

# Top U.S. General Says Russia Poses 'Existential Threat' to Country

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford testifies during the Senate Armed Services committee nomination hearing to be chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Capitol Hill in Washington, July 9, 2015.

WASHINGTON — Russia presents the greatest threat to U.S. national security and its behavior is "nothing short of alarming," Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford told lawmakers on Thursday as they weighed his nomination to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Dunford also added his voice to those Pentagon officials who have supported providing lethal arms to Ukraine to help it defend itself from Russia-backed separatists, a step that President Barack Obama has so far resisted.

"My assessment today, senator, is that Russia presents the greatest threat to our national security," said Dunford, the Marine Corps commandant, who is expected to swiftly win Senate confirmation to become the top U.S. military officer.

Relations between Moscow and the West have plunged to a post-Cold War low since Russia's intervention in Ukraine upended assumptions about the security of NATO's eastern flank.

"If you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I'd have to point to Russia. And if you look at their behavior, it's nothing short of alarming," he said.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said later the administration was mindful of Russia's destabilizing activity but Dunford's comment reflected "his own view and doesn't necessarily reflect the ... consensus analysis of the president's national security team."

In Dunford's view, Russia is at the top a list of security concerns that also included China, whose rapidly expanding military has alarmed Pentagon officials, North Korea and the threat from Islamic State militants.

Without weapons to counter tank and artillery fire, Ukrainian troops would not be able to fend off "Russian aggression," he said.

"From a military perspective it's reasonable that we provide that support to the Ukrainians," Dunford said.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter has also said he was inclined to provide defensive arms to Ukraine. But Carter has qualified that position, saying economic sanctions should be the primary focus for exerting pressure on Moscow.

The wide-ranging hearing covered everything from Dunford's views on the conflict in Syria to the growing U.S. military focus on the Asia-Pacific and how he got his nickname, "Fighting Joe."

Asked whether Obama's strategy of pursuing a multi-sectarian Iraq would be successful, Dunford acknowledged the country is beset by a deep sectarian divide that is fueling the Islamic State movement.

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