



## Open Letter to President Donald Trump

### Time for American Leadership to Raise the Costs on Russian Aggression

December 12, 2018  
The Honorable Donald Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House

Dear Mr. President,

Russia's aggression against Ukrainian vessels exercising their right to freely navigate international waters near the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov represents a grave threat to international peace, security, and the free flow of global commerce. Russia's actions demand a robust and clear response from the United States. We ask you to strongly respond to this challenge and protect U.S. interests with action: by demonstrating to Russia that it will pay a great cost for continuing to challenge the rules-based international order and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Russia's leaders appear confident that they can bear the burden of existing sanctions imposed upon them. In response to Moscow's latest escalation, it is imperative that we raise the costs on current—and future—Russian aggression against its neighbors. Failure to do so puts our national interests, and the interests of our allies and partner countries, in great danger.

This is the right moment for American leadership. For months, Russia has steadily intensified its campaign of harassment against Ukrainian vessels. Its latest seizure of three Ukrainian naval ships and their crews by force is not an isolated incident. It further endangers the security of Europe, and it is a test of America's resolve. In 2014, Russian leaders ruptured the tranquility of Europe by forcefully and illegally annexing the Crimean Peninsula—the sovereign territory of Ukraine. Your Administration stood firm in refusing to recognize the Kremlin's illegal claims of sovereignty over territory that it seized through military action—and against international law. **Russia is now attempting to widen its annexation by asserting control over the maritime spaces around Crimea.**

If successful, Russia's illegal expansion of the Crimean annexation would weaken our partner Ukraine by cutting off its vital ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk from the rest of the world. These ports import coal. They export food and steel. The isolation of these cities would disrupt international trade, damage the global economy, and upend the policies of peace which your Administration has worked to uphold. We may prevent this by raising the costs on Russia at this important moment.

For too long, the West has allowed Russia's leaders to have it both ways: to enjoy the benefits of international rules and norms while simultaneously violating them. In the maritime spaces around Ukraine, Russia has violated one of America's oldest and most sacred principles: the free navigation of international waters. This is what makes global commerce and our prosperity possible. In order to protect American interests and those of our allies, it is necessary for you to send a message of strength and resolve to Russia's leaders. If they wish to benefit from the international economy, they must also abide by its rules.

Your Administration has already responded to Russia's violations of Ukrainian sovereignty by upholding and imposing new sanctions on Moscow, and by providing Kyiv with the military capabilities that it needs to defend itself. These steps were necessary. Unfortunately, they were not enough. Russian leaders still believe they enjoy a permissive environment in which to test us. They are not going to stop with this latest action. Russia's recent military aggression against Ukraine is great. The costs to Russia for this—and future—escalation should be equally great.

Mr. President, you currently have it in your power to swiftly raise the costs on Russia for its latest illegal actions—and by making visible preparations to impose even higher costs for future aggression. The United States must not waver: the costs must rise until Russia's leaders no longer wish to bear the burden of challenging peace in Europe. We can impact this dynamic by understanding that we face a test across the entire Black Sea region. To this end, American leadership can begin by:

**First**, aggressively implementing and enforcing existing U.S. sanctions against Russia to the fullest extent allowed by law.

**Second**, providing additional security assistance to strengthen Ukraine's maritime capabilities, specifically by providing systems such as radars, coastal defense missiles, ISR equipment, and patrol boats for defense and deterrence against future attack on Ukraine's Black and Azov Sea littoral zones.

**Third**, employing the bully pulpit of your office to ensure that all European allies hold firm in maintaining their own financial penalties on Russia for its *previous* illegal actions in Crimea and press our allies to maintain a robust NATO maritime presence in the Black Sea in order to defend freedom of navigation.

**Fourth**, immediately imposing either new or more restrictive sanctions on Russian financial instruments and banks, including Vnesheconombank (VEB), Promsvyazbank, Gazprombank, and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF).

**Fifth**, rallying our European allies through all available means to persuade the German government to suspend its official support for the Russian-owned Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline on account of Moscow's latest aggression.

**Sixth**, taking visible and obvious steps that prepare new and immediate U.S. sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline—and assert the willingness to implement them.

Sending the right message via action now—and visibly preparing to implement additional sanctions in the future—is a language that Vladimir Putin will understand. We can use the strength of our financial system, the integrity of our leadership, and the friendship of our allies to make Europe and the United States safer and more secure. Indeed, we stand stronger against Russian aggression when we stand together with our European partners and allies. We ask you to act.

Your consideration of these concerns is greatly appreciated.

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