

**PUTIN'S INVASION OF UKRAINE AND THE  
PROPAGANDA THAT THREATENS EUROPE**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE AND REGIONAL  
SECURITY COOPERATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

NOVEMBER 3, 2015

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



Available via the World Wide Web: <https://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

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## **PUTIN'S INVASION OF UKRAINE AND THE PROPAGANDA THAT THREATENS EUROPE**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2015**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE AND REGIONAL  
SECURITY COOPERATION,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:47 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Ron Johnson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Johnson, Gardner, Shaheen, and Murphy.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RON JOHNSON, U.S. SENATOR FROM WISCONSIN**

Senator JOHNSON. This hearing will come to order.

I will not talk about our prehearing banter.

First of all, I want to welcome all of our witnesses here. I want to thank you for your thoughtful testimony and your taking the time to appear before this committee.

The hearing title is "Putin's Invasion of Ukraine and the Propaganda that Threatens Europe." I took my first trip into eastern Europe a couple of months after I was sworn in, in 2011, and we visited Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States. I have been back there a number of times since then. The conditions literally have not changed, from the standpoint of the pressure that Russia is applying to those fledgling democracies, people that are trying to shed themselves of the legacy of corruption, people who are trying to improve their lives through democratic process and freedom. And, of course, Vladimir Putin, that apparently threatens him. And so, it is been instructive as we have taken those trips, particularly with colleagues, how effective Vladimir Putin's disinformation and propaganda really has been.

My sense is, I have not been—I am, you know, new to the Senate in 2011. I traveled the world in my business. So, I have not been involved in things like Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, and understanding exactly how those broadcasting outlets were really functioning, or not functioning. But, my sense is, they obviously played a key role during the cold war; but, once the Berlin Wall fell, it seems like we declared victory and stopped our efforts. Based on testimony, it sounds like we were starting to ramp those things up again, but, from my standpoint, we cannot ramp them up fast enough. We have got to push back on what is, like I said,

very effective, on—the standpoint of Vladimir Putin. We have the truth on our side, and we need to convey that truth.

So, again, I certainly want to thank the witnesses for your thoughtful testimony.

And, with that, I will turn it over to Senator Shaheen for opening comments.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a statement that I will enter for the record, but let me just point out that I have been to Europe several times over the last 4 or 5 months, and—both eastern Europe, Ukraine, and the Baltics. And one of the things that I heard everywhere I went was the impact of Russian propaganda in those countries. And I think it is important for us not to lose sight of the ways that the Kremlin has been able to use its state-owned media to harass journalists, for disinformation, and to create space for Putin’s recklessness abroad.

I think it is important for us to look at ways that we can leverage opportunities offered by new media technologies, by the insight and assistance of our European allies to create opportunities for Russians, for Ukrainians, and for all of those people who have been within eastern Europe to access accurate information and make their own informed decisions.

I had the opportunity, earlier this year, to present an Atlantic Council Freedom Award posthumously to Boris Nemtsov. As we all know, he had been tireless in promoting freedom and openness in Russia. And I remember—I presented the award to his daughter, and I think she very aptly summarized the threat posed by Russian propaganda. She said, “Russian propaganda kills. It not only kills reason and common sense, it literally kills.” And that, I think, was a very important statement for us to remember today at this hearing and as we look, going forward, at how to combat that propaganda.

So, again, I look forward to the discussion today, and very much appreciate all of those people who will be testifying.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Senator Shaheen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEANNE SHAHEEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE

Thank you to our witnesses for agreeing to testify today, and to you, Senator Johnson, for working with me to call this important hearing.

I recently returned from a trip to Europe that included a stop in Kiev. There, officials described to me how important Russian information warfare is to President Putin’s strategy in Ukraine. Their comments echoed concerns I’ve heard from others in Central and Eastern Europe. Clearly, Russian propaganda has become a strategic export, designed to promote the agenda of Vladimir Putin abroad, undermining democracy and free markets and to maintain Russian influence in what it considers to be its sphere of influence. Our partners in Europe, in particular those with Russian-speaking populations, are rightfully concerned that Ukraine was just one victim of Russia’s hybrid warfare, and are looking to the United States to assist them in countering disinformation emanating from the Kremlin.

Even as we focus here on the outward effects of Russian propaganda, we should not lose sight of the ways the Kremlin uses its control of state-owned media, harassment of journalists and disinformation to deceive the Russian population and create political space for Putin’s recklessness abroad.

The U.S. Government is not new to promoting truth and transparency overseas, but I worry that more than 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we have gotten rusty. These times require a renewed effort that takes full advantage of the resources at our disposal. We must leverage the opportunities offered by new media technologies and the insight and assistance of our European allies to create opportunities for Russians, Ukrainians, and all people to access accurate information and then to make their own informed decisions.

Earlier this year, I had the honor of presenting an Atlantic Council Freedom Award posthumously to Boris Nemtsov for his tireless efforts to promote freedom and openness in Russia. Nemtsov had vocally opposed Russian involvement in Ukraine, and was, at the time of his murder, working on a report to highlight the human toll on Russian soldiers. His award was accepted by his daughter Zhanna, who aptly summarized the threat posed by Russian propaganda. She said: "Russian propaganda kills . . . it not only kills reason and common sense, it literally kills."

I'm looking forward to today's discussion, and to hearing from both the administration and distinguished experts from academia and the media on how the U.S. can best help our allies confront Russian propaganda.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Our first witness is Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. Benjamin Ziff. As I said, he is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. In this capacity, he is responsible for relations with the Baltic and Nordic countries and manages the European Public Diplomacy Portfolio. He joined the Foreign Service in 1988 and has worked in public diplomacy positions in Australia, Israel, Panama, and Peru.

Secretary Ziff.

**STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN G. ZIFF, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. ZIFF. Well, thank you, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of this committee, for the opportunity to join you today, and for this—your personal investment so many of you have made in our shared vision of Europe whole, free, and at peace. Your bipartisan support, your visits to Ukraine, the assistance you and your fellow Senators have provided are truly making a difference in the region.

We have all heard the popular Kremlin refrains asserting that there are no Russian soldiers in Ukraine, that Ukraine is on the verge of collapse, or that Americans, and not corrupt leaders, are the cause of domestic discontent overseas. The Kremlin sponsors this misinformation with a sophisticated \$1.4-billion-a-year propaganda apparatus, at home and abroad, which claims to reach 600 million people across 130 countries in 30 languages. In the face of the Kremlin's attack on the truth, the free flow of reliable, credible information is our best defense.

In my remarks today, I will describe how we use our public diplomacy tools and foreign assistance to amplify fact-based messages, support credible independent voices, and improve access to diverse sources of information.

In the fiscal year 2015, the State Department and USAID allocated \$66 million in U.S. foreign assistance funding to sustain civil society and independent media in Eurasia and southeast Europe, of which more than 60 million supports independent media. In addition, we have also dedicated \$4 million from the public diplomacy budget to bolster our staff and our programming. These funds help partners who are susceptible to Russian aggression build demo-

cratic principles, independent media, and a civil society intolerant of corruption.

In fiscal year 2016, President Obama is requesting a 26-percent increase to the State Department and USAID for an assistance budget in this sector, proposing \$83 million to surge our support for civil society and independent media in countries most vulnerable to Russian pressure. This increase is needed in countries that continue to be under threat, not just in Russian-speaking areas, but also in the western Balkans, as well. Our public diplomacy and foreign assistance resources create programming focused on delivering our messages and supporting local democratic voices throughout the region. Our efforts in Russia, in the Russophone world, and in Western Europe, help audiences identify objective reporting over the Kremlin's noise, and 90 percent of all Russian-language news, entertainment, and sports in the world are produced in Moscow and controlled by the Kremlin.

We at the State Department employ a combination of short-term, rapid-response messaging with medium- and long-term programs to boost resilience and build capacity to recognize and reject Kremlin propaganda. A few days after the shoot-down of the MH17 airliner in July of last year, Embassy Moscow plugged into the State Department's network of 130 Russian-language specialists and released hourly messages and content from journalists on the ground that helped negate Russian conspiracy theories.

Rapid response is certainly crucial. However, the best defense against Kremlin propaganda gaining traction is a proactive approach that strengthens allies as they fight propaganda on the front lines. The United States is not alone in dealing with Russian disinformation, as you well know. We are joining forces with our partners in Europe. Through a group of message experts from like-minded countries, a 20-plus network of government and international—multilateral organizations known as the Friends of Ukraine, we regularly consult on messaging campaigns, media trends, and Kremlin propaganda tactics. Longer term, local independent voices and a strong independent media are the real answer to free and democratic societies throughout the region.

The exchange and training programs we sponsor link and educate regional and transatlantic journalists and other opinion leaders. We recognize that, despite Moscow's significant investment in disinformation, its efforts have limited effectiveness abroad. A Pew Research poll published in August indicates that a median of only 30 percent of those polled outside Russia see Russia favorably. President Putin, himself, is viewed even less favorably, with only 24 percent of respondents having confidence that President Putin will do the right thing in world affairs.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Shaheen, members of this committee, America's investment in public diplomacy is about more than countering a single country. It is about protecting the rules-based system across Europe and around the world. It is about saying no to borders changed by force, to big countries intimidating their neighbors and demanding a sphere of influence.

I thank the subcommittee for its bipartisan support and commitment to public diplomacy and to a Europe whole, free, and at peace. And I welcome your questions.



Thank you very much.  
 [The prepared statement of Mr. Ziff follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY BENJAMIN ZIFF

Thank you Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of this committee for the opportunity to join you and for the personal investment so many of you have made in our shared vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Your bipartisan support, your visits to Ukraine, the assistance you and your fellow Senators have provided are truly making a difference in the region.

We have all heard popular Kremlin refrains asserting there are no Russian soldiers in Ukraine; that Ukraine is on the verge of collapse; or Americans, and not corrupt leaders, are the cause of domestic discontent overseas.

While many of these claims can easily be refuted, their around-the-clock dissemination attempts to sow doubt, confusion, and suspicion and question even the most basic truths.

The Kremlin sponsors these efforts with a sophisticated \$1.4-billion-a-year propaganda apparatus at home and abroad, which claims to reach 600 million people across 130 countries in 30 languages. The Russian Government also funds think tanks and outside organizations in its neighboring states to help achieve its goals of promoting the Kremlin's false narratives; portraying the West as a threat; and undermining trust in independent media as well as Western institutions and values.

In the face of the Kremlin's attack on the truth, the free flow of reliable, credible information is the best defense. This is why the State Department has focused its efforts on supporting independent media; improving access to high quality, objective information; exposing false narratives; and building the capacity of civil society. After all, truth should be discovered, not dictated.

Strong independent journalism is a key element in any democracy and will eventually prevail over disinformation and propaganda.

In my remarks today, I will expand upon these areas and describe how we use our public diplomacy tools and foreign assistance to amplify fact-based messages and support credible, independent voices and to improve access to credible information. Finally, I will focus on our diplomatic and security engagements that reinforce the positive story our allies and partners in Europe tell about our transatlantic relationship and commitments.

In FY 2015, the State Department and USAID allocated \$66 million in U.S. foreign assistance funding to sustain civil society and independent media in the Eurasia and Southeast Europe region, of which more than \$16 million supports independent media. In addition to our foreign assistance funds, we have also dedicated \$4 million from the public diplomacy budget to bolster our staff and programming. These funds help our partners who are susceptible to Russian aggression build democratic principles, independent media, and a civil society intolerant of corruption.

In FY 2016, President Obama is requesting a 26-percent increase to the State Department and USAID foreign assistance budget in this sector, proposing \$83 million to surge our support for civil society and independent media in countries most vulnerable to Russian pressure.

This increase is needed in countries that continue to be under threat of democratic backsliding, especially where the Kremlin's influence is strong and growing—not just in Russian-speaking areas, but also in the western Balkans. Increasingly, reports indicate that Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, are targets of Russian pressure and disinformation. This is not new, but susceptibility is increasing.

We are putting our current public diplomacy and foreign assistance resources to good use, mainly toward programming focused on delivering our messages and supporting local, democratic voices throughout the region.

THE AUDIENCE

In Western and Central Europe, we work with our European partners to underscore allied unity and bolster resolve to work together on global challenges. We also offer Western journalists opportunities to view the realities on the ground in countries, like Ukraine, where the Kremlin tries to distort the facts.

For Russian-speaking audiences, especially in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, we offer information and programming alternatives while bolstering the capacity of civil society and independent journalists to identify and tackle disinformation. This population is particularly vulnerable to disinformation since Russian is the 10th most-spoken language in the world—the 5th most when counted as a second language—

and since 90 percent of all Russian language news, entertainment, and sports in the world are produced in Moscow and controlled by the Kremlin.

Inside Russia, we work with media—traditional and social—to reach the public and maintain a dialogue with the Russian people through programs that accurately describe U.S. policy, society, and values. Embassy Moscow is at the forefront of this engagement and has increased its nongovernmental exchanges budget by \$2 million, and its English language programming by \$400,000.

Yet, our work to connect with ordinary Russian citizens continues to be hampered by the Kremlin. All 29 American Corners in Russia were closed down over the last 2 years, and the Library of Foreign Literature ended our long-standing (22-year) partnership last month, closing the American Center there.

The outcry from ordinary Russians angry about losing this cultural tie with America was immediate and loud. Thanks to them and the efforts of our Embassy team, we relaunched a new American Center on Embassy grounds, and had a huge turnout at its first public event. Our hope is that we can continue to provide an undistorted view of American literature, culture, entertainment, and values to those who seek it in Moscow.

#### NEAR TERM: MESSAGING

On a daily basis, our efforts help audiences identify objective reporting over the Kremlin's noise.

