

Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
“Implications of the Ukraine Crisis for U.S. Policy in the Indo-Pacific”

Opening Remarks, Chair Ami Bera

May 19, 2022

I thank our witnesses and members of the public for joining today’s hearing on this important topic.

Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine has been a stark reminder of the threats that one man’s unchecked ambitions and ego can pose for international peace and stability. Many of us had talked for months about the potential of a Russian invasion. But on the morning of February 24, when we saw Russia ruthlessly invade another sovereign country, the full risks of unchecked coercion became viscerally apparent.

Russian forces have been ruthless in their campaign, with the Ukrainian people paying the price. They have indiscriminately bombed hospitals, employed targeted killing against civilians, and blocked humanitarian aid - displaying an unrestrained effort to instill terror on Ukrainians. Thousands of innocent civilians have been killed and millions more displaced.

The international community’s response has been strong and it has been united. We have sent billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine, adopted crippling sanctions against Russian financial and oil and gas sectors, and spoken out against Putin’s aggression, all of which has had a real impact on Putin’s war machine. As the Chair of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, I am particularly proud of the way so many came together in the Indo-Pacific. From supporting the UN General Assembly resolution deploring Moscow’s actions, to joining multilateral sanctions against Russia, these actions are a public recognition that in the face of such authoritarian aggression, we can and must unite in defense of the rules-based international order.

Through these horrors, we have witnessed the strength of the Ukrainian people and their will to fight for their country. We have also seen the unity of countries around the world when one country so blatantly attacks the fundamental principles of territorial sovereignty and integrity.

The crisis in Ukraine also underscores that this type of military confrontation does not happen overnight. It builds over years of coercive behavior – military, economic, and diplomatic – that erode sovereignty, and attempt to undermine international resolve, as we’ve seen Putin do for years in Ukraine.

These tactics are unfortunately familiar to the people of the Indo-Pacific. From disinformation campaigns across the Taiwan Strait to frequent small-scale incursions in the South and East China Sea, Beijing has for years used gray zone operations to erode sovereignty, stability, and unity in Asia. As we’ve seen from Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, we must take steps now to defend international norms and proactively deter against future conflicts.

That is why this moment and the lessons we learn from it are so critical, and I hope our witnesses today can share their insights on three key themes throughout today's hearing.

First, is the need to seize on the diplomatic unity that has resulted from the Ukraine crisis and build similar coalitions to defend against authoritarian aggression in the Indo-Pacific. I commend the Biden Administration for the great diplomatic work that has restored our credibility with NATO and our European partners, who have been indispensable in our collective response. Without this concerted effort, we would not have built such a strong coalition as rapidly as we did. We must work to channel that sense of urgency and build a coalition with the aim of deterring potential conflicts in the Indo-Pacific.

Second is the pressing need to strengthen our collective economic resilience. Many countries have imposed export controls and economic sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion. These punitive measures, particularly those targeting Russia's oil and gas sector, have come at a cost to many of our closest allies and partners in Europe. Looking toward the Indo-Pacific, we can enhance our deterrence and enhance our ability to respond to aggression by strengthening supply chain redundancy and resiliency, investing in critical national security sectors at home, and helping the private sector find opportunities outside of China.

Finally, we need to understand what Beijing is learning from Russia's invasion and how it has progressed since February. Xi Jinping and other PRC decisionmakers have certainly taken note of the strength and unity of our response to Russia's actions. But Beijing also undoubtedly recognizes the key economic and military differences between itself and Moscow. Would similar levels of sanctions being imposed on Russia currently be possible to impose on the PRC, given the world's heavy reliance on the Chinese market? How does the People's Liberation Army view the Russian military's tactical failures in Ukraine? We need to think strategically about how we will respond to the lessons they are learning, too, from this conflict.

Before I close, I'd like to spotlight the brave Ukrainians fighting for their homeland. The courage they're demonstrating is remarkable, but not surprising. I was part of a bipartisan delegation to Ukraine led by Chairman Meeks in late January, and through our many conversations, it was clear Ukrainians were uninterested in living under Russian rule and would fight any attempt to overtake their country.

And they're doing a heck of a job.

Putin continues to use propaganda to hide the realities of the war in Ukraine from his people. He can try to hide behind censorship. He may even be able to temporarily hide the truth of his unprovoked, illegitimate assault on Ukraine from the Russian people. But the rest of the world knows what's happening, and the people of Russia will eventually know the truth, too.

I now yield five minutes to my friend from Ohio, our Ranking Member, Representative Steve Chabot, for any opening comments he may have.