message that the United States and its allies intend to impose costs on Russia for the Ukrainian intervention, the official added, and they give the United States flexibility to respond based on Russia's actions, whether positive or negative.

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

Related Articles:

[Hagel, Dempsey Outline U.S., Partner Approach to Ukraine](#)

7. Syria Spillover: The Growing Threat of Terrorism and Sectarianism in the Middle East and Ukraine Update (03-06-2014)

Testimony by William J. Burns, Deputy Secretary of State before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity. I'm pleased to be joined by Matt Olsen and Derek Chollet. I ask that my written testimony be entered into the record.

Before addressing the issue of extremism in the Levant, let me first offer a quick assessment of developments in Ukraine, as you requested.

Ukraine

A great deal is at stake in Ukraine today. Less than 48 hours ago in Kyiv, not far from the Shrine of the Fallen, Secretary Kerry made clear America's deep and abiding commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, in the face of Russian aggression, and our determination to ensure that the people of Ukraine get to make their own choices about their future. That's a bedrock conviction for the United States. On my own visit last week, I was profoundly moved by the bravery and selflessness of Ukrainians, and profoundly impressed by the commitment of the new interim government to reach across ethnic and regional lines and build a stable, democratic and inclusive Ukraine, with good relations with all of its neighbors, including Russia.

While we and our partners worked to support Ukraine's transition, Russia worked actively to undermine it. Russia's military intervention in Crimea is a brazen violation of its international obligations, and no amount of Russian posturing can obscure that fact.

Ukraine's interim government, approved by 82 percent of the Rada, including most members of Yanukovich's party, has shown admirable restraint in the face of massive provocation. They need and deserve our strong support. President Obama, Secretary Kerry and the entire Administration have been working hard, steadily and methodically, to build urgent international backing for Ukraine, counter-pressure against Russia, reassurance to other neighbors, and a path to de-escalation. Our strategy has four main elements, and we look forward to working with Congress on each of them.

First, immediate support for Ukraine as it deals with enormous economic challenges and prepares for critical national elections at the end of May. On Tuesday, Secretary Kerry announced our intent to seek a \$1 billion loan guarantee. That will be part of a major international

effort to build a strong economic support package for Ukraine as it undertakes reform. That effort includes the IMF and the EU, which laid out its own substantial assistance package yesterday. Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and his colleagues are committed partners, and understand that the Ukrainian government has difficult reform choices to make, after inheriting an economic mess from Yanukovich. Ukraine's considerable economic potential has never been matched by its business environment or economic leadership, and now is the time to begin to get its financial house in order and realize its promise.

Second, deterring further encroachment on Ukrainian territory and pressing for an end to Russia's occupation of Crimea. President Obama has led broad international condemnation of Russia's intervention, with strong, unified statements from the G-7 and NATO, as well as the EU, whose leaders are meeting today in an emergency summit. We are sending international observers from the OSCE to Crimea and eastern Ukraine to bear witness to what is happening and make clear that minorities are not at risk. This was never a credible claim by Russia, nor a credible pretext for military intervention.

We are making clear that there are costs for what Russia has already done, and working with our partners to make clear that the costs will increase significantly if intervention expands. Today, the President signed an executive order authorizing sanctions – including asset freezes and travel bans on individuals and entities responsible for activities undermining democratic processes or institutions in Ukraine; threatening the peace, security, stability, sovereignty or territorial integrity of Ukraine; contributing to the misappropriation of state assets of Ukraine; or that purport to exercise authority over any part of Ukraine without authorization from the Ukrainian government in Kyiv. This E.O. will be used in a flexible way to designate those most directly involved in destabilizing Ukraine.

The State Department today also put in place visa restrictions on a number of officials and individuals. We continue to look at every aspect of our relationship with Russia, from suspension of preparations for the Sochi G-8 Summit to pausing key elements in our bilateral dialogue.

Third, bolstering Ukraine's neighbors. We are moving immediately to reinforce our Washington Treaty commitments to our allies. As Secretary Hagel stressed yesterday, we are taking concrete steps to support NATO partners, through intensified joint training with our aviation detachment in Poland and enhanced participation in NATO's air policing mission in the Baltics.

And fourth, Secretary Kerry is working intensively to de-escalate the crisis, in order to restore Ukraine's sovereignty while creating a diplomatic off-ramp. We support direct dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow, facilitated by an international contact group. As the President and Secretary Kerry have emphasized, we do not seek confrontation with Russia. It is clearly in the interests of both Ukraine and Russia to have a healthy relationship, born of centuries of cultural, economic and social ties. The will for that exists among Ukraine's new leaders. But it cannot happen if Russia continues down its current dangerous and irresponsible path. That will only bring greater isolation and mounting costs for Russia.