To do this, we employ a combination of short-term messaging strategies with medium- and long-term programs to boost resilience and build capacity to recognize and reject Russian propaganda. The State Department has implemented a rapid response system to support our overseas posts in times of heightened Kremlin propaganda. Armed with the facts, our embassies are able to adapt the content and materials we supply to their own audiences and amplify the truth rapidly.

For example, a few days after the shoot down of the MH17 airliner in July of last year, Embassy Moscow plugged into the State Department's network of 130+ Russian language officers and released hourly messages and content from journalists on the ground to help negate the rampant obfuscation and conspiracy theories being blared by the Russian news media.

Similarly, in September 2015, after photoshopped images alleging U.S. Ambassador Tefft's presence at a Russian opposition rally were released, Embassy Moscow responded by producing a photo collage of the same picture of the ambassador altered to show him at various events—including landing on the moon. The Embassy's success in discrediting the risible attempt at propaganda went viral, reaching over 1 million Russians, and forcing the Russian news outlet that shopped the image to withdraw its own story.

This kind of "rapid response" counter messaging, while necessarily reactive, is crucial to defend against the manipulation of truth. But the best defense against Russian propaganda gaining traction is proactive. It is designed to instill strength and independence in local communities and allies fighting propaganda on the front lines and it encourages higher standards of journalism.

For Ukraine, we are constantly reviewing our policies and needs through a department-wide working group organized by Deputy Secretary Blinken. Under Secretary Stengel and I cochair this group, which meets weekly to maintain a focus on Ukraine's successes in the face of overt Kremlin aggression and messaging distortion. Through this consultative process, we update our Embassies daily on current policy priorities, messages, and programs, and all State elements work to communicate our policy and support for Ukraine as one voice.

To reach the broader Russian-speaking population, the Department spokesperson's office last week launched a Russian-language version of its Twitter feed. Now, our official statements reach audiences in the region directly, without having to be interpreted by third parties. Along these lines, we are also engaging directly with independent media within Russia. State has placed interviews of more than a dozen Assistant Secretaries, Special Envoys, and other senior officials in such outlets this fiscal year.

#### PARTNERING WITH OTHERS ON MESSAGING

The U.S. is not alone in dealing with Russian disinformation. To correct untruths not only in Ukraine and Russia, but across Russian-speaking communities, we are joining forces with our partners in the EU to identify, analyze, and debunk Russian disinformation where and when we find it; highlight Ukraine's progress in building its democracy, fighting corruption, and advancing reform; bolster the Russian-speaking areas of Europe seeking to resist disinformation; and fortify transatlantic unity through institutions like NATO and the EU.

Through a group of messaging experts from like-minded countries—known as the “Friends of Ukraine”—we regularly consult on messaging campaigns, media trends, and Kremlin propaganda tactics. Friends of Ukraine (FoU) is a growing 20+ member network of governments and multilateral organizations committed to responding to disinformation in real time through multiple voices. Efforts by the FoU have helped to keep Ukraine on the front burner, even when the Kremlin’s media machine has tried to distract its audiences with other topics.

NATO also is active in this area through its Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in Riga, Latvia. The newly opened center designs programs to advance StratCom doctrine development and standardization, conducts research and experimentation to find practical solutions to existing challenges, identifies lessons from StratCom operations, as well as enhances training and education efforts and interoperability throughout the alliance.

And, our partners at The European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU’s diplomatic corps, have started a new Strategic Communications unit, which directs public diplomacy messaging and programs throughout the Eastern Partnership countries. I visited Brussels recently and met with the leadership of this new unit, and was impressed by their team and the content and campaigns they are developing. We are committed to helping one another share content and distribute information through EU and U.S. channels, and this spring I hope to bring the State Department and EU teams together to enhance this much-needed collaboration.

#### LONG TERM: BUILDING CAPACITY

While rapid response counter-messaging is a critical element of our strategy, local independent voices and a strong independent media are the real answer to free and democratic societies throughout the region. State Department and USAID programs support free media in the region to provide open, objective, accessible information to all. Exchange and assistance programs provide critical tools and increase access to a variety of local news sources, high-quality fact-based content, and honest investigative journalism.

We are proud of the exchange programs and “tech camps” we sponsor to link and train regional and transatlantic journalists and other opinion leaders. By November, we will have trained 120 “Tech Camp” alumni—60 in Prague and Riga and 60 more in Kiev—who will go on to support strong independent journalism by sharing best practices and resources.

We are also working with the EU to cooperate on supporting the creation of new regional programs to support Russian-language media, based on the European Endowment for Democracy’s (EED) Feasibility Study on Russian Language Media Initiatives.

Altogether, in FY15, the State Department and USAID allocated approximately \$16 million to support independent media. Already, we have success stories that we are proud of including:

- Launching a year-long investigative journalism training and exchange program for up to 75 journalists from the Baltics.
- The Regional Investigative Journalism Network, supported by USAID and DRL, which connects local investigative journalists throughout the region and helps them investigate and report on cases of corruption and misuse of government authority.
- And, the 5-year Ukraine Media (U-Media) Project, which promotes the development of a free, vibrant, and professional media sector in Ukraine and also serves as a watchdog in the public interest. The U-Media program has adapted to the changing context in Ukraine by promoting balanced political coverage across Ukraine through local content production, exchange visits, public discussions, and webcasts with special attention to the South and East. Local media partners also monitor and publicize intimidation and attacks on civic activists and journalists and government interference in independent media coverage of Ukrainian politics.

While training and exchanges are critical to our efforts, information is also impeded by the lack of communications infrastructure in many areas tied to Kremlin-sponsored programming.

To help build capacity, the Broadcasting Board of Governors’ (BBG) new Russian-language news program, Current Time, is on air in nine countries via 25 major market commercial, satellite, and public media outlets.

Nearly 2 million viewers in Russia are watching Current Time online weekly, and BBG’s digital media engagement has grown by an average of 2.5 million Russian-speakers per week.

A popular BBG program, “Footage v. Footage,” is devoted to pointing out inconsistencies in Russian reporting and debunking myths.

BBG has also helped to bring about a contract with PBS Distribution for nearly 400 hours of Russian-language public media content to Ukraine, Lithuania and Estonia.

These stations will air these programs for Russian language speaking audiences starting in November of this year.

In late August, BBG also donated its recently developed “Fly Away FM System,” which is suitable for use as low power FM transmitters.

While BBG’s contributions, our exchanges, and public diplomacy programming are vital to our strategy against Kremlin disinformation, we must continue to ensure our commitments and support to our allies so that we continue to have a positive story to tell.

#### RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

Ultimately, countering disinformation is a security issue, especially when the goal of Russian disinformation and propaganda is to destabilize, distract, and divide our allies.

Addressing this problem is an important part of our diplomatic effort to promote a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

The Baltic States are primary targets of Russian disinformation, especially since all three—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—are valued NATO allies. Just as we are cooperating with them to counter Russian disinformation, we work together in the realm of collective defense.

The combination of our diplomatic efforts ensures that the U.S. not only has a positive story to tell, but that others will be able to hear it over the Kremlin’s noise.

Despite Moscow’s significant investment in disinformation, its efforts have limited effectiveness abroad. A Pew research poll published in August indicates that a median of only 30 percent of those polled outside of Russia see Russia favorably. Putin himself is viewed even less favorably, with only 24 percent of respondents having confidence that Putin will do the right thing in world affairs.

Here in the United States, we have not seen evidence that the Kremlin’s misinformation has gained any traction: A recent Pew poll indicated 75 percent of Americans have no confidence in Putin to do the right thing in world affairs.

This reveals that even while Europe, and in particular Ukraine, works through tough challenges and fights disinformation, our work together continues to speak more loudly than Russia’s meddling.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Shaheen, members of this committee, America’s investment in public diplomacy is about more than fighting a single country.

It is about protecting the rules-based system across Europe and around the world. It is about saying no to borders changed by force, to big countries intimidating their neighbors or demanding a sphere of influence.

I thank this subcommittee for its bipartisan support and commitment to public diplomacy and to a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

I look forward to your questions.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Secretary Ziff.

Can you talk to me about, you know, what our efforts—you know, how they are divided between the new media, social media, and, you know, traditional broadcast outlets, the effectiveness of radio versus TV versus those, and how are we allocating those resources?

Mr. ZIFF. Certainly, Senator.

We are working across all media spectra in the State Department. We focus—we have 63 embassies and consulates in the—in Europe and Eurasia with teams of people who are devoted to messaging and to countering propaganda and to putting America’s messages out there. These people work with traditional media. They all have Web sites and Twitter feeds, as well, and they all sort of deal with opinion leaders and deal with the media on the ground there.

From the State Department, the Broadcasting Board of Governors has increased its Russia-language programming by over 100

percent. Its streaming online TV reaches 2.5 million people a week. And our Twitter feeds from the State Department are also very popular and very engaged.

We kind of divide the efforts up between Washington, as the supplier of the meta message to our posts abroad, and each of these posts is able to adjust and use the material we provide in ways that best address their local audiences.

Senator JOHNSON. Give me some assessment, though, in terms of the effectiveness between broadcast and—I mean, your—in other words, your assessment, the State Department's, in terms of pushing it out through the Internet—

Mr. ZIFF. Sure.

Senator JOHNSON [continuing]. Again, into the eastern European countries, but then also the effectiveness, and how do we reach citizens inside Russia?

Mr. ZIFF. Sure. TV is the 800-pound gorilla in this area. Certainly in Russia, the Kremlin controls about 90 percent of the TV programming there. So, within Russia, TV is the way that the Kremlin gets its message out. Overseas, it is much less effective. We are seeing that Russian television is not doing anywhere near as well overseas as it does within Russia. Online, we are focusing a lot on online, because even the people who may not like us all have, sort of, iPhones, and so we are focusing a great deal on Twitter and on streaming media as a way to reach the audiences throughout western Europe, the border countries, as well as Russia. Russia is a harder environment to work in, but, obviously, in western Europe and the border countries, it is a much more welcoming environment for our efforts.

Senator JOHNSON. How do we push information to Russia, though? I mean, is it radio? Are we completely blocked by TV? Are we completely blocked on the Internet?

Mr. ZIFF. No, sir. As I mentioned, the Broadcasting Board of Governors does reach Russia through its streaming TV programs. Our Embassy in Moscow also reaches people through its Twitter feed and has electronic engagement. And I believe that the radio programming coming out of the border countries also reaches Europe, as well—Russia, as well.

Senator JOHNSON. Can you talk about—within those border countries, you know, to what extent, or what percentage, has Russia invested—and those individuals aligned with Russia invested in those broadcast outlets and totally control them?

Mr. ZIFF. I do not have those figures for you right now, Senator. I will be happy to try and get them for you.

Mr. ZIFF. I know that audiences in some of the border countries, the Russian-speaking audiences, do tune in to Russian TV; though, for example, Estonia just recently began its own Estonian national Russian-language television station, which is apparently doing very well. And I know other countries are looking very closely at how they address the needs of Russian-speaking audiences within their own borders.

Senator JOHNSON. In your testimony, you talked about rapid response, and you used the downing of the airliner as one example. Can you cite other examples—

Mr. ZIFF. Sure.

Senator JOHNSON [continuing]. And just also talk about—How do we counter, specifically, other than just rapid response—I mean, is our broadcasting—is it organized enough where we are specifically addressing and countering specific pieces of propaganda? Now just an instance like that, but, I mean, the specific pieces of propaganda that Russia is pushing.

Mr. ZIFF. I would say that it depends on the situation, Senator, because, while, as I said, we do emphasize rapid response, we think that the whack-a-mole approach to every lie and every exaggeration is counterproductive, because it is reactive and you are always behind the curve. The way to really fight this and look at this is a medium- and long-term challenge where we strengthen the local abilities, local journalists, local civil society, that they can identify this problem in Russian propaganda from the outset.

Another example of rapid response, you asked for, a Russian outlet tweeted a photoshopped photograph of our Ambassador in Russia at a—to—his presence, purportedly, at a opposition rally, when, in fact, he was nowhere near there, and, within 2 hours, our Embassy in Moscow had photoshopped our Ambassador on the Moon, at an ice hockey rink, and doing other ridiculous things, which highlighted that this was pure propaganda, and did not work. This tweet was retweeted extensively within Russia. So, that is another example of—a tactical example of how we would fight back against a particular message.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

How are we coordinating with our European allies to combat Russian propaganda? I understand that there is a center in Brussels that the EU is operating out of. There is a NATO center in Riga. There is a variety of nongovernmental organizations and media outlets, like Deutsche Welle who are also working on this issue. So, can you talk about how coordination occurs between all of these entities? Or does it?

Mr. ZIFF. I sure can, Senator. Thank you very much.

I am just back, 10 days ago, from Brussels, where I met with our colleagues in the European External Action Service. They have got a large team in Brussels which is doing pretty much what we are doing here. We coordinate weekly with them. We have secure video teleconferences with them. We talk to them frequently. We share products, as well, with them. The—our embassies are also, sort of, our lead coordinators, across the board, with their local interlocutors. Obviously, the border countries are the most aware of this threat and are most organized to combat it. Fact, the—we just had a—the European Endowment for Democracy just had a conference in Warsaw in September to discuss, sort of, ways that the continent itself can work to strengthen civil society and journalistic abilities to be able to fight this problem.

Senator SHAHEEN. And to what extent are we working with dissidents inside Russia who are also trying to get correct information out to Russians, people like Boris Nemtsov?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, I would like to discuss in a—sort of offline, if I could.

Senator SHAHEEN. Okay.

Mr. ZIFF. That would be, I think, a more useful conversation.

Senator SHAHEEN. So, can you talk a little bit about the impact that we are seeing of the Russian propaganda on European politics? I have been watching some of the recent elections, and seen the gains that nationalist parties are having. To what extent do we think those are being fed by Russian propaganda?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, I believe that you can look at Europe right now, and the challenges that they are facing are—with migration and other things—are a ripe field to be taking advantage of. I do not know of any specific, sort of, elements that I would want to talk about here, with Russia funding any particular elements. But, obviously, even without that, given the conditions on the ground, the migrant crisis, and others, it is a fertile environment for all kinds of propaganda and all kinds of misinformation.

