



**Closing Session of the U.S. FSC Chairpersonship**  
**Remarks by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Laura Cooper**

Distinguished Ambassadors and representatives, I am delighted and honored to speak to this Forum today. I would like to express my gratitude to Chargé d'Affaires Courtney Austrian for leading the U.S. FSC Chairpersonship to its successful conclusion and for inviting me here today.

In my remarks today, I will focus on three themes. First, I will note some key takeaways from the U.S. Chairpersonship of the Forum for Security Cooperation, and I would welcome feedback from other participating States on their reactions to the discussions from the last ten weeks. Second, I'll focus on the root causes of the deterioration of our collective security and U.S. response measures. Lastly, I will briefly provide a perspective on what can be done to rebuild confidence and security in the OSCE region amidst what many consider to be a low-trust environment.

**Key Points from the U.S. Chairpersonship of the FSC**

When Ambassador Reeker addressed the opening session of the U.S. FSC Chairpersonship, he underlined the aim of fostering a constructive and goal-oriented dialogue. U.S. goals ranged from dispelling misunderstandings about NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, to identifying and addressing pervasive and dangerous below-threshold of armed conflict threats, to demonstrating the need for Vienna Document modernization, to advocating for more meaningful participation of women in the FSC and OSCE, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and to advancing our joint work on Small Arms and Light Weapons. We've had the dialogue. Now we need action.

I think nearly everyone here would agree that to restore trust and confidence, we also need to improve transparency. Modernizing the Vienna Document would increase military transparency, including with respect to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, for all participating States. The United States and our NATO Allies take our obligations very seriously. When adhered to, international agreements and confidence and security building measures like the Vienna Document are key contributors to our mutual security. We urge Russia to work constructively for the benefit of all participating States to increase transparency and confidence by engaging in negotiations in this Forum. 34 participating States sponsor the Joint Proposal for Vienna Document modernization and 45 called for moving forward with negotiations at last year's Tirana Ministerial Council.

We hope that the dialogue on NATO's enhanced Forward Presence dispensed with any lingering doubts about its wholly defensive nature, as well as any false notion that eFP is somehow an impediment to modernizing the Vienna Document. We offered an FSC session on eFP to address concerns Russia has expressed about NATO's modest rotational presence in Poland and Baltic countries. Let's not forget, eFP was developed as a necessary deterrence measure after Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine in 2014. In response to these aggressive actions, NATO only bolstered its forward presence with approximately 4,500 rotating military personnel. Such numbers pose no threat, and are in fact, dwarfed by Russia's increasingly large, multi-division force postured on its western borders. The FSC Security Dialogue underscored that eFP should be seen for what it is: modest yet credible deterrence. Furthermore, eFP deployments are consistent with NATO's international commitments and are conducted in strict adherence to the Vienna Document and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty).

The success of the High Level Military Doctrine Seminar (HLMDS) was a tribute to all who participated. This included extraordinary number of senior military officials from across Europe and Eurasia...more than 300 in total! I want to briefly highlight a couple themes from the Seminar that I think are worth following up on in subsequent engagements.

First, discussion of doctrine is a useful and rather uncontentious way of candidly assessing how threats, and perceptions of threats, have actually been translated into explicit guidance for our respective armed forces. Forums that base discussions on concrete guidance instead of speculation are often more productive towards improving mutual understanding.

Second, my government welcomed the open engagement on difficult security topics, to include below-threshold of armed conflict threats. Speakers at the seminar—including military officials—shared insights on the pervasive nature of those threats, and their inherent dangers, including the exceptionally high risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation. The challenge of “attribution” was brought up several times. I would agree that developing resiliency to these threats and improving attribution are absolutely crucial going forward.

Third, I think we can all agree that military contacts are invaluable, in part, because discourse between senior military officials is typically pragmatic and straightforward. The FSC provides a unique forum to connect and exchange candid viewpoints between defense officials, which is absolutely critical when regional tensions run high.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all participating Defense Ministries, and of course the OSCE staff, for supporting the HLMDS, which was especially challenging to conduct virtually this year. We look forward to a post-pandemic environment that will afford better opportunities for highly prized in-person meetings on the sidelines between our Defense Chiefs and in the intersessional dialogues at the OSCE.

Regarding last week's Security Dialogue on “Confidence Building Amid Strategic Ambiguity,” I was impressed that the FSC took on a table-top exercise to visualize how the international community might address deliberately ambiguous and below threshold of armed conflict tactics. These types of activities are specifically designed to undermine international

norms and increase the likelihood of unintended consequences, including the potential for military escalation. Especially in the OSCE region, we must shine a light on such tactics, which are meant to conceal intent and avoid national attribution.