Our strategy, it seems to me, needs to be steady and determined, mindful of what's at stake for Ukrainians as well as for international norms. We also need to be mindful of the enduring strengths of the United States and its partners, and the very real weaknesses sometimes obscured by Russian bluster. Most of all, President Putin underestimates the commitment of Ukrainians, across their country, to sovereignty and independence, and to writing their own future. No one should underestimate the power of patient and resolute counter-pressure, using all of the non-military

means at our disposal, working with our allies, and leaving the door open to de-escalation and diplomacy if Russia is prepared to play by international rules.

Extremism in the Levant

Now let me turn very briefly to the Levant. The turbulence of the past three years has had many roots: rising aspirations for dignity, political participation and economic opportunity in a region in which too many people for too many years have been denied them; the ruthless reaction of some regimes; and the efforts of violent extremists to exploit the resulting chaos.

Nowhere have these trends converged more dangerously than in Syria. The conflict, and the Asad regime, have become a magnet for foreign fighters, many affiliated with terrorist groups from across the region and around the world. As Matt will describe, these fighters, mostly Sunni extremists, represent a long-term threat to U.S. national security interests. From the other side, Asad has recruited thousands of foreign fighters, mostly Shia, to defend the regime, with active Iranian support and facilitation. The hard reality is that the grinding Syrian civil war is now an incubator of extremism – on both sides of the sectarian divide.

We face a number of serious risks to our interests as a result: the risk to the homeland from global jihadist groups who seek to gain long-term safe havens; the risk to the stability of our regional partners, including Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq; the risk to Israel and other partners from the rise of Iranian-backed extremist groups, especially Lebanese Hizballah fighting in Syria; and the risk to the Syrian people, whose suffering constitutes the greatest humanitarian crisis of this new century.

These are enormous challenges. They require a steady, comprehensive American strategy, aimed at isolating extremists and bolstering moderates, both inside Syria and amongst our regional partners. I'd highlight four elements of our strategy:

First, we are working to isolate and degrade terrorist networks in Syria. That means stepping up efforts with other governments to stem the flow of foreign fighters into Syria, and cutting off financing and weapons to terrorist groups. It also means stepping up efforts to strengthen the moderate opposition, without which progress toward a negotiated transition of leadership through the Geneva process or any other diplomatic effort is impossible. Strengthened moderate forces are critical both to accelerate the demise of the Asad regime, and to help Syrians build a counterweight to the extremists who threaten both the present and the post-Asad future of Syria and the region. None of this is easy, but the stakes are very high.

Second, we are pushing hard against Iranian financing and material support to its proxy groups in Syria and elsewhere. We are also working intensively with partners in the Gulf and elsewhere to curb financing flows to extremists.

Third, we are increasing cooperation with Turkey, and intensifying our efforts to strengthen the capacity of Syria's other endangered neighbors:

-- **In Jordan**, which I visited again last month, we are further enhancing the capacity of the Jordanian Armed Forces to police its borders and deepening intelligence cooperation on extremist threats. The staggering burden of supporting 600,000 Syrian refugees has put serious strain on Jordan's resources. We deeply appreciate Congress' continued support for significant U.S. assistance for Jordan, which has totalled about a billion dollars in each of the last couple years, complemented by substantial loan guarantees. I can think of no better investment in regional stability than our efforts in Jordan.

-- **In Lebanon**, we are supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces to deter spillover, better monitor the border with Syria, and help bolster the government's policy of "dissociation" from the Syrian conflict. The formation of a new Cabinet last month provides a renewed opportunity for the United States to engage, and Secretary Kerry reaffirmed our strong commitment to Lebanon's security and economic stability directly to President Sleiman and at the International Support Group for Lebanon ministerial meeting in Paris yesterday.

-- **In Iraq**, we are surging security assistance and information sharing to combat the rising threat from ISIL, while pressing Iraqi leaders to execute a comprehensive strategy – security, political and economic – to isolate extremists, especially in Anbar. That was one of the main purposes of my last visit to Baghdad at the end of January. I appreciate the close consultation we've had with you, Mr. Chairman, and with other members of the Committee on these crucial issues, and we look forward to continuing to address your concerns, which we share.

And finally, we are supporting global efforts to ease the humanitarian crisis in Syria, through the \$1.7 billion we have already contributed. We are working hard to facilitate the delivery of cross-border aid, using the recently adopted UN Security Council resolution to expand humanitarian access. We are also providing substantial aid to refugee populations in neighboring countries.

Beyond the Levant, we continue to work with our Gulf partners to enhance security cooperation, blunt the extremist threat, and support sound economic development in transitioning countries. This will be an important focus of the President's visit to Saudi Arabia later this month.

Mr. Chairman, the rise of extremism in the Levant poses an acute risk for the United States, and for our regional partners. It is essential that we intensify our efforts to isolate extremists in Syria, limit the flow of foreign fighters, bolster moderate opposition forces, ease the humanitarian crisis, and help key partners like Jordan defend against spillover. Thank you again for your focus on these vitally important challenges, and I look forward to continuing to work with you.