Senator SHAHEEN. We have been having a series of hearings in the Armed Services Committee talking about military reform and the potential for military reform. And one of the things that has come up in—for example, that former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates said, a couple of weeks ago, when he was before the committee—he talked about the fact that we had abolished the U.S. Information Agency, back in the late 1990s, and we really had not replaced that with other—with a direct program, I guess is the best way to put it. So, to what extent are we working with—is State working with the Department of Defense on some of these issues? And do you see that as a priority, as we think about how to respond to Russia and to some of the other threats that are coming, certainly from ISIS, as the result of their very effective efforts on the Internet?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, you are talking about a topic very near and dear to my heart, Senator. My father was a USIA officer, and I was a USIA officer before joining the Department of State. And I can attest to its qualities and what it did. And I can also attest that the incorporation of those qualities into the State Department has, in some ways, made us more flexible, more adaptable, and brought us closer to policy. So, I—while I certainly emotionally lament the departure of USIA, I think the State Department has done a very good job in responding to a 21st century threat, which is broader than the one that was presented by the Soviet Union back in the day.

As far as the Department of Defense, obviously we coordinate very closely. We are in constant contact with our colleagues in—on the military side. They are—sort of, in the European Command—and they are very—they are helping us a great deal in a—in producing, sort of, some products and some initiatives that allow us to have a sort of whole-of-government approach to this problem.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator JOHNSON. Senator Gardner.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Ziff, for your testimony today.

While the cease-fire in eastern Ukraine is fragile, it does appear to be holding, at least at this point. What do you believe is—the State Department—what does State Department believe that Putin's next step is Ukraine?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, perhaps you should ask Mr. Putin that, Mr. Gardner. I think the—the cease-fire is holding, Senator, but the—their—our goal is full Minsk implementation. The Minsk Accords have to be implemented, and we are not seeing that moving forward. The hostages have not been released. The full withdrawal of weapons has not been completed. And the full—the free access by—of humanitarian assistance has not been allowed. So, in those ways, we see that the Kremlin and President Putin are not complying with the terms of the Minsk agreement.

Senator GARDNER. Is there any sense of escalation or any anticipation of escalation?

Mr. ZIFF. I think perhaps the—oh, yeah, thank you—there has been—thank you very much—there have been some—an uptick in attacks over recent days. We have 17 casualties since September 1, and 50 wounded, some mines, some boobytraps. This is still a—sort of a blip in the cease-fire; nonetheless, something we are following very closely and we are very concerned about, because, obviously, violence is the last thing we want to see reoccur in that zone.

Senator GARDNER. So, 17 casualties since September 1.

Mr. ZIFF. Yes, sir.

Senator GARDNER. Could you give, sort of, a timeframe from when the Minsk was entered into, what that means?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, I think the issue was, when the cease-fire began, there was supposed to be a cease-fire. Nonetheless—

Senator GARDNER. Seventeen.

Mr. ZIFF [continuing]. There were—killings continued.

Senator GARDNER. And if fighting renews, what is the U.S. strategy?

Mr. ZIFF. Excuse me?

Senator GARDNER. What is the U.S. strategy if fighting resumes?

Mr. ZIFF. The U.S. strategy? Let me defer that to my more military-inclined colleagues, Senator, because our assistance to Ukraine, to this point, has not included lethal aid, but we have not ruled out the possibility, if conditions change. We are watching closely and seeing what occurs on the ground. Our focus right now is on getting Minsk implemented and making sure that the Russians and the separatists fulfill their commitments.

Senator GARDNER. Surely, State has had conversations, if there was a renewal of fighting, with the government. Is that correct?

Mr. ZIFF. I do not—I am not aware of any such conversations. I would imagine that our Ambassador on the ground may have done so.

Senator GARDNER. Okay. And the sanctions against Putin, how do you—how effective do you believe they have been? Are there things that we could do to strengthen them and make them more effective in targeting critical sectors, oil and gas or others?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, I think—we have sanctioned almost 100 individuals and enterprises on the Russian side in, sort of, response to their actions in Ukraine and in Crimea. Those sanctions are ongoing. They are having an effect. We are seeing an effect, not only by those sanctions, but also the Russian countersanctions. It is affecting the Russian economy. We believe this is a way to motivate the Russian and sort of, the Kremlin and its entourage to change



their behavior. In fact, if Minsk is not implemented, we are looking to roll over those sanctions for another period, come January.

Senator GARDNER. Do you believe that the Russian actions in Syria are on a parallel track, or are they, in some ways, an attempt for a bargaining chip in Ukraine?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, Senator, luckily, my responsibilities encompass Europe and do not extend to the Middle East. And I am very grateful for that on a daily basis. And so, I recommend that that question be directed to people who are more focused on the Middle East.

Senator GARDNER. Okay, but—so, no conversations that you have had with anybody regarding a possible—possible use of Syria's activities in Ukraine, try to create a bargaining—

Mr. ZIFF. Well, no, we—

Senator GARDNER [continuing]. Position of some kind.

Mr. ZIFF. I have discussed the counterpropaganda aspects of that in our response is to the Russian narratives regarding Syria, but not specifically to the military options on the ground.

Senator GARDNER. Okay. And do you believe—did you anticipate further Russian activity to destabilize other Baltic allies? I know you spoke to that with Senator Shaheen briefly, but would just love to see your response on United States commitment to NATO if Russia moves against our NATO allies in the Baltics.

Mr. ZIFF. I think, Senator, article 5 is article 5. And our commitment to article 5, we have a rotating presence throughout the Baltics which demonstrate our resolve. We are cooperating extensively on military and, as I said, civil society and counterpropaganda efforts. I would imagine that our commitment to those countries is crystal clear.

Senator GARDNER. There was a—articles recently—and you may or may not be able to answer this question, but there were articles recently about Russian activities surrounding our transatlantic cable—communications systems. Certainly provocative action, if true. Can you highlight any activities that may be taking place around some of our communications systems?

Mr. ZIFF. Not in this forum, Senator.

Senator GARDNER. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman.

Senator JOHNSON. Secretary Ziff, I would like to give you an opportunity just to—if there is anything else you would like to convey to the committee before we release you. But, I do have one quick question.

You mentioned that the hostages have not been released. Do you have—does the State Department have a number on what those hostage levels are?

Mr. ZIFF. Well, we have several prominent hostages, Senator. We treat them all the same. We believe they are all important, and they all need to be released, whether they are prominent or not. Some of them were kidnapped, as you well know. The human cost of the Ukrainian conflict is extensive, and these are more victims. So, we believe, as part of any agreement, this is a—sort of a requirement.

Senator GARDNER. But, do we have a count? I mean, do we—we are operating with a certain level, here?

Mr. ZIFF. I do not have that number in hand. I am happy to get it to you, Senator.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay.

Do you have any further comments before we—

Mr. ZIFF. I would just like to conclude to—by reinforcing the fact that our—the State Department’s view, this—the work against the Kremlin’s propaganda is not necessarily a short-term effort. This is a medium- and long-term effort to make sure there is no fertile ground in Europe or Eurasia for the kind of efforts that they are doing. And I know that it is frustrating, on occasion perhaps, to see the lies and the distortions occur. But, the best defense we have is to make sure that we have well-trained, able journalists and publics on the ground in Europe who can discount those.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay.

Thank you, Secretary Ziff.

We will seat the next panel, then.

[Pause.]

Senator JOHNSON. Again, I want to thank the witnesses for your time and for your testimony.

We will start, moving from my left to right. First witness will be Dr. Leon Aron. Dr. Aron is a resident scholar and the director of Russian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Dr. Aron serves on the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees the operations of several international broadcasting outlets, including Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty.

And, I know in your testimony, Dr. Aron, you are testifying on your own behalf, not as governor of the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

So, Dr. Aron, please.

**STATEMENT OF LEON ARON, RESIDENT SCHOLAR AND DIRECTOR OF RUSSIAN STUDIES, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. ARON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

You have made the disclaimer for me, so more time.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, the aggressive, often sophisticated and Internet-savvy propaganda campaign is skillful, it is flexible, it is adapted to the geography of the audience. While general patterns are similar, and I will discuss them in a moment, the content may differ considerably, depending on the ethnicity, political culture, and geography of the target audience. Thus, in western and United States, the RT television networks aims not so much to sell what might be called the Russia brand, but, rather, to devalue the notion of democratic transparency and accountability, to undermine confidence and objective reporting, and to litter the news with half truths and quarter truths. “Question More” is RT’s advertising motto, and it is not coincidental, for the Russian propaganda seeks to exploit several key conventions and tendencies of Russian media and Western audiences. Let me mention a few.

First, truth is in the eye of the beholder. As a former insider observer of the Russian media put it, Russian propaganda uses the idea of a plurality of truths to feed disinformation, which, in the end, looks to trash the information space.

Two, there are two sides to every story, and the credibility of the source is secondary. And therefore, RT fits rather smoothly in the panoply of Western media.

Just to be on the safe side, though, RT, which does not broadcast in Russian, never identifies itself as a Russia-based and government-funded network.

Four, RT and the Sputnik News Network, which was launched last year, find the soil of the Western media markets already fairly lucent and fertilized as far as conspiracy theories are concerned. Did the U.S. Government orchestrate 9/11? Why not? Twenty-three percent of Germans thought so, as did 15 percent of Italian. Seven years after the fall of the Twin Towers, between one-fifth and a quarter of Britons, French, and Italians told pollsters that they have no idea who was behind the attacks. Well, then, after the CEO of France largest oil company, Total, who had opposed economic sanctions on Russia, was killed when his plane slammed into a snowplow operated by a drunken driver at the Moscow Airport, Russian commentators asserted that he was killed by the CIA. And why stop there? Did the CIA aid Ukrainians in shooting down the MH17 Malaysian airliner? That was one of the versions put out. Plausible. Did the Russian opposition kill its own leader, Boris Nemtsov to embarrass Putin? Possible.

Yet, for all the seemingly fertile soil of the Russian propaganda distortions, the impact of the Russian disinformation campaign on the democracies of western and central Europe appears paltry. Where the ratings were credibly established, RT was barely visible, apart from the presold audiences on the extreme left and right. And the main reason is the highly competitive media environment that exposes people to wide range of facts and interpretations.

Now, the situation is quite different, grimmer, when we go east to the countries collectively known as the former Soviet Union. There the effectiveness of Russian propaganda is greatly enhanced by two factors. First, the presence of ethnic Russian minorities, some of whom nurture grievances, and, second, the existence of far fewer alternative sources of credible information than in the east and—west and central Europe. It is here that what is known as the weaponization of information occurs. News and analysis as means of provoking strong negative emotions potentially leading to hatred, incitement, and ultimately justification of violence.

In Kiev, earlier this year, one of my most memorable meetings was with the dean of the School of Journalism at the Kyiv Mohila Academy, Professor Evhen Fedchenko. Together with his students, he runs a Web site called StopFake.org, which records some of the Russian propaganda masquerading as news. Here is just two examples. Russia's most widely watched Pervyi Kanal, or First Channel, television network, broadcast an interview with a terrified woman identified as a refugee from the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government. She said she witnessed Ukrainian soldiers publicly executing the wife and the son of a pro-Russian separatist. The child was crucified on a bulletin board in the center of the city while the woman was allegedly dragged behind a tank until she was dead. The story was proven to be a complete fake.

Another example. A popular Russian television channel posted on social media sites an invented conversation between a Ukrain-

ian military commander and a German doctor in which they discuss in detail the harvesting of internal organs, presumably of deceased members of the pro-Russian population caught up in the fighting. The officer is quoted as saying, “We would have a great deal of material to work with, thanks to our Western partners.”

Fortunately, there is an antidote to this poison. It is impossible, of course, to sanitize all of this, but the—because of the lopsidedness of funding and manpower, but there is enough to deflate the effort considerably.

As usual, the best medicine is a rich, diverse, and uncensored democratic media environment, but as such environment does not yet fully exist in most post-Soviet states, the U.S. international media could be of great help.

I wonder if I could have 2 more minutes. I am almost done. It is an interesting story.

Despite being barred from the domestic outlets in Russia, the on-line audience for Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and Voice of America has been growing in Russia, reaching 4.7 million this summer. Last year, a Gallup nationwide survey in Ukraine showed the size of the VOA audience—the size of—I am sorry—VOA audience across all the media platforms in Ukraine and in the Russian-language doubling since 2012 to nearly 7 million adults who use VOA every week. That is 18 percent of all adults in Ukraine. In Kiev, I was repeatedly struck by the deep appreciation across the board, across the political spectrum, both in the media elites and political elites, at the fact that the VOA and the Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe content was superior, not just to the Russian propaganda, but also to the output of the oligarch-dominated domestic Ukrainian television.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, we are facing a determined and often refined propaganda effort. From the sophisticated exploitation of Western media patterns and vocabulary to outright lies and crude fakes, the goal remains the same: to undermine the people’s trust in democratic politics and policies and in free and fair media. As this effort is vital to the maintenance of the present Russian regime, it may be with us for a long time. So, time and talent and task and risktaking innovation, and, yes, money, for U.S. international media will continue to be needed to counter this effort.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Aron follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. LEON ARON

Thank you Mr. Chairman. First, a disclaimer: the testimony I am about to give will be given in my capacity as a private expert and not as a Governor of the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Mr. Chairman, the ranking member, members of the committee, the aggressive, often sophisticated and Internet-savvy propaganda campaign, underwritten by the Russian Government to the tune of at least half a billion dollars a year, is flexible and skillfully adapted to the geography of the audience. While general patterns are similar and I will discuss them in a moment, content may differ considerably depending on the ethnicity, political culture and geography of the intended audience.

