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On the first anniversary of Russia's renewed bloody invasion of Ukraine, the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) takes stock of where we are today one year later.

The Ukrainian people bravely fight on, defending their homeland against Russia's imperialist land seizures, genocide, and kidnapping of their children. This blatant breach of international law, shockingly callous disregard of human rights, and norms of civilized behavior cannot be unaddressed. It should be remembered that Russia actually invaded Ukraine nine years ago in February 2014, and still illegally occupies Crimea and large parts of eastern Ukraine. Moscow's continuing destabilizing belligerency endangers the region, Europe, and the global democratic order.

The United States and its allies must remain diligent to act in a timelier manner to address the challenge, aid Ukraine, and ensure that Russia is defeated and withdraws from all Ukrainian territory. Countries of the CEE region, which have also been profoundly impacted by the War, have been boldly facing Russian aggression, setting an example we hope the United States continues to emulate. President Biden's visit to Kyiv and Warsaw, and meeting with leaders from the Bucharest Nine countries, presented an important stage for getting America's message across for the benefit of democracy, decency, and the defense of Ukraine. The United States must continue to boldly lead and keep actions in step with these important words of support including providing the proper military aid necessary to ensure a Ukrainian victory.

The United States, its allies and partners must continue to enact crippling sanctions against Russia's ruling elite and economic infrastructure, to ensure that a heavy price is paid within the Kremlin. The Wagner Group must be designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), and Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism (SST). Russia is a terrorist state, by every definition, thus we must act accordingly! The CEEC strongly supports the Biden Administration's statement that Russia has committed crimes against humanity. Russia, and all responsible individuals including Mr. Putin, must be held accountable for war crimes against Ukraine.

The CEEC applauds the Biden Administration, and also the bipartisan consensus in Congress and state lawmakers for keeping up the pressure through vital legislative responses, for statements of support, direct military aid, security assistance, and visiting Ukraine and the CEE region. Additionally, as the next NATO Summit in Lithuania in July nears, there must be a push to consider Ukraine's NATO membership. If not now, then when? Ukraine is ready, willing, and capable – and deserving to be a NATO member.

The CEE communities in the United States reject Russia's blatantly false historical narratives, lies, and deceit used to justify the invasion and to denigrate the Ukrainian nation. These tactics recall the days of Hitler and Stalin.

For years, the world has watched Putin's kleptocratic mafia organization, which masquerades as the Russian government, terrorize Russia's neighbors, and wreak increasing havoc around the world, whether by military infiltration of Belarus, creeping occupation in Georgia, bombings in Syria, energy blackmail, information warfare or cyberattacks.

We will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes to support its enduring independence and territorial integrity. Together, we will resist Russian bloody imperialist aggression and fight to remain free.

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