8. President Putin's Fiction: 10 False Claims about Ukraine (03-05-2014) **Fact Sheet**

As Russia spins a false narrative to justify its illegal actions in Ukraine, the world has not seen such startling Russian fiction since Dostoyevsky wrote, "The formula 'two plus two equals five' is not without its attractions."

Below are 10 of President Vladimir Putin's recent claims justifying Russian aggression in the Ukraine, followed by the facts that his assertions ignore or distort.

1. **Mr. Putin says:** *Russian forces in Crimea are only acting to protect Russian military assets. It is "citizens' defense groups," not Russian forces, who have seized infrastructure and military facilities in Crimea.*

The Facts: Strong evidence suggests that members of Russian security services are at the heart of the highly organized anti-Ukraine forces in Crimea. While these units wear uniforms without insignia, they drive vehicles with Russian military license plates and freely identify themselves as Russian security forces when asked by the international media and the Ukrainian military. Moreover, these individuals are armed with weapons not generally available to civilians.

2. **Mr. Putin says:** *Russia's actions fall within the scope of the 1997 Friendship Treaty between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.*

The Facts: The 1997 agreement requires Russia to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. Russia's military actions in Ukraine, which have given them operational control of Crimea, are in clear violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

3. **Mr. Putin says:** *The opposition failed to implement the February 21 agreement with former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich.*

The Facts: The February 21 agreement laid out a plan in which the Rada, or Parliament, would pass a bill to return Ukraine to its 2004 Constitution, thus returning the country to a constitutional system centered around its parliament. Under the terms of the agreement, Yanukovich was to sign the enacting legislation within 24 hours and bring the crisis to a peaceful conclusion. Yanukovich refused to keep his end of the bargain. Instead, he packed up his home and fled, leaving behind evidence of wide-scale corruption.

4. **Mr. Putin says:** *Ukraine's government is illegitimate. Yanukovich is still the legitimate leader of Ukraine.*

The Facts: On March 4, President Putin himself acknowledged the reality that Yanukovich "has no political future." After Yanukovich fled Ukraine, even his own Party of Regions turned against him, voting to confirm his withdrawal from office and to support the new government. Ukraine's new government was approved by the democratically elected Ukrainian Parliament, with 371 votes – more than an 82% majority. The interim government of Ukraine is a government of the people, which will shepherd the country toward democratic elections on May 25th – elections that will allow all Ukrainians to have a voice in the future of their country.

5. **Mr. Putin says:** *There is a humanitarian crisis and hundreds of thousands are fleeing Ukraine to Russia and seeking asylum.*

The Facts: To date, there is absolutely no evidence of a humanitarian crisis. Nor is there evidence of a flood of asylum-seekers fleeing Ukraine for Russia. International organizations on the ground have investigated by talking with Ukrainian border guards, who also refuted these claims. Independent journalists observing the border have also reported no such flood of refugees.

6. **Mr. Putin says:** *Ethnic Russians are under threat.*

The Facts: Outside of Russian press and Russian state television, there are no credible reports of any ethnic Russians being under threat. The new Ukrainian government placed a priority on peace and reconciliation from the outset. President Oleksandr Turchynov refused to sign legislation limiting the use of the Russian language at regional level. Ethnic Russians and Russian speakers have filed petitions attesting that their communities have not experienced threats. Furthermore, since the new government was established, calm has returned to Kyiv. There has been no surge in crime, no looting, and no retribution against political opponents.

7. **Mr. Putin says:** *Russian bases are under threat.*

The Facts: Russian military facilities were and remain secure, and the new Ukrainian government has pledged to abide by all existing international agreements, including those covering Russian bases. It is Ukrainian bases in Crimea that are under threat from Russian military action.

8. **Mr. Putin says:** *There have been mass attacks on churches and synagogues in southern and eastern Ukraine.*

The Facts: Religious leaders in the country and international religious freedom advocates active in Ukraine have said there have been no incidents of attacks on churches. All of Ukraine's church leaders, including representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, have expressed support for the new political leadership, calling for national unity and a period of healing. Jewish groups in southern and eastern Ukraine report that they have not seen an increase in anti-Semitic incidents.

9. **Mr. Putin says:** *Kyiv is trying to destabilize Crimea.*

The Facts: Ukraine's interim government has acted with restraint and sought dialogue. Russian troops, on the other hand, have moved beyond their bases to seize political objectives and infrastructure in Crimea. The government in Kyiv immediately sent the former Chief of Defense to defuse the situation. Petro Poroshenko, the latest government emissary to pursue dialogue in Crimea, was prevented from entering the Crimean Rada.

10. **Mr. Putin says:** *The Rada is under the influence of extremists or terrorists.*

The Facts: The Rada is the most representative institution in Ukraine. Recent legislation has passed with large majorities, including from representatives of eastern Ukraine. Far-right wing ultranationalist groups, some of which were involved in open clashes with security forces during the EuroMaidan protests, are not represented in the Rada. There is no indication that the Ukrainian government would pursue discriminatory policies; on the contrary, they have publicly stated exactly the opposite.