Thus, in Western Europe and the United States, the RT television network aims not so much to “sell” what might be called the “Russia brand,” but rather to devalue the notions of democratic transparency and accountability, to undermine confidence in objective reporting, and to litter the news with half-truths and quarter truths.

“Question more!” is RT’s advertising motto—and it is not coincidental. For the Russian network seeks to exploit several key conventions and tendencies of Western media:

- First, truth is in the eye of the beholder. As a keen and formerly inside observer of the Russian media effort put it, Russian propaganda uses “the idea of a plurality of truths to feed disinformation, which in the end looks to trash the information space.”<sup>1</sup>
- Second, that there are two sides to every story, and the credibility of the source is secondary.

“The medium is the message,” Marshall McLuhan famously proclaimed in the 1960s. Half a century later, the message is increasingly detached from the medium, and words from those who utter them. After all, post-modernism postulates that “there is no author, there is only the text.” My favorite modern English poet, Robert Graves, started the poem, titled “Forbidden Words,” with these four lines:

“There are some words [that] carry a curse with them:

Smooth-trodden, abstract, slippery vocables.  
They beckon like a path of stepping stones;  
But lift them up and watch what writhes or scurries!”

But when showered by these smooth-trodden and slippery vocables, how often do Western media bother to lift the stones?

- Third: since the credibility of the source is of secondary importance, Russian propaganda finds itself fitting rather smoothly into a panoply of Western media. (Just to be on the safe side, RT, which does not broadcast in Russian, never identifies itself as a Russia-based and government-funded network.)
- Fourth: RT and the Sputnik news network, launched last year, find the soil of the Western media markets already fairly loosened and fertilized as far as conspiracy theories are concerned. Did the U.S. Government orchestrate 9/11? Why not? Twenty-three percent of Germans thought so, as did 15 percent of Italians.<sup>2</sup> Seven years after the fall of the Twin Towers, between a quarter and one-fifth of Britons, French, and Italians told the pollsters they had no idea who was behind the attack.<sup>3</sup> Well, then, after the CEO of France’s largest oil company, Total, who had opposed economic sanctions on Russia, was killed when his plane slammed into a snowplow operated by a drunken driver at a Moscow airport, Russian commentators asserted that he was killed by the CIA.<sup>4</sup> And why stop there? Did the CIA aid Ukrainians in shooting down the MH 17 Malaysian airliner (one of the “versions” suggested by Russian propaganda)? Plausible. Did the Russian opposition kill its own leader, Boris Nemtsov, to embarrass Putin? Possible.
- Fifth: With all the so-called value judgments to be taken out of the reporting, there are no more “just” wars or wars of “aggression”—only “conflicts.” Just as there are no “victims” and “perpetrators,” only “violence.” So when RT and Sputnik editors read or see or hear news in the leading Western media about “renewed violence” in the “conflict” between Ukraine and Russia, they find it easy to build up on and extrapolate from them to twist the truth. Especially, when almost one in three Germans was reported last summer to find Russia not responsible for the violence in Ukraine, that’s another opening for RT to exploit.

Yet for all this seemingly fertile soil for Russia’s distortions, the impact of the Russian disinformation campaign on the democracies of Western and Central Europe appears paltry, if not to say negligible. Where the ratings were credibly established, RT was barely visible, apart from the “pre-sold” audiences on the extreme left and right.<sup>5</sup> The main reason is a highly competitive media environment that exposes people to a wide range of facts and interpretations.

The situation is quite different when we go east, to the countries collectively known as the Former Soviet Union. There the effectiveness of Russian propaganda is greatly enhanced by two factors. First, the presence of ethnic Russian minorities, some of whom nurture grievances; and, second, the existence of far fewer alternative sources of credible information than in West-Central Europe.

It is here that what is known as the “weaponization of information” occurs: news and analysis as a means of provoking strong negative emotions, potentially leading to hatred, incitement and, ultimately, the justification of violence.

A couple of months ago, while searching Russian-language sites for information on the growing presence of Russian fighters with ISIS in Syria, I was directed by one of the links to one of Russia’s most popular sites, an equivalent of Facebook called VKontakte, which has hundreds of thousands of visitors each day both from Russia and the Former Soviet Union. Before I could get to the articles I was looking

for, I saw pictured at the top of the opening page a cartoonish Uncle Sam holding on his lap a baby clad in a black uniform with a Kalashnikov on its back. The caption read: “ISIS is a project of America’s two-party system.”

As an expert on Russian propaganda in Estonia put it, this effort has produced “a separate reality created by Russian media” in which he claims many ethnic Russian Estonians already live and which creates enormous problems for democratic politics.

In Kyiv earlier this year one of my most memorable meetings was with the Dean of the School of Journalism at the Kyiv-Mohila Academy, Professor Evhen Fedchenko. Together with his students he runs a Web site called StopFake.org, which records some of the Russian propaganda masquerading as news. Here are a few examples:

- A report in the Russian media that the U.S. President has extended a decree that bans balalaikas (which are traditional Russian musical instruments) in the United States until 2020.
- Russia’s most widely watched Pervyi Kanal, or First Channel, television network, broadcast an interview with a terrified woman identified as a refugee from the territory controlled by the Ukrainian Government. She said she witnessed Ukrainian soldiers publicly executing the wife and son of a pro-Russian separatist. The child was crucified on a bulletin board, while the woman was allegedly dragged behind a tank until she died. The story was proven to be a complete fake.
- Another popular Russian television channel posted on VKontakte and other social media sites an invented conversation between a Ukrainian military commander and a German doctor in which they discuss in detail the harvesting of internal organs, presumably of deceased members of the pro-Russian population caught up in the fighting. The officer is “quoted” as saying that “we would have a great deal of material to work with, thanks to our Western partners.”

Again, bear in mind that Russian television, especially the news programs I just mentioned are viewed by millions of people, especially ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers, outside Russia.

Fortunately, there is an antidote to this poison. It is impossible, of course, to sanitize all of the lies, given the lopsidedness of the manpower, but there is enough of it to deflate the effort considerably.

As usual, the strongest antidote is a rich, diverse, and uncensored democratic media environment. But as such an environment does not yet fully exist in most post-Soviet states, the U.S. international media effort could be of great help.

Despite being barred from domestic outlets in Russia, the online audience of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America online has been growing, reaching 4.7 million this summer. In my office last week, a top Russian pro-democracy leader, Vladimir Milov told me that “Radio Liberty is by far the finest and most influential of unofficial sources of political information and analysis in Russia today!” According to independent research, nearly 2 million Russians are watching RFR/RL’s flagship 30-minute nightly news program *Nastoyashchee vremya* or Current Time online every week.

Last year, a nationwide Gallup survey in Ukraine showed that the size of the VOA audience across all of its media platforms in the Ukrainian and Russian languages had doubled since 2012 to nearly 7 million adults using VOA every week—that is 18 percent of all adults in Ukraine plus nearly 3 million using RFE/RL.

In Kyiv I was repeatedly struck by the deep appreciation by Ukraine’s political and media elites of the content provided by Radio Liberty. RFE/RL content is being recognized as superior not just to the Russian propaganda but, to the output of the oligarch-dominated Ukrainian media, which is just as important. As a result, several top Ukrainian television networks competed for the prime time broadcast rights for Current Time.

Mr. Chairman, we are facing a determined and often refined propaganda effort. From the sophisticated exploitation of Western media patterns and vocabulary to outright lies and crude fakes, the goal remains the same: to undermine the people’s trust in democratic politics and policies and in free and fair media. As this effort is vital to the maintenance of the present Russian regime, it will be with us for a long time.

Time, and, talent, and risk-taking innovation and yes, money for U.S. international media will continue to be needed to counter it. Thank you.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Castle, “A Russian TV Insider Describes a Modern Propaganda Machine,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>“International Poll: No Consensus on Who Was Behind 9/11.” World Public Opinion, September 10, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Alan Cullison, “Russia Uses MH17 Crash for Propaganda,” Wall Street Journal, July 23, 2015.

<sup>5</sup>The Daily Beast reports that in 2012, RT’s daily viewership did not reach the minimum Nielsen rating threshold of 30,000 people in the United States, and that in Europe, its audience has amounted to less than 0.1 percent of total viewership, except in Britain where it does slightly better, garnering 0.17 percent of the total viewing population in 2015. RT’s oft-cited figure of “630 million people in 100 countries” refers to the potential geographical reach of its programming based on where RT is available—not on how many people are actually viewing it. See: Katie Zavadski, “Putin’s Propaganda TV Lies about its Popularity,” The Daily Beast, September 17, 2015.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Dr. Aron.

Our next witness is Peter Pomerantsev. Mr. Pomerantsev is a senior fellow at the Legatum Institute, as well as an author and documentary producer. His writing is featured regularly in the London Review of Books, Atlantic, the Financial Times, focusing largely on 21st century propaganda. His book about working as a TV producer in Putin’s Russia, “Nothing is True, and Everything is Possible,” was published in 2015.

Mr. Pomerantsev.

**STATEMENT OF PETER POMERANTSEV, SENIOR FELLOW,  
TRANSITIONS FORUM, LEGATUM INSTITUTE, LONDON,  
UNITED KINGDOM**

Mr. POMERANTSEV. I cannot talk about Russia right now without at least sending my personal condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims of this terrible air disaster that happened over Egypt recently.

I was looking this morning, actually—I had jet lag—I was looking at the sort of—the sort of Instagrams and social media sites of some of the victims, and there were young people who had been on holiday, and it was absolutely clear that their lifestyles and aspirations were no different to young people in Wichita. And that was always the dream of social media and of the Information Age, that it would bring people together across borders, that it would be a catalyst for mutual understanding. And yet, throughout the world, we are seeing the Information Age becoming the Misinformation Age. We are seeing new information technology and old—the old power of television, which is so much more—bigger and more global now, being used to sew enmity and hatred. We have the example of ISIS. In southeast Asia, we can see how China is using the doctrine of the three warfares to make sure media and psychological war to undermine the United States. We have plenty of influences—instances of misinformation being used inside the United States to mess with the stock market, for example.

And, of course, we have Russia, which is really the avant garde of making the Information Age into the Disinformation Age. It does so domestically. If Stalin was 75 percent violence and 25 percent propaganda, Putin’s the other way around, he is 75 percent propaganda and 25 percent violence. And they do it internationally through, really, a doctrine that is now right in the middle of Russian military thinking, the idea that you can bring other countries to their knees, that you can, basically, enhance your foreign policy power, largely through information and psychological operations—again, with a minimum of violence.

If there is one key theme that runs through the whole of the Kremlin's thinking, it is cynicism. It is the idea that, domestically, there is no alternative to Putin. You know, you create a media space where all the possible opposition is gone, the ones that remain are freaks, basically, and Putin is built up as the strongest and only alternative. It is a cynicism that says there is no difference between democracies and authoritarian regimes. That is the main message of the Kremlin's propaganda, both domestically and internationally. They are always saying, "The U.S. is just as bad as we are. Europe is just as bad as we are." They are not trying to get Putin's Pew numbers up. You know, they are just trying to erode faith in democratic systems elsewhere. Putin does not want to be loved internationally. He wants to be feared. That is a very, very different kind of process.

And the biggest cynicism is, they say there is no difference between truth and lies. You know, so it does not matter if Vladimir Putin says, one day, "There are no Russian soldiers in Crimea," and, a few weeks later, says, "Oh, yes, there are," because what they are saying is, there is no value to the idea of truth.

And I worked in the European Endowment for Democracy Project, and we looked at a—at little focus groups in eastern Europe in the sort of a—in what we call the "front-line states." We looked at the 90 million Russian speakers outside of Russia. You know, and we talk about international—90 million outside of Russia. And here is—I am doing, like, a compendium quote, what we heard from a lot of different people in Latvia or in eastern Ukraine, and they were, like, "We have so many media surrounding us—American, Russian, Ukrainian, international—we do not believe anyone anymore. But, the Russians tell such an emotional story, it is so cinematic and entertaining, that we go with the Russians. It rings true to our hearts."

So, it is the opposite question from the cold war, when we had to break through censorship to get information to people. Now the problem is too much information, people do not trust anyone, and the Russians tell this incredibly compelling story of crucified children, incredible game shows. Channel One, the biggest Russian channel, is a very successful entertainment machine, not just a disinformation machine.

So, we face a slightly new challenge. It is a challenge, in one word, to balance out cynicism to win trust, to create communities of trust again. That is the Russian strategy, to destroy, divide, and conquer, sew fear and distrust. How do we do that? There are so many things that we could be doing. There is no basic Russian-language news agency that would be giving people information about their daily lives, you know, about hospitals, roads, something people knows about them and, therefore, they can relate to. We can talk about increasing media literacy. We can talk about investing in narrative programming, not just sort of news and talk, but the kind of big TV shows and big narrative projects that really convince people that you understand them. But, the most important thing that we need is an understanding that the age of—that misinformation is—may be one of the great challenges of the 21st century, and that we need a strategy to start addressing it.



I will do one last thing. The last time we had a burst of information technology was the start of the 20th century, when radio appeared, when cinema appeared. And that led, not to a better world, that led to the emergence of totalitarian propaganda, which swept away critical thinking. We stand at the start of a tide now. Russia is just exploiting—ruthlessly and successfully exploiting this trend. It is happening across the world. And that tide will only grow and grow.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pomerantsev follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PETER POMERANTSEV

Peter Pomerantsev is a Senior Fellow at the Legatum Institute, London, where he runs a project on 21st century propaganda and how to counter it. He was the coauthor of a study commissioned by the Dutch, U.K. and Latvian Governments to the European Endowment for Democracy, which identified ways to strengthen independent Russian language media. He is one of the coauthors of a new project by CEPA, funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation, on how to counter Russian propaganda in Europe.