Deliberately non-attributable security dilemmas are clearly on everyone's mind, given their outsized impact on European security. Almost every participating State, including my own, has been forced to respond to these kinds of threats in one way or another. In the OSCE, we must continue to engage on the real security threats facing our region, rather than seeking to sweep issues under the rug as somehow too sensitive to discuss.

### **The Deterioration of OSCE Regional Security and U.S. Response Measures**

Next, I would like to discuss the root causes behind the deterioration of our collective security, as well as our necessary response measures.

So how did we get here? Two broad factors come to mind: one is actual military aggression – an attack upon a sovereign neighbor – and the other is failure by States to uphold international law and abide by commitments.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 was a watershed event in the deterioration of our shared security environment, which in reality, began years earlier—notably during the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia. In both cases, we witnessed the violation of sovereignty, including the stationing of forces on a foreign sovereign's territory without consent, as well as Russia other violations of international law and key commitments, notably the CFE Treaty and the Helsinki Final Act.

Unfortunately, Russia has demonstrated no real desire to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine and fulfill its Minsk commitments. On the contrary, Russia has only increased the size of forces along its borders.

Russia has also increased the size and scope of its exercises, and we fully expect ZAPAD 2021 to be one of the largest of its major recurring exercises.

It is hardly surprising that the United States and NATO would need to respond to these Russian actions. In response and in fulfillment of our commitment to the security of our European Allies and partners, U.S. force presence in Europe continues to evolve. We are now engaged in a review of our global force posture and we've halted the withdrawal of American forces from Germany. But we are transparent about our activities and open about our reasons.

Force posture, training, and exercises are, of course, essential components of credible deterrence. The United States has consistently provided detailed briefings on U.S. military capabilities and exercises through multiple international fora and directly to the Russian Ministry of Defense through the U.S. Defense Attaché Office in Moscow. In this respect, the U.S. does not receive equivalent reciprocity. Russia's selective implementation of the Vienna Document and, in some instances, unexplained differences between officially notified troop

numbers participating in military exercises and information released to the public, undercut regional confidence. Given their history as precursors to military incursions, the United States and many participating States also remain wary of Russia's snap exercises. The concerns such activities raise are precisely those which prior notification is intended to defuse. This is one reason why the Vienna Document is important and why it should be updated.

This month, preliminary activities to support Exercise DEFENDER 2021, which officially begins on May 1st, began across Europe. DEFENDER and its linked exercises will continue through June 14th. This exercise was officially notified last week, and our Joint Staff colleagues will provide a detailed briefing later next month. The United States has long sought to be as transparent as possible; to provide reassurance to our Allies, while providing assurance and predictability to all other States.

Of course, exercise notifications are just one component of many confidence and security building measures (CSBMs). CSBMs require political and military willingness to be transparent, for the sake of everyone's collective security. The United States continues to fully support CSBMs that are effective and verifiable. But such measures absolutely must be reciprocated to be effective in truly building confidence and security in the region.

### **Rebuilding Trust, Predictability, and Security**

So where do we go from here? Harkening back to Ambassador Reeker's opening remarks, I believe that rebuilding military transparency and confidence would be a necessary first step. And we must all have the courage to hold each other accountable for our obligations and commitments.

Voluntary, advance notifications of military exercises are a helpful first step. I am encouraged by Russia's recent voluntary advance notification of three exercises occurring in the March-April timeframe. Although voluntary measures are no substitute for full implementation of one's commitments, I truly hope that these kinds of notifications will become the norm and not the exception. But the key step we need to take, is to work together to rebuild transparency and confidence by modernizing the Vienna Document. We call on others to join us so that a real negotiation can begin following this year's Ministerial to lower thresholds, increase inspection opportunities, and capture snap exercises.

I also believe that not all challenges need to be politicized. We can work collaboratively to address Small Arms and Light Weapons, UN Security Council Resolution 1540, and the Vienna Document. We must find sufficient common ground to update this long-standing set of CSBMs for the benefit of all participating States.

In closing, I believe that the Forum for Security Cooperation has an extraordinary unique role to play. Since 2014, trust, transparency, and predictability have been waning commodities in the OSCE area. The FSC's focus on transparency and risk reduction is the beginning to rebuild confidence. As an implementation body, the FSC has the right expertise and tools

to put in place measures to combat misperceptions amidst deep deficits in trust and heightened tensions.