

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## If Russia Attacks: How the U.S. Should Respond to Further Aggression Against Ukraine

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After Russia's illegal invasion, occupation, and subsequent annexation of Crimea, there is a concern that Moscow will not stop until all of Ukraine is under Russia's control. By invading Crimea, the regime of President Vladimir Putin has made it impossible any longer to consider Russia a responsible nation or suitable partner for the United States in solving regional and strategic security issues. The U.S. should adopt a new long-term strategy that addresses protecting its vital interests against the irresponsible and illegal actions of Moscow.

Further Russian escalation, however, risks a wider war that could destabilize the transatlantic alliance. The U.S. should mitigate this risk even as it establishes a new long-term strategy to deal with a hostile and aggressive Russian regime. Most important, Washington should make absolutely clear to Putin that the U.S. will defend its NATO allies.

**Growing Designs on Ukraine.** There is no telling whether Russia will invade the remainder of Ukraine. It might instead initiate a campaign of coercion and propaganda in Ukrainian oblasts that have large ethnic Russian populations where pro-Russian protests continue. This could become a seri-

ous problem for the new government in Kyiv, especially leading up to the elections in May. However, a full-blown invasion cannot be ruled out.

The U.S. should not wait for Moscow to make its next move but should act preemptively now by:

- **Continuing in the most forceful terms and actions to reiterate America's commitment to NATO's Article 5.** In addition to suspending the NATO–Russia Council, it should be made 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. President Obama should convey this message during a visit to Poland or one of the Baltic states. The U.S. should be reassuring NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe that their defense is guaranteed and that spillover from any possible conflict will be contained. This means deploying assets to the region required to defend the territorial integrity of NATO countries close to Russia.
- **Declaring that the U.S. will expand joint training exercises with NATO allies.** General Philip M. Breedlove, commander of the U.S. European Command, told *The Army Times* in a recent interview that the U.S. has canceled 45 percent of military-to-military training events with European partners. This is unacceptable. In light of recent Russian aggression, the Department of Defense should prioritize U.S. training missions in Central and Eastern Europe.

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- **Getting serious about the defense of Central and Eastern European nations in NATO.** The Pentagon and NATO should immediately begin to review and update contingency defense plans. These plans should deliver a suitable, credible, and actionable conventional defense of NATO member nations.

**Raise the Costs of a Russian Incursion.** 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. Putin understands force and the risks he incurs in widening the war. Should the situation take a turn for the worse and Russia move to annex more of Ukraine, 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 contest Russia's move for a considerable time. But this type of effort takes planning to be effective.

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. 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.

**If Shooting Starts.** If Putin recklessly elects to commit additional illegal and aggressive actions, there is little of consequence the West can do to convince him to reverse course, but there are actions the U.S. can take to show that these actions are unacceptable:

- **Suspend diplomatic relations with Moscow.** In the event of further Russian aggression against Ukraine, the U.S. should immediately recall its ambassador from Moscow (if a successor to Michael McFaul is in place) and expel Russia's ambassador to Washington. This should have been done already after the annexation of Crimea and after Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia.
- **Shut down the Russian embassy.** Washington should also deny American visas to all Russian government officials and their family members.

- **Impose travel restrictions.** The U.S. should enforce a 25-mile travel restriction on officials assigned to the Russian mission to the United Nations in New York. Similar restrictions could be imposed on Russian officials assigned to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund headquarters in Washington, D.C.

**Looking to the Long Term.** Regardless of the outcome of the current crisis, President Obama's strategy for dealing with Russia is beyond repair. Hopes that Russia would assist the U.S. in resolving difficult issues such as Syria, Iran, and Afghanistan were illusory. Further, it is now clear that Russia represents a credible threat to the peace and security of the transatlantic region. Indeed, many of the actions the U.S. needs to take should have been implemented after Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and its recent invasion of Crimea. The U.S. government should develop a new long-term strategy that includes:

- **A new global free-market energy policy.** The U.S. should work immediately and comprehensively to eliminate barriers to U.S. energy exports.
- **A new economic policy toward Russia.** Moscow has exploited and perverted its access to global free markets. It represents a growing threat to economic freedom in the region and to U.S. interests. The U.S. should take the lead in immediately developing a comprehensive international regime to counter Russian behavior and isolate and punish a corrupt leadership class.
- **A new approach to the strategic balance, arms control, and missile defense.** The U.S. should abrogate ineffective treaties, modernize its nuclear forces, and reaffirm its commitment to robust missile defense.
- **A new diplomatic strategy.** Moscow should be treated as even more of a pariah internationally. Russia has already been expelled from the G8. The U.S. should rethink future Russian participation in the G20, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Community of Democracies. Washington should work with allies in Europe to pressure FIFA, soccer's world governing body, to withdraw the World Cup from Russia, where it is due to be held in 2018.

**The “Reset” Is Dead.** Recent events have confirmed that the “Russian reset” is dead. Crimea is under the control of Moscow, and it does not appear that Russian troops will be leaving anytime soon. Russia has used the illegal referendum to justify its imperial annexation of part of a neighboring country.

Russia’s behavior is a direct violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a full invasion of the rest of the country should come at a high price for Russia both diplomatically and economically. Regardless of further aggression, the U.S. should change the way it deals with Moscow.

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