Pomerantsev frequently contributes to the FT, Foreign Policy, Politico and many other publications. He has testified to the U.S. Congress on how to combat Kremlin propaganda. His book about Russian media, “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible,” is long-listed for the Guardian and Samuel Johnson Prizes and is translated into over 10 languages.

The West is belatedly waking up to the power of the Kremlin’s media machine. The Supreme Commander of NATO called the annexation of Crimea “the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen.” Zhanna Nemtsova, daughter of murdered Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, blames the climate of hate created by Kremlin propaganda for the murder of her father and starting the war in Ukraine. “We are losing the information war” complains the British head of the House of Commons culture and media committee.

The Soviet Empire may be gone but the Kremlin still has media hegemony over the Russian language space: the 149 million citizens of Russia, as well as the estimated 93 million in the former U.S.S.R. who have Russian as a fluent first or second language (not to mention a further 5 million or so in Germany).

A recent project by the European Endowment for Democracy, a Brussels foundation, looked for ways to tackle this challenge. I was one of the authors, and we soon found differences between today’s situation and the cold war.

Back in the 20th century the job of Western Russian language media such as the BBC World Service or Radio Free Europe was to break through the information iron curtain. The battle was for alternative points of view and against censorship. Today TV is strictly controlled by the Kremlin inside Russia, but there is easy access to other media online. Meanwhile Russian speakers in Ukraine, Moldova or the Baltics have access to a plethora of media, Kremlin, local and Western, each presenting strikingly contradictory versions of reality.

Take Estonia, where viewers who followed the rival Russian and Western stories of the causes for the downing of MH17 ended up simply disbelieving both sides. Something similar is happening in Kharkiv, a town on the Russian-Ukrainian border, where polls showed a high number of people cynical about all media, whether Russian, Western, or Ukrainian. In a landscape where viewers trust no one, they are still most entranced by Russian television channels which, according to Latvian focus group respondents, “are emotionally attractive, because some news you watch as an exciting movie. You don’t trust it, but watch it gladly.”

In order to woo viewers the Kremlin has utterly blurred the lines between fact and fiction. Kremlin “current affairs” programs are filled with spectacular scare-stories about Russian children crucified by Ukrainian militias or U.S. conspiracies to ethnically cleanse East Ukraine. In a context where no one “believes” any media, all that matters is that the “news” is sensationalist and cinematic.

The challenge for independent media is thus not simply to deliver information, but to win trust. This necessitates content that is engaging, reflecting both national and local contexts, and that delves deep into the lived reality of Russian-language speakers across the region.

Reality-based, locally relevant, engaging programming is the one type of content Kremlin media, despite its many successes, does not produce.

News ignores local social problems, whether it’s the health service, schools or courts. There is currently no quality Russian language news agency covering the

whole of the Russian speaking world. A first step could be to expand the Russian language bureaus of such agencies as the BBC or AFP so they could cover the local news the Kremlin ignores; or create a news-hub that maximized existing sources. One might not be able to convince Kremlin-captive audiences about who shot down MH17, but one can be more relevant to them by focusing on local issues.

Kremlin entertainment meanwhile is largely devoid of socially engaged documentary formats: docu-soaps about institutions such as schools or the army; reality shows exploring ethnic tensions. Local broadcasters need help, both financial and professional, to create this sort of quality content to create the local versions of radio hits like “This American Life” or “Make Bradford British,” a British documentary program that grappled with ethnic hatred by putting people of different races in one house (in the style of the U.S. show *Big Brother*) and forcing them to confront their prejudices. Imagine a Russian-language program that would use a similar tactic to probe an emotionally charged subject—say, the bitterness between Russians and Ukrainians in a place such as Kharkiv.

New programs could also invite Russians to tackle historical traumas through formats such as the popular BBC series “Who Do You Think You Are?”—a show that follows celebrities as they trace the lives of their ancestors, often engaging with the horrors of 20th-century wars and genocide. In the Russian case, these kinds of programs would require their subjects to explore the human cost of the gulag, the holodomor (Ukraine’s enforced famine under Stalin), and the KGB arrests. Some participants would discover their ancestors among the victims; others, among the executioners. In both cases, they would have to reckon with past traumas, a highly emotional and cathartic process. Such content would also allow the audience to move away from the collective historical narratives imposed by the Kremlin, which stress how Russia’s leaders, from Stalin to Putin, led the nation to triumph.

Ideally programming would dove-tail with policy priorities: judicial reform in Moldova, for example, accompanied by entertainment shows about courts. BBC Media Action (the charity arm of the BBC funded by grants and not the license fee) have been working with the fledgling Ukrainian public broadcaster on short dramas about young people caught up in the war from different parts of the country. The budget is painfully miniscule but it’s exactly the sort of project we need so much more of.

Apart from classical media programmes we should also prioritize media literacy projects which help populations withstand the new Kremlin propaganda and tell the difference between spin and evidence-based inquiry. Online investigative projects, such as Ukraine’s myth-busting *Stop Fake* or Alexey Navalny’s corruption-busting Web site which finds the secret cash stashes of crooked politicians, are powerful not only because of the information they provide, but because they involve citizens in an interactive, open source search for the truth and thus build communities of trust and critical inquiry.

The key thing is to recognize, as Vladimir Putin understands so well, that media and entertainment are as essential to societies and security as doctors or soldiers. The West made a dreadful mistake in the 1990s, abandoning the development of media in the former Soviet Union to the “free market”: instead media were captured by oligarchs or corrupt regimes, who have used them for malign ends. After the cold war it was considered part of the “peace dividend” to slash funding for Radio Free Europe or BBC Russian. A much greater cost is being paid now.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Pomerantsev.

Our next witness is Maksymilian Czuperski. Mr. Czuperski serves as a Special Assistant to the President and CEO of the Atlantic Council. At the Atlantic Council, he has led efforts to open-source intelligence and digital forensic research, including for the report, “Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin’s War in Ukraine.” This report demonstrates Russian involvement in the conflict in Ukraine using open-source information and social media. He has appeared in the BBC, *Vice News*, and conducts regular briefing and workshop sessions for governments within the NATO alliance on these innovative methods.

Mr. Czuperski.

**STATEMENT OF MAKSYMILIAN CZUPERSKI, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND CEO, THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. CZUPERSKI. Thank you, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as a Polish citizen and an EU citizen who was raised on a continent defined by division of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, where the children of former enemies grew up as friends, and where the longest era of peace on the continent has been marked by freedom, democracy, tolerance, and, foremost, trust.

But, today, this vision, long a key U.S. strategic goal, is being tested by forces that seek to undermine the Europe I grew up in. No geopolitical event has made that more clear than Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. And, critically, it is not only boots on the ground that challenged this vision, but also a raging propaganda machine aiming to destroy the West's confidence in its ideals and accomplishments in Europe. This Russian-led propaganda machine has become so effective, that we, as the West, have sleepwalked into the unimaginable: the armed annexation by one state territory belonging to another. This propaganda machine is providing a cover for a revisionist Russian leader.

And so, "I can tell you outright and unequivocally that there are no Russian troops in Ukraine." These words the words of President Putin early this year, and they were outright and unequivocally a lie. When Western officials presented strong evidence that Russian troops have, in fact, been deployed in Ukraine, the Kremlin was quick to dismiss the evidence as just images from computer games. And, for a long time, the Kremlin succeeded in discrediting us, because today's information systems are also, unfortunately, hotlines for which ill-intentioned leaders can channel deception. As we fumbled, a new reality was emerging. We are no longer merely in an Information Age in which narratives are shaped by one flow of information pushing against another, but, in fact, we are in an Engagement Age, where the narratives we create are shaped by how we engage with one another.

Unlike in the past, citizens have unprecedented power to access the vast amounts of information, not to mention create, engage, share, and, most importantly, discover information freely. This is a new age that has brought the world and Europe itself closer together, but also, at the same time, it is being hijacked by less benevolent forces, such as those of Mr. Putin. Troll shops and cutting-edge media factories in Russia work around the clock to engage and misinform their audiences through flashy content. We know this, because some of those who were tasked with the job of spreading lies 140 characters at a time came out, revealing a glimpse into what happens within those troll shops.

The spreading of digital breadcrumbs is an attempt to undermine our Western narrative and values, and divide NATO and the EU. But, the Engagement Age has also reached Russia, providing us with new opportunities to challenge Mr. Putin's deception. Because the desire to share and connect is fundamentally a value shared by all. Hence, rather than rely on the government's information to expose Mr. Putin's lies, the Atlantic Council's report "Hiding in Plain

Sight” collected and presented the facts that the Kremlin has been trying to hide so desperately.

When we post selfies, videos, photos, tweets, and Facebook updates, then we frequently leave so-called “digital breadcrumbs” behind that are often publicly accessible and even entail geotags with exact geographical details of where a crumb was created. Anyone can access those digital breadcrumbs. And using innovative forensic research techniques, we were able to then tell the true story of what had unfolded in Ukraine. This is no civil war, and has not been a civil war, but, rather, a Kremlin-manufactured war fueled by Russian equipment, fought by Russian soldiers, and directed by Mr. Putin. One of the many Russian soldiers we found to have been sent to fight in Ukraine was Bato Dambayev, who, after participating in fighting in Donbas, returned home to his home region, Buryita, more than 4,000 miles away on the Russian-Mongolian border. Like many of his friends, he documented his adventure by posting selfies and pictures along the ways. And these methods also allowed us to then tell the story what actually had happened on the day that MH17 was downed. Eliot Higgins and his colleagues Bellingcat Way would actually identify the very BUK missile system that is believed to have downed MH17, and that was supplied to by Russian forces.

But, if we could expose Russia’s war in Ukraine, despite it being publicly denied by its leader, we ask ourselves, What was the potential for these methods within civil society and journalists? Simon Ostrovsky, of VICE News, tested our digital forensic research methods by recreating Bato’s journey. And as we watched Simon standing in the very location that Bato was taking his selfies, we are able to see how protecting our narrative nowadays is much more powerful in the hand of our journalists and the public rather than just in the hands of the government.

And hence, we recommend that these skills, these digital forensic research skills, are trained to the public and to civil society so that they can help us more proactively distinguished between fact and fiction. This requires empowering citizens to be part of the process in stopping those who otherwise would attempt to blind us.

So, in closing, let me please underscore that Mr. Putin has used the crisis in Ukraine and Syria, first and foremost, to consolidate his own authority at home, and—at home so that he can distract from the bad governance that he has been leading while repressing civil society, independent media, and social media networks. Therefore, revealing Putin’s deception of his own people is a key part of the strategy to end the aggression in Europe by hitting him where he is most vulnerable.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Czuperski follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MAKSYMILLIAN CZUPERSKI

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today. As a Polish citizen, I was raised on a continent that was defined by the vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. A Europe in which the children of those who were once enemies became each other’s best friends, and in which freedom, democracy, and tolerance have served as unifying forces during the longest era of peace and prosperity on the European Continent. A Europe in which diversity laid the foundation not for bloodshed and violence, but solidarity and progress. This Europe has become a beacon of hope—an opportunity for a better

future for the thousands who risk their lives as they seek to reach its shores, or remain steadfast in the face of oppression and injustice, just to inch closer to that dream.

But today this vision—which has long been a key U.S. strategic goal—and the continent this vision helped define are being tested by forces that seek to undermine the Europe I grew up in. No geopolitical event has made that more clear than Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year. And, critically, it is not only Russian boots on the ground that challenge the vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, but also a raging propaganda machine aiming to destroy the West’s confidence in its ideals and accomplishments in Europe.

This Russian-led propaganda machine has become so effective that we, as the United States and Europe, have sleep-walked into the unimaginable: the armed annexation by one state of territory belonging to another, an act not seen in Europe since 1945. This propaganda machine is providing cover for a revisionist Russian leader to reverse the progress that the Western nations have made together in Europe over the past two decades, and create a Europe divided, dictated to, and at war.

“I can tell you outright and unequivocally that there are no Russian troops in Ukraine.”<sup>1</sup>—These were the words of Vladimir Putin, and they were, outright and unequivocally, a lie.

In fact, Putin has been lying to his own people while Russian citizens and soldiers have been fighting and dying in a war of his own making. Thanks to the propaganda machine he has built, it has been possible for the Kremlin to deny any allegations of Russian involvement in Ukraine. Said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in January of this year: “If you allege [that Russian troops are in Ukraine] so confidently, present the facts. But nobody can present the facts, or doesn’t want to. So before demanding from us that we stop doing something, please present proof that we have done it.”<sup>2</sup>

When Western officials did indeed present strong evidence that Russian troops have been deployed in Ukraine, the Kremlin was quick to dismiss the evidence as “just images from computer games”<sup>3</sup> and has sought to discredit information released by NATO, the U.S. Government, and its European allies as a “smear campaign.”<sup>4</sup> And for a long time the Kremlin succeeded, because today’s information systems are also, unfortunately, hotlines through which ill-intentioned leaders can channel misinformation.

As we stumbled while Europe’s borders were redrawn, a broader new reality was also emerging: We are no longer merely in an information age, in which narratives are shaped by one flow of information pushing against another and simply presenting the truth can discredit lies. Today, we are in the engagement age whereby the narratives we create are shaped by how we communicate with one another. Unlike the past, we have unprecedented power to access vast amounts of information that is now in citizens’ hands, not to mention the power to create, engage with, share and most importantly discover this information freely. It is a new age that has brought the world and Europe itself closer together, and made it more open, but that is now being hijacked by less benevolent forces such as those of Mr. Putin.

Moscow has seized this new space through a concentrated and engaging propaganda campaign—hybrid information warfare if you will—with the aim of sowing confusion and encouraging or justifying the West’s ambivalent response to Russia’s aggression, now also in Syria.

