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# Hagel: Europe Faces 'Bracing New Realities'

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U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel delivering remarks on NATO expansion and today's security threats.

Russia's military moves in Ukraine "shatter the myth" that the end of the Cold War meant an end to insecurity, at least in Europe, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said Friday.

Amid worries in Europe that Russia may be preparing for broader aggression, Hagel said the NATO alliance "must stand ready to revisit the basic principles underlying its relationship with Russia." He did not elaborate.

On Thursday, NATO's second-ranking official, Alexander Vershbow, an American, said Russia had compelled the alliance to begin viewing it as an adversary.

Hagel renewed a familiar U.S. call for increased defense spending by European members of NATO, saying that even a united Europe still faces great dangers.

"While we must continue to build a more peaceful and prosperous global order, there is no

postmodern refuge immune to the threat of military force," Hagel said in a speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "And we cannot take for granted — even in Europe — that peace is underwritten by the credible deterrent of military power."

Earlier Friday in Ukraine, two Ukrainian helicopters were shot down as Ukraine launched its first major offensive against the pro-Russia forces that have seized government buildings in eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin said Kiev's move against the insurgents "destroyed" hopes for peace in the region.

Hagel said NATO members needed to boost their defense investment because over the long run, Russia will test the purpose, stamina and commitment of the 28-nation U.S.-led alliance.

"In recent years, one of the biggest obstacles to alliance investment has been a sense that the end of the Cold War ushered in the 'end of history' and an end to insecurity — at least in Europe — from aggression by nation-states. Russia's actions in Ukraine shatter that myth and usher in "bracing new realities," Hagel said.

He dismissed the notion advanced by some critics that U.S. support for the expansion of NATO, starting in the late 1990s, is responsible for Russia's recent aggressive moves. Poland and other Central and Eastern European nations that once were in the Soviet sphere of influence are now NATO members.

"The historical record now speaks clearly for itself," he said. "And it makes clear that NATO has sought partnership, not conflict, with Russia." He said the U.S. and its allies made a "good-faith effort to convince Russia that our security interests were converging," even as Washington worried that Moscow might one day abandon democracy.

Looking beyond the military aspects of European security, Hagel said the U.S. and Europe should work together to "blunt Russia's coercive energy policies." He said the U.S. Energy Department has conditionally approved export permits for U.S. liquefied natural gas that add up to more than half of Europe's gas imports from Russia.

He called for the inclusion of budget officials at a future NATO defense ministers meeting focused on ways to break the pattern of steadily declining defense budgets among European member states.

NATO's defense ministers, including Hagel, are scheduled to meet in June, followed by a gathering of alliance foreign ministers, including U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. U.S. President Barack Obama is due to attend a NATO summit in Wales in September.

A key challenge for the alliance in the weeks ahead will be finding a unified position on the nature of the Russian threat and how to respond over time.

Fear of Russian aggression is most acute among newer NATO members such as Poland and other Eastern European states that once were part of the Soviet sphere of influence but chose to join the Western alliance after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Some older NATO members in Europe are less alarmed and see less urgency in trying to punish Moscow for its moves in Ukraine.

Europeans also have seen the U.S. pare down its military presence in the region over the past

two decades. More broadly, Obama has urged greater U.S. caution in the use of military force as an instrument of foreign policy, following more than a decade of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a defense of his approach, Obama last week said his critics "would go headlong into a bunch of military adventures that the American people had no interest in participating in and would not advance our core security interests."

The Obama administration has thus far declined to provide Ukraine with arms, instead opting to provide non-lethal aid such as pre-packaged meals.

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