

Chairman Menendez Opening Remarks at Full Committee Hearing: Update on U.S.-Russia Policy

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, today delivered the below opening remarks at this afternoon’s full Committee hearing entitled “Updates on U.S.- Russia Policy,” convened as Russia continues its massive military buildup along Ukraine’s border. Testifying before the Committee was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs the Honorable Victoria Nuland.

“I want to be crystal clear to those listening to this hearing in Moscow, Kyiv, and other capitals around the world: A Russian invasion will trigger devastating economic sanctions, the likes of which we have never seen before,” **Chairman Menendez said**. “Putin doesn’t get to redraw the map of Europe. Europeans should be thinking about that. He doesn’t get to bully the people of an independent nation into submission. He may dictate the course of events inside Russia, but he does not get to dictate the course of events in Ukraine. Ukrainians won’t stand for it and neither should we.”

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“Finally, this critical moment calls for unity of purpose – unity with our partners in Kyiv, unity with our allies, especially those who value democracy and the rule of law, and unity amongst ourselves in this body,” **Chairman Menendez added**. “As we have during past instances of peril, the Senate must be united in sending a clear and strong message that unwarranted aggression will not stand. I urge our members to come together in that unity of purpose in the days to come.”

Find a copy of Chairman Menendez’s remarks as delivered below.

“Secretary Nuland, thank you for coming before the Committee today, and coming not just once, but twice this week to testify before this Committee. We appreciate the time you and Assistant Secretary Holmgren gave us last night in a classified setting.

As we meet here today, Russia is engaged in one of the most significant troop buildups that we have seen along Ukraine’s border. To anyone paying attention, this looks like more than posturing, more than attention seeking. The Kremlin’s actions clearly pose a real threat of war.

I want to be crystal clear to those listening to this hearing in Moscow, Kyiv, and other capitals around the world: A Russian invasion will trigger devastating economic sanctions, the likes of which we have never seen before.

I proposed a suite of options last month in an amendment to the NDAA. The Russian banking sector would be wiped out. Sovereign debt would be blocked. Russia would be removed from the SWIFT payment system. Sectoral sanctions would cripple the Russian economy. Putin himself as well as his inner circle would lose access to bank accounts in the west. Russia would effectively be cut off and isolated from the international economic system.

Let me be clear—these are not run-of-the-mill sanctions. What is being discussed is at the maximum end of that spectrum, or as I have called it, the mother of all sanctions. And I hope that we can come together in a bipartisan way to find a legislative path forward soon so that we can achieve that.

If Putin invades Ukraine, the implications will be devastating for the Russian economy, but also for the Russian people.

The Ukrainian military forces of 2021 are not the Ukrainian military forces of 2014.

They are well equipped thanks to the United States and our allies.

They are well trained.

They have years of combat experience.

And most importantly, they have every incentive to fight.

Russia clearly has conventional advantages. But is the Kremlin really ready to face a bloody, persistent, and drawn out insurgency?

How many body bags is Putin willing to accept?

In New Jersey, we have a large Ukrainian diaspora. I know Ukrainians well. I know their fighting spirit.

Is Russia ready for Ukrainians from every walk of life – from boys and men and grandmothers – to rise up, undermine, and destroy a Putin-installed puppet government?

Do Russian families really want to sacrifice their sons and daughters to the ego of a dictator in the Kremlin?

Is the Kremlin truly prepared for 1980's Afghanistan all over again?

In short, the Kremlin may want to reconsider.

Putin clearly wants to reconstitute the Soviet Union, amass power and expand Russia's borders. But you know what? It turns out Ukraine gets a vote.

And the Ukrainian people clearly want to be a part of the West. They do not want to be subservient to Moscow. They want a better future for their children.

Given Ukraine's resolve, Putin may want to reconsider.

There are off ramps available if he chooses to follow them.

Finally, Putin is clearly underestimating our allies. This is not a question of United States versus Russia. Our European allies and partners share our alarm, they are willing to act, and if pushed, they will stand in solidarity with Ukraine and against Kremlin aggression.

Given Europe's resolve, Putin may want to reconsider.

This is a critical time. There still may be a window to deter the Kremlin from deciding to invade. But we must be clear—and united—about what awaits Russia if it chooses that unwise path.

I look forward to hearing about the administration's diplomatic efforts, including a readout of this morning's call with Putin by President Biden. I look forward to hearing how we are supporting Ukraine's military. I look forward to hearing how we are leading a sanctions effort with allies.

Let's not mince words. This is not a time for half measures. If Putin does decide to act, if he invades Ukraine, the response will be swift, and it will be unequivocal.

Putin doesn't get to redraw the map of Europe. Europeans should be thinking about that. He doesn't get to bully the people of an independent nation into submission. He may dictate the course of events inside Russia, but he does not get to dictate the course of events in Ukraine. Ukrainians won't stand for it and neither should we.

Finally, this critical moment calls for unity of purpose – unity with our partners in Kyiv, unity with our allies, especially those who value democracy and the rule of law, and unity amongst ourselves in this body.

As we have during past instances of peril, the Senate must be united in sending a clear and strong message that unwarranted aggression will not stand. I urge our members to come together in that unity of purpose in the days to come.

With that, let me turn to the distinguished Ranking Member, Senator Risch, for his opening statement.”