Troll-shops and cutting-edge media factories in Russia work around the clock to engage and misinform their audience through flashy content. We know this, because all of us have seen the deceptive videos posted online by the outlet RT that today claims to be the most watched news network on YouTube with over 2 billion views.<sup>5</sup> And some of those who were tasked with the job of spreading lies 140 characters at a time, such as 34-year-old Lyudmila Savchuk, have come out providing us with a rare glimpse into what happens within these shops.<sup>6</sup>

This spreading of “digital breadcrumbs” is an attempt to undermine our Western narrative and values, and divide NATO and the EU, by exploiting divisions within both nations and communities.

But the engagement age has also reached Russia. In fact, the Kremlin has recognized the potential of this new age to the degree that it is concerned about its impact on its own people. Several weeks before Mr. Putin sent his troops—little green men as they were known—to Crimea and launched his propaganda assault on Ukraine, he first struck at home.

On January 24, 2014, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, the network VKontakte, with its 60 million daily users, was forcefully taken over from its former CEO Pavel Durov, by businessmen allied with Mr. Putin in an attempt to control the potential dangers of the engagement age to Russia’s leadership.

But, while Mr. Putin is attempting to control the digital space, there are limits to the level of control that can be put on opportunities for the Russian people to engage with one another and to discuss what is actually happening in Russia.

This also provides us with new opportunities to challenge Mr. Putin's propaganda machine.

The desire to share and connect is a fundamental value shared by all. Hence, rather than rely on government information to expose Mr. Putin's lies, the Atlantic Council's report, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine," collected and presented the facts that the Kremlin had been trying to hide by tapping into people's desire to share and engage: When we post selfies, videos, photos, tweets, and Facebook updates then we frequently leave so called "digital breadcrumbs" behind that are often publicly accessible and even entail geotags with the exact geographical details of where a crumb was created. Anyone can access these "digital breadcrumbs." But we, of course, don't take these face value, which why using innovative digital forensic research and verification techniques including geolocating we can differentiate between fact and fiction. This allowed us tell the true story of Russia's war in Ukraine.

This was no civil war. The evidence presented in "Hiding in Plain Sight" makes clear that the conflict in Ukraine's east is a Kremlin-manufactured war, fueled by Russian equipment, fought by Russian soldiers, and directed by Mr. Putin.

Our team at the Atlantic Council was able to reveal numerous cases of Russian soldiers being sent to fight in Ukraine. One of them was Bato Dambayev of the 37th Motorized Infantry Brigade who, after participating in the fierce fighting in Donbas, returned home to the city of Buryita along the Russian-Mongolian border more than 4,000 miles from the Ukrainian conflict. An ordinary Russian soldier, he had trained at large camp near the Russian city of Kuzminka from where he was sent across the border to fight in Ukraine. Like many of his friends, he documented his adventure by posting selfies and pictures along the way.

For a long time, the Kremlin has succeeded in setting the narrative for the Ukraine conflict, even managing to convince many that it is purely a civil war. But the story of Bato and thousands of others like him shows a different reality. The innovative methods used to show Bato's journey, are also the methods our colleague, award winning citizen, journalist Eliot Higgins and his team at Bellingcat, used to uncover the Russian military brigade that is believed to have supplied the very BUK missile launcher that downed the civilian aircraft known as flight MH17.

But if we could expose Russia's war in Ukraine despite it being publicly denied by its leader, we asked ourselves, what potential did these methods hold for civil society leaders and journalists?

That's why we shared our findings with Simon Ostrovsky of VICE News. He was able to follow the journey of Bato and verify once again that these innovative digital forensic research methods and open source intelligence produce results. As we watched Simon standing in the very locations that Bato's selfies were taken, we recognized that one of the strongest means of protecting our narrative against misinformation is equipping and training journalists with these new methods, to use in both their own countries and abroad.

We also produced this body of research for an even more compelling reason: If the international community cannot distinguish fact from fiction, or chooses not to do so in public, it is unlikely to coalesce around an effective strategy to support Ukraine and deter Mr. Putin.

Our experience taught us that:

(1) The best antidote to misinformation in this hybrid war is clarity; to speak the truth but foremost to empower the public to reveal and communicate it clearly.

(2) Second, social media forensics and geolocation analysis are powerful tools:

Information once available only to intelligence agencies is now available to all. We do not need to engage in an information war, rather we need to empower civil society, journalists and citizens to distinguish between fact and fiction.

This matters: because it can help overcome the healthy skepticism that the public may have toward official government narratives.

This is the new reality of a world in which individuals and nongovernmental actors play critical roles in the engagement era.

The best part is—you don't need to believe me or my coauthors—the methods we've used in our report are essentially a tool that we don't control.

This is the principle behind the concept of "information defense" put forward by our colleague, Ben Nimmo, a British specialist in analyzing information warfare. He

argues that the key to defeating disinformation is to support media, academics and civil society in gathering information on areas of particular concern, so that they can debunk any disinformation as soon as it is released.<sup>7</sup> We therefore recommend expanding that support into the digital arena through concrete training programs and workshops for journalists, civil society leaders, and ordinary citizens, not only here at home but also in regions most effected by the propaganda war, so that they can navigate the engagement age more effectively and do so equipped with groundbreaking new digital forensic research methods.

This concept was proven in Syria, where colleagues such as the Bellingcat group and blogger Ruslan Leviev have spent 4 years building up an intelligence picture of the conflict from social media.<sup>8</sup> When Russia began bombing targets in Syria and claiming that they were from the Islamic State, it took Ruslan Leviev just hours to prove that the Russians were lying, and were, in fact, hitting the moderate opposition. Russia's claim that it is focusing on IS was shredded on the first day—leaving it without the diplomatic legitimacy that striking IS would give.

It is important to bear in mind that Mr. Putin has used the Ukrainian and Syrian crises first and foremost to consolidate his own authority at home, whipping up patriotic sentiment to paper over the Kremlin's own failures in governance while repressing civil society, independent media, and social networks.

Chairman Ed Royce rightly pointed out in his Wall Street Journal op-ed earlier this year, that Russia's propaganda machine, "may be more dangerous than any military, because no artillery can stop their lies from spreading and undermining U.S. security interests in Europe"<sup>9</sup>—For that it is time that we put resources where they matter as we did in the cold war, but with the understanding that a new era requires new thinking and new solutions: It is time that we don't blindly push information, but engage in the digital infosphere with our citizens so that they can play a role in distinguishing between fact and fiction. This requires empowering citizens to be part of the process and stopping those who otherwise attempt to blind.

Therefore, revealing Putin's deception of his own people is a key part of a strategy to end his aggression in Europe, by hitting him where he is vulnerable.

We must also demonstrate solidarity with those Russians who are courageous enough to take a stand against the lies of the Putin regime.

The first victims of Putin are the people of Russia, who deserve better.

Confronting Mr. Putin's aggression does not imply a confrontation against the Russian people. As the cosigners of the preface in our report "Hiding in Plain Sight" point out: "We all share a common vision for a Europe whole, free, and at peace, in which Russia finds its peaceful place. But Mr. Putin's war in Ukraine threatens this vision and the international order."<sup>10</sup>

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49261>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/22/us-ukraine-crisis-davos-poroshenko-idUSKBN0KU1TX20150122>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/kremlin-satellite-images-russian-troops-computer-games-n191771>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28492474>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rt.com/news/214723-rt-two-billion-youtube/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/content/russians-get-glimpse-of-internet-troll-factory/2846484.html>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.li.com/events/information-at-war-from-china-s-three-warfares-to-nato-s-narratives>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2015/09/07/are-there-russian-troops-fighting-in-syria/>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wsj.com/articles/countering-putins-information-weapons-of-war-1429052323?alg=y>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/hiding-in-plain-sight-putin-s-war-in-ukraine-and-boris-nemtsov-s-putin-war>.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Czuperski.

Our final witness is Ms. Heather Conley. Ms. Conley is senior vice president for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic, and Director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS. Prior to joining CSIS, she served as an executive director at the American National Red Cross and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs.

Ms. Conley.

**STATEMENT OF HEATHER CONLEY, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
FOR EUROPE, EURASIA, AND THE ARCTIC, AND DIRECTOR,  
EUROPE PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTER-  
NATIONAL STUDIES, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. CONLEY. Mr. Chairman, Senator Shaheen, thank you so much for this opportunity to testify before you today on a subject of great importance concerning Russian influence in Europe.

I believe this is a subject area where there is little holistic understanding of the Kremlin's tools and methodology in either Europe or the United States, and, without understanding how this influence works and the tools that are deployed, we cannot identify appropriate responses to counter and ultimately combat this increasingly effective form of manipulation. I am particularly concerned how it is being deployed within NATO countries today.

Strategic communications directed toward the Russian people and the international community is an essential part of Russia's full-spectrum toolkit designed to shape the 21st century battlespace. There are conventional and nonconventional components to this strategy and, as Senator Gardner had mentioned, one of the conventional approaches today, Russian submarines, are closely examining the locations of European undersea fiber-optic cables to disrupt all Internet and communication lines, military command and control, essential commerce, the functioning of critical infrastructure that will prevent government communications to its population. In fact, this summer, a Russian vessel continually harassed a Swedish research vessel, which was laying a new fiber-optic cable connecting Sweden to Lithuania. Again, Ukrainian military forces have repeatedly underscored the effectiveness of Russian military forces in jamming their radar in military communications as well as UAVs operated by the OSCE to monitor the Minsk cease-fire agreement. And clearly the United States and NATO forces need to exercise these various scenarios to better prepare for their eventuality.

But, the focus of this hearing is to gain a better understanding of the Kremlin's use of nonconventional means to shape and influence public opinion and political outcomes in democratic societies. But, please make no mistake, these nonconventional means equally shape the future battlespace.

The origins of the Kremlin's policy were developed shortly following the collapse of the Soviet Union and can be found in Russia's Compatriot Policy. This policy establishes links estimated to 40 million ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living beyond the borders of the, at that time, newly formed Russian Federation. The definition of a Russian "compatriot" has been refined over time, but, generally, a compatriot demonstrates a connection to Russian culture, history, values, and language.

Now, this concept has evolved to justify the protection of ethnic Russians living in the post-Soviet space, which means that Russia will intervene in a foreign country's internal affairs on behalf of, quote, "their" ethnic Russian populations. And in 2013, President Putin approved Russia's foreign policy concept, which provided for a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives, building on civil society's potential, information, culture, and other methods and technologies to protect ethnic Russians abroad. And,



of course, on March 18, 2014, this policy was the justification for Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, when President Putin stated that, "Millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people that live in Ukraine and will continue to do so, Russia will always defend their interests."

So, it is estimated that the Kremlin spends approximately \$100 million annually to fund organizations such as *Russkii Mir*, or the Russian World Foundation. This entity supports Russia's Compatriot Policy. It provides funding to filmmakers, exactly as Dr. Aron was saying, to make that entertaining discourse, that liveliness that people watch, civil society organizations and political entities that promote the Russian language, Russian policies in general as well as affirming Russia's historical narrative of other period during and after the Second World War, which presents the then-Soviet Union as a liberator.

Again, it is important to note that these policies have been in place in the mid-1990s. They have continued to evolve—in fact, accelerated—since the "color revolutions." The Kremlin has put an enormous amount of focus on the Compatriot Policy, using all tools at its disposal.

In 2011, actually, the CSIS Europe program conducted a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of Russia's Compatriot Policy in Estonia. Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I ask that a copy of this report be submitted for the record. And we can see how its impact affects different countries in different ways, depending on the population and the historical relationship with Moscow, but there are a lot of commonalities.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The report mentioned above was too voluminous to include in the printed hearing. It will be retained in the permanent record of the committee.]

And, if I may, just to give you an example of how this works: In Latvia, a country with 22–26 percent ethnic Russian population, and it works using Russian-owned media outlets. For example, in Latvia, the main three media outlets are controlled by Russian entities. For example, one is owned by Bank Rossiya, which has already been sanctioned by the United States. It owns half the shares in one station, while the other channels are owned by a single holding company, Baltic Media Alliance, which has 11 subsidiaries in the Baltic States alone. This alliance operates the most popular Russian television channels in the Baltic States, rebroadcasts very popular Russian television shows. The other channels are owned by two other Russian oligarchs. One Russian channel is registered in the United Kingdom, holds a U.K. broadcasting license, and falls under British regulatory scrutiny. These channels are used extensively to encourage Russian policies, and, in fact, once received—was prompted by the U.K. regulator to state that the channel was in violation of British regulations.

This is a complicated way of saying that, in many ways, the problem is our own system. Russian companies are purchasing these media outlets, they are controlling them, they are controlling the message. The Compatriot Policy influences political parties, politicians, it uses cultural vehicles, it uses the Orthodox Church. It is a comprehensive policy, and it is happening within NATO

countries today to shape public opinion, shape policy, potentially to provoke. This is extremely difficult to combat, because it takes democratic societies to fight that which is in their own system. I believe it requires an enormous amount of transparency and diversification of media resources and outlets.

I am heartened to hear from Doctor Aron that RFE/RL is reaching those, but I fear those tools are limited. We have to look inside our own societies, diversify our media, initiate significant anticorruption, anti-kleptocracy initiatives, and fight for transparency in our media. Those are the best methods to combat this growing Russian influence in our own societies.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Conley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HEATHER A. CONLEY

Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today on a subject of great importance concerning Russian influence in Europe. This is a subject area where there is little holistic understanding of the Kremlin's tools and methodology in either Europe or the United States. Without understanding how this influence works and the various tools that are deployed, we cannot identify appropriate responses to counter and ultimately combat this increasingly effective form of manipulation.

Strategic communications, directed toward both the Russian people and the international community, is an essential part of Russia's full spectrum tool kit designed to shape the 21st century battlespace. There are conventional and nonconventional components to this strategy with the conventional or military applications being the most straightforward. Today, Russian submarines are closely examining the locations of European undersea fiber optic cables to disrupt all Internet and communication lines, military command and control, essential commerce, the functioning of critical infrastructure, and prevent government communication to its population. This summer, a Russian vessel continuously harassed a Swedish research vessel which was laying a new fiber optic cable that connects Sweden to Lithuania, ultimately preventing the Swedish vessel from laying the cable. Ukrainian military forces have repeatedly underscored the effectiveness of Russian military forces in jamming their radar and military communications in combat as well as UAVs operated by the OSCE to monitor the Minsk cease-fire agreements.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, U.S. and NATO forces need to exercise these various scenarios to better prepare for their eventuality.

The focus of this hearing, however, is to gain a better understanding of the Kremlin's use of nonconventional means to shape and influence public opinion and political outcomes in democratic societies. But, make no mistake, these nonconventional means equally shape the future battlespace.

The origins of the Kremlin's policy were developed shortly following the collapse of the Soviet Union and can be found in Russia's Compatriot Policy. This policy established links to the estimated 40 million ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living beyond the newly formed borders of the Russian Federation.<sup>2</sup> The definition of a Russian compatriot has been refined over time but generally a compatriot demonstrates a connection to Russian culture, history, values, and language. More recently, the policy has evolved to justify the protection of ethnic Russians living in the post-Soviet space which means that Russia will intervene in a foreign country's internal affairs on behalf of "their" ethnic Russian populations. In 2013, President Putin approved Russia's Foreign Policy Concept which provided for a "comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies . . ." <sup>3</sup> to protect ethnic Russians abroad. On March 18, 2014, this policy was the justification for Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea when President Putin stated "Millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests . . ." <sup>4</sup>

It is estimated that the Kremlin spends approximately \$100 million annually to fund organizations such as Russkii Mir, or Russian World Foundation, which support the implementation of its compatriot policy.<sup>5</sup> Russkii Mir provides funds to filmmakers, civil society organizations and political entities that promote the Russian language, Russian policies in general as well as affirm Russia's historical narrative of the period during and after the Second World War, presenting the Soviet

Union as a liberator. It is important to note that although this policy has been in place since the mid-1990s, the policy has been accelerated since the advent of the “color revolutions” beginning in the 2003–2004 period, administratively streamlined in the Kremlin, and significantly funded. In 2005, the Russian Presidential administration created a specific Department for Inter-Regional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries which was designed to renew influence in the post-Soviet space and prevent color revolutions.

In 2011, the CSIS Europe Program conducted a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of Russia’s compatriot policy in Estonia. I ask that a copy of this report be submitted for the record. Although the compatriot policy is deployed differently in each country depending on the composition of the population and historical relationship with Moscow, there are common traits. In Latvia, for example, the Russkii Mir Foundation reports that there are approximately 100 Russian compatriot organizations.<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, these compatriot organizations support political parties and individual politicians sympathetic to the Kremlin whose goal is to create an internal political forces within the country to increase Russia’s political influence while simultaneously eroding confidence in the democratic state. In Latvia, these organizations promote the message that Riga discriminates against its 26 percent ethnic Russian population by suppressing use of the Russian language and citizenship as well as endorsing neofascist political tendencies. In 2012, these political forces, aided by Russian-owned media outlets, were able to advance a referendum to constitutionally mandate that Russian become the second official language in Latvia (which is currently not allowed by the Latvian Constitution). The referendum was unsuccessful—the Russian language is freely used in Latvia—yet it demonstrated that these well-funded groups, utilizing democratic processes (that are ironically unavailable in an authoritarian Russia) are very capable of internally pursuing the Kremlin’s policy agenda, sowing societal divisions and delegitimizing democratic governments.

These divisive political messages are successfully amplified and magnified through Russian media outlets. Russian news outlets copy their Western media counterparts assiduously, while inserting their own biased commentary into their programming. While they play popular music and cover human interest stories, they also report frequently on rampant corruption and decadence in the West, play on the fears of extremism and nontraditional society, and air “news” stories of fascists taking over in Ukraine and European leaders subservient to their U.S. masters.

But Russian-based networks are not the only channels broadcasting such programming; many of Europe’s “independent” news outlets have been purchased by local oligarchs who are in collusion with the Kremlin. Once again, looking to Latvia as an example, the three most popular television stations—which operate commercially—are either indirectly or directly controlled by the Russian Government. Bank Rossiya (which has already been sanctioned by the United States, with \$572 million frozen in U.S. accounts)<sup>7</sup> owns half the shares in one station while the other the channels are owned by a single holding company, Baltic Media Alliance (BMA), which has 11 subsidiaries in the Baltic States alone. BMA operates the most popular Russian television channel in the Baltic States and rebroadcasts popular Russian television shows. One channel is owned by two Russian oligarchs.<sup>8</sup> Two other Russian television channels are registered in the United Kingdom, hold a U.K. broadcast license, and fall under British regulatory scrutiny. These television stations were used extensively to encourage signatures for the Russian language referendum in Latvia which prompted the U.K. regulator to state that the channels had violated British regulations.

Other European countries, such as Bulgaria, also have a very high percentage of Russian-owned media outlets which are used effectively to counter government policies, such as anticorruption or judicial reform as well as policies which support the U.S. or the European Union. In 2012, for instance, VTB Capital—the investment arm of Russia’s second-largest bank—led a consortium with Bulgaria’s Corporate Commercial Bank (KTB) to purchase the largest telecommunications company in Bulgaria, BTC. VTB is 60 percent owned by the Russian Government and owns 9 percent of KTB (which also happened to be one of the banks implicated in Bulgaria’s summer 2014 banking crisis). Since making these strategic acquisitions, Russia has been accused of using Bulgarian media outlets to advance its national interests. A €20 million media campaign backed widespread antishale protests throughout the country, and was handled by several media companies with Russian connections—presumably to keep Bulgaria dependent on Russian oil and gas. These acquisitions have also coincided with a decline in Bulgaria’s media independence ranking as tracked by international watch dogs and monitors, including the World Bank and Freedom House.

While Russia's compatriot policy is designed for (and is most efficacious in) former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries, Western European countries as well as the U.S. are not immune from its influence, particularly political party financing in Europe and its pervasive media. In June 2015, a new faction was created in the European Parliament called the "Europe of Nations and Freedoms (ENF)" party. Although newly formed, the ENF consists of 39 members from 8 European countries and is unabashedly pro-Kremlin in its positions. As of August 2015, ENF members had voted 93 percent of the time in favor of the Kremlin's positions,<sup>9</sup> and they have opposed the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine, backed Russia's annexation of Crimea, and refused to condemn the murder of Russian opposition leader, Boris Nemtsov. This new grouping is led by the leader of France's far-right Front Nationale, Marine Le Pen, who received a €9 million loan from the Moscow-based First Czech-Russian Bank last November.<sup>10</sup>

These pro-Russian EU politicians have been bolstered by Russia's effective and broad-reaching media campaign which has used television, radio, and Internet sites as mediums to convey its messages across Europe. The main perpetrator of these tactics is the increasingly sophisticated Russian news outlet, RT (formerly Russia Today). RT purports to reach over 700 million people and has an annual budget comparable in size to the BBC's World News Service. The United Kingdom's media regulator, Ofcom, has recently sanctioned RT for biased coverage of events in Ukraine.

Other effective channels of Russian influence are the Russian Orthodox Church and the use (or, more accurately, misuse) of history propaganda. The compatriot policy also defends and disseminates Russian traditional values, particularly those clash of values between a traditional society and secular democracy, through the voice of the church. Perhaps most insidious is the use of the Soviet historical narrative which portrays the U.S.S.R. as a liberating power during the Second World War and vanquisher of the Nazis; but not as an occupying power that the West never recognized—a frequent theme on Russian television. Thus, Russian television channels regularly show film documentaries that exhort Russia's liberation and heroic role which continues to reinforce this narrative among ethnic Russian populations. The Russian security services provide substantial funds for the production of such patriotic films. However, native populations in many European countries see the role of the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War quite differently and therefore view these recitations as a diminishment of their own history of independence.

This is the challenge we face and let me be clear, the challenge is daunting. Russia's network of influence has been active for over two decades; it is well funded; and has largely succeeded in creating dense and opaque networks in many NATO countries. These intertwined networks work together to subvert government action, influence policy action, finance political parties and significantly control domestic and international media space. We must educate European and American citizens about the Kremlin's true objectives rather than simply hope, as we do today, that they will not be persuaded.

Recognizing the challenge and educating about the nature of the threat is the first step; now the United States and Europe must take effective countermeasures.

I do not believe financing a major U.S.-backed information dissemination campaign toward Russia will be effective. The Kremlin has efficiently closed all access to any independent journalism or media by implementing extraordinary measures to suppress alternative narratives to its prevailing views at the time. In this environment, a State Department fact sheet, no matter how correct, will do very little. However, social networks in Russia do continue to exist that can circumvent these measures to receive independent information through social media. I would urge RFE/RL to explore how to reach and expand these loose social networks but realistically, this will only target a small, urban population and not effect change in Russia.

The United States and Europe must also significantly enhance measures of transparency and diversify the media outlets functioning in our own countries. Countries should insist on greater transparency requirements to identify the true ownership of media holding companies. If one country or its affiliated commercial enterprises acquire an excessively large holding in any one company, efforts should be made to diversify outlets. Television and radio remain the most powerful sources of information in some of the most vulnerable NATO countries. Regulatory mechanisms should be strengthened to control overly biased coverage, and firm penalties—such as the suspension of broadcasting licenses—should be considered as a deterrent.

Most importantly, the U.S. should also initiate a major anticorruption/antikleptocracy initiative, in cooperation with the European Union, to root out malignant Russian economic influence in Europe. America's greatest soft power instruments

are its global fight against corruption and ability to prevent the use or misuse of the U.S. financial system to further corrupt practices. This is the Kremlin's greatest vulnerability and the U.S. has the reach and ability to affect change.

Sadly, when European governments begin to take decisions to suspend media outlets, the Kremlin will cry foul that "free speech" and "media freedoms" have been trampled. If a European Government initiates anticorruption activities, seeks energy independence, or implements banking and judicial reform, media outlets and previously unknown NGOs actively and vociferously work against any reform efforts to enhance transparency. It is perhaps the greatest irony that the Kremlin proactively uses our democratic institutions, civil society and laws to undermine our democracy and erode confidence in our societies. In other words, we can speak exhaustively about Russia's media methods and influence but this is really about how we—the United States and Europe—can strengthen the rule of law and transparency and improve the health in our democracies to fight against this influence. It is our vigilance and our transparency that is needed the most.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Amb. Daniel B. Baer. "Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by Russian Federation in Ukraine." U.S. Mission to the OSCE. October 15, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Nikolai Rudensky, *Russian Minorities in the Newly Independent States: An International Problem in the Domestic Context of Russia Today*. National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia. M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1994. Pp. 58–60.

<sup>3</sup>Foreign Policy Concept (2013): *Kontseptsia vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*.

<sup>4</sup>Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation." The Kremlin, Moscow. March 18, 2014.

<sup>5</sup>Sanita Jemberga, Mikko Salu, Eesti Ekspress, Šarūnas Černiauskas, Dovidas Pancerovas, "The Kremlin's Millions," *Re: Baltica*. August 27, 2015.

<sup>6</sup>See Catalogue, *Russkii mir* Foundation.

<sup>7</sup>Philip Shiskin, "U.S. Sanctions Over Ukraine Hit Two Russian Banks Hardest." *Wall Street Journal*. March 5, 2015.

<sup>8</sup>Springe I., Benfelde S., Mikko Salu M, (2012): *The Unknown Oligarch*, *Re: Baltica*.

<sup>9</sup>Peter Kreko, Marie Macaulay, Csaba Molnar, Lorant Gyori. "Europe's New Pro-Putin Coalition: The Parties of No." *Institute of Modern Russia*. August 3, 2015.

<sup>10</sup>Suzanne Faley and Maia de la Baume, "French Far Right Gets Helping Hand with Russian Loan." *The New York Times*. December 1, 2014.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Ms. Conley. And without objection, the requested information will be entered in the record.

Let me start with you, Ms. Conley. You talked about Compatriot Russians. And obviously, there was pretty fertile ground in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Where else in eastern Europe would there be that fertile a ground, in terms of Russia having influence?

Ms. CONLEY. Again, the Compatriot Policy has an extremely broad definition, so if you love Tolstoy, if you love great Russian literature and music, you are a compatriot, because we enjoy those cultural aspects, the language. So, it has a very broad definition. Clearly, where there are strong ethnic Russian minorities, such as in Latvia and Estonia, it has a particular focus on Russian language, on Russian citizenship. But, in Bulgaria, where networks are very strong in culture and society, it works in a very different way, through business, through the financial sector, through energy, through the media. And so, it is used differently, but it reaches civil society, NGOs, the media, and it portrays a picture that the West is weak and decadent, and its credibility is low, and an authoritarian model is a much better model of governance.

Senator JOHNSON. The question I was really—and maybe somebody else could answer this, is—What other Russian ethnic populations within other countries is vulnerable? Is—any population who is vulnerable, as what we saw in Crimea or eastern Ukraine.

Dr. Aron.

Dr. ARON. Well, there is—

Senator JOHNSON. Your—

Dr. ARON. Thank you very much.

As I mentioned, and as Ms. Conley mentioned, there is the Baltic republics—Estonia and Latvia—from a quarter to one-third of the ethnic Russians. Now, they have some grievances that are legitimate. In many cases, there were or—there is less now, but there were facts of discrimination against them, based on their inability to communicate well in the language of the country. They were settlers, essentially, sent there after the Baltics were reconquered by the Soviet Union, 1944–45.

So, the Russian—there are border areas, especially, with Estonia, Narva, where the Russian minorities are especially vulnerable to this propaganda. And, as I mentioned, the propaganda there is not terribly sophisticated, it is not—I delineated between the two. It is more like the—those last two dramatic examples that I used. Plus, do not forget that they are watching, until recently, until, for example, Estonia launched its Russian channel—they watch Russian TV. In other words, what is fed to domestic audience is also fed, not just to the Russian speakers in Latvia or Estonia, but also in Kazakhstan, where there are millions of Russian speakers, and all over in the post-Soviet Union.

That creates, I think, a vulnerability, because the local elites, or at least until now, did not pay much attention to those people. There was a certain amount of ethnic prejudice. As Stalin was mentioned here, he made sure that ethnic minorities within each of the so-called Soviet republics were vulnerable so that only the center, only Moscow—that they could only look to Moscow to protect them. And, in many regards, that is how it is—remains, and that is what Russia is exploiting.

Senator JOHNSON. Would you, I guess, kind of agree with me that the vulnerability is really related to the economic conditions, as well, where they have got a huge economic advantage of potentially joining with Russia, they are going to far more vulnerable to the propaganda than if they are economically—

Dr. ARON. Well, yes and no. For example, the impoverished mining areas in Donbass and Luhansk, it is not, as they used to say in the Soviet times—it is not an accident that that is where Putin went. In addition to that being heavily ethnically Russian, it is also—

Senator JOHNSON. So, it is a combination of the two.

Dr. ARON. Yes, those areas were in total decline, as mining areas are in most of the world. So, he definitely found very fertile soil there.

I was in Estonia earlier this year, and the Estonians feel pretty good that their miners, who make about 10 times more than their Russian counterparts, are harder to sway than the Ukrainian—or Russian Ukrainian miners. Still, though, as I said, it is not always economic. It is also the voice of the motherland, it is hidden or not so hidden discrimination against Russian minorities, or at least the memory of this discrimination. So, it works a long all kinds of factors.

Senator JOHNSON. You had mentioned these two examples of pretty extreme propaganda, and you said they are proved—the stories were proved false, fake. Who proved them fake? And how was that accomplished?

Dr. ARON. It was proven by—and as somebody mentioned, here—I think, Peter—civil society is a huge resource. This group that I mentioned, StopFake, in Ukraine, in Kiev, is one of quite a few that go after the Russian propaganda, and they actually—these people actually go—and the Ukrainian journalists—they go on the ground, and they interview people. And the—just to mention that story about the—ostensibly, you know, a child—a child and a wife of a pro-Russian separatist being so horribly murdered. They actually interviewed her parents, and they said, “Well, you know, the husband joined pro-Russian separatists, left her without money, and she did it because the Russian television paid her.” So, it is possible to unravel it, but it requires an effort. And that effort has to be encouraged through civil society. USAID, BBG cannot do it. It has to come from the civil society.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. Pomerantsev, we hear reports that Vladimir Putin has very high public opinion approval ratings in Russia. In your testimony, you talked about that really the attitude in Russia is very cynical—high level of cynicism. Can you kind of square those two differences of opinion, I guess?

Mr. POMERANTSEV. Well, the—well, I mean, cynicism in the—look, opinion polling in authoritarian regimes is a very complex thing. You know—

Senator JOHNSON. So, you do not buy it.

Mr. POMERANTSEV. I think we have to look at the environment in which it happens. There are no alternatives, so, you know, Putin is the only one left standing. So, who do you like? Do you like Putin?

No—look, just—cynicism, when you do not believe the facts around you—I mean, “Do you think Putin is corrupt?” People, like, “Yeah.” “Do you think your government is doing well?” “Yeah. But, every government is bad.” But, still there is an emotional, you know, high that comes from victory. Eight-four percent is pretty common for any military leader.

But, listen, there was a great little bit of—a great little bit of research the University of California did about China, about people watching the main news. And in a very, very subtle way, they did sociology, not telling people what they are actually asking. And most people, after they watched the news, did not think the government was good. They thought it was strong. A lot of propaganda is a signal. This is the rules of the game. This is the stuff you have got to say. Nod. Say this, and you can keep your little corrupt business, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

When you do more deep sociology in a lot of these bits of the world, it is a really mixed picture that you get. So, for example, are there Russian soldiers in Ukraine? A lot of Russians say, “Do you mean officially?” That was in sociological reviews. So, you have to go a little bit deeper.

But, without a doubt, I mean, there has been an emotional, you know—you know, catharsis from the Crimean experience. The question is, How deep does that go? Is that like a football match? “Yay, we got Crimea, now where is our food?” Or is that actually something deeper, and will it take us somewhere very, very dark? The parallels in the 20th century are obvious. So, I think that is

what we are all asking ourselves. Is this a momentary high or is this something more long term and much more frightening?

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you all very much for being here.

Mr. Pomerantsev and Mr. Czuperski, it is my understanding that about 60 percent of Russians have access to the Internet, and that the Internet is relatively unfiltered compared to some other dictatorships. So, why do more Russians not see differences between what they see on the Internet and what they see on State-controlled media?

Mr. POMERANTSEV. It is actually interesting, when you look at the Internet. Internet gives us—it does give us some glimmers of hope. So, the Kremlin, since 2012, since the protests against Putin, invested very heavily into the incident, creating these mixtures of entertainment and disinformation, Internet projects, like Life News, which is like a mixture of tabloid, celebrity, fascists in Ukraine. They do quite well, but they actually get the same number of hits as, sort of, Alexei Navalny's anticorruption blog. So, it is a much more equal thing, and it shows that there are Russians who want, you know, evidence-based, fact-based news.

But, listen, it is—nowadays—today's dictators, they do not really work through censorship, they work through putting so much disinformation out there, people cannot tell, you know, the good from the bad, disinformation from real information. A lot of, sort of, authoritarian regimes work this way. You just confuse everyone, and, in that confusion, people cannot tell what they want, so they just go with—you know, they go with the flow.

So, authoritarian regimes across the world have worked out how to use the fact that there are so many different sources of information, for themselves.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Czuperski.

Mr. CZUPERSKI. One of the really interesting things that happened leading up to the occupation of Crimea was that, way before President Putin's strike in Crimea and his "little green men" started appearing, is that, in fact, the biggest social network, the Facebook equivalent, VKontakte, in Russia, with over 60 million daily users, was overtaken forcefully from Mr. Pavel Durov, and overtaken by Kremlin associated oligarchs and businessmen. And that shows you just to what degree, while they might not be censoring entirely the Internet, as Peter pointed out, there is an attempt to try to control what is being released, at what time, and when, and get a deeper understanding of those new networks to understand how to mold public opinion even deeper. So, there is an effort there.

Senator SHAHEEN. Ms. Conley, in your testimony, you say that you do not believe that financing a major U.S.-backed information dissemination campaign would be effective in Russia, but you do talk about the opportunity to explore how to reach and expand loose social networks, which I assume access to the Internet would be an important part of that. So, can you talk a little bit about how you see that happening, compared to what you have just heard from the other two witnesses?



Ms. CONLEY. Absolutely. In conversations we have had with colleagues that are working in the Moscow Bureau of RFE/RL, that, in some ways, there is an attempt to control the Internet. Again, Internet usage in Russia is very much highly urbanized. Less, obviously, rural populations, television and radio is a much greater source of their information, which is very much Kremlin-controlled, but that there are still vibrant networks, using Facebook and elsewhere, and they do crave fact-based information, they do want the truth. To be able to use those networks effectively—but, again, it almost has to grow organically. There is extraordinary distrust from top-down information. But, if we can expand those networks—but, make no mistake, the Duma, in passing regulations and rules, is trying to stop those avenues. There is extraordinary use of cyberactivities to track them, to follow them. We certainly saw that in Ukraine.

So, to allow and support creative uses of these networks, to let that information in, I just think a government, top-down approach is not going to be effective, that we have to be, exactly, innovative, creative, using these networks, and that they can help spread the story, rather than have it come in, as we did it traditionally during the cold war, with large and heavy funding. That is just not going to be how we are going to fight this battle in the 21st century.

Senator SHAHEEN. I mentioned to the earlier panel that we have been doing these series of hearings in the Armed Services Committee about military reform and what the world—the 21st century looks like for combat and war. And one of the points that was made at one of those panels today was that, as we are looking at how to combat this kind of propaganda, it is very much what you have just said, that the way to do that is through network—organic networking that individuals are doing in theater, wherever that may be. So, talk, if you can, a little bit about how to promote those kinds of independent, organic efforts that would spread and help with information-sharing and correcting the story that is being put out by state-owned media.

And, I do not know, Ms. Conley, if anybody else wants to respond to that. Maybe you could begin.

Ms. CONLEY. I am happy to start. Again, I think the challenge is—because so much has been shut down within Russia itself—is perhaps using Russians that have left Russia, but still retain their contacts, their networks, trying to work through them. Again, not to create, again, fulfill the myth of the foreign agents and that contamination of the West, but to allow them to use those—their existing networks to help pull the truth towards them. I think it is using a lot of young people. Again, it is sort of the reverse troll factories, right? We want to use young people and their friend network to try to spread the truth. But, I think we should look to our allies that have ethnic Russian populations within their countries, and try to see where we can reverse engineer and work through those networks to provide the truth rather than the alternative universe that they are presenting.

I will let my other colleagues speak to it, as well.

Senator SHAHEEN. Anyone else want to speak to that?

Dr. ARON. I wonder if I could—

Senator SHAHEEN. Dr. Aron.

Dr. ARON [continuing]. Illustrate something in—

Senator SHAHEEN. Sure.

Dr. ARON [continuing]. Illustrate something that Peter said in response to your question. I think he is absolutely right, the—it is—so far—so far, it is not the Iranian or the Chinese method of actually censoring sites, but overwhelming them with trolls.

And let me give you an example from my own research. I have been very interested in the Russian—ethnic Russian and also Russian-language fighters in ISIS. As you know, Russian is the third-largest language there now, after Arabic and English. And I was doing research on the Internet, and I was directed to the Russian equivalent of Facebook, which was mentioned here, of Vkontakte—an enormous site—by one of the links. And, indeed, I saw my article that—the article I was looking for. But, before I saw the article, on the top-right of that page, I saw a cartoon. It was Uncle Sam with a baby on his lap, clad in a jihadist uniform, with a Kalashnikov AK-47 behind him, so you make no mistakes. And the caption says, “ISIS is a product of America’s two-party system.”

So, this is clearly—every major system now, every major site—social site, unless they are, as you call them, dissident sites, say, you know—who are hanging by a thread. But, if you are an important site, and if you want to make money, and if you want to host, I think it is your obligation to display these types of messages. And then people come to the Internet, they do not know what to believe. And they are constantly being proffered these types of messages.

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes, Mr. Czuperski.

Mr. CZUPERSKI. One of the things that Peter was mentioning is trust, and building trust. And the methods that we use to now report digital forensic research methods that let us verify whether a digital breadcrumb is accurate or inaccurate, I think really speaks to that. And the more we can spread these techniques to the public and journalists, I think, the more impressive we can see results, where we can start growing this trust again in communities that are skeptical toward us.

The most impressive mark of our report was not so much that we created it and it showed us what was happening in Ukraine, but, in fact, that we created the tools for the public to just go out there and verify the facts themselves. And that is what Simon Ostrovsky in writing the story. I am going to show you a picture where he is actually standing in the very spot where that picture—where the picture was taken a few months earlier. And I think that that really highlights that, if we empower a journalist with these new techniques to navigate the digital space, we can really show what is happening, and they will need to do that, trickle down, but let it trickle up.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator JOHNSON. We have 10 minutes left on a vote. Do you want—would you like to keep it going? I will quick go and come back. Is that okay?

Senator MURPHY. Yes, let me try to fit some questions in now.

Senator JOHNSON. Do you want to do that? And I will go vote, and then I will come back.

Senator MURPHY. That is fine.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay. So, you keep it going until then. If you have got to leave, then put it in recess, and I will be back. That make sense?

Senator MURPHY. Sure.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay.

Senator MURPHY [presiding]. Thank you all. And I apologize for not being here for your testimony.

But, I caught, Mr. Pomerantsev, of your sort of rendering of the underlying message of the Russian propaganda campaign essentially being one of nihilism, that there is nothing worthwhile believing in, that, you know, you should not believe their narrative, but you really maybe even should not be our narrative that there is really no truth. And so, if that is the case, if that is sort of the underlying message, then I wonder, as we are trying to decide between these two competing strategies of either seeding a bunch of local narratives versus trying to tell one narrative directed from the outside as to whether we are just effectively feeding into their methodology by putting resources into a variety of different local accounts who are all going to have, you know, some distinct, separate agenda behind them, or whether we are better off attempting to husband our resources together and try to tell one narrative to try to sell a simple truth, like “Russia invaded Ukraine,” like “Russia took down the plane”—right?—instead of investing in all of these disparate story lines, given the fact that their whole strategy is about trying to create lots and lots of disparate story lines.

So, I hear a lot of you, sort of, making this recommendation, that maybe it is not worthwhile to do one big project, that it is worthwhile to invest in a lot of other projects. But, tell me if I am wrong, that sounds like it might actually just sort of feed into their entire strategy, which is not to tell one narrative, is to just try to spread out the narratives as widely as possible.

Mr. POMERANTSEV. You have actually asked the key question that I am wrestling with in my think-tank work. How do we get the balance between talking to every audience in their own language and to what concerns them? Right now, if you come to someone in Natava and try to tell him the truth about MH17, forget about it. It is too late. They are already too confused, too cynical, and too kind of, “Probably the—some masons did it.” You know, they are too far gone in the conspiracy world. If you go and talk to him about his roads, he will listen to you. So, a lot of the time, it is about changing the conversation and talking to people about what is important to them.

However, the secret of us—for us to—as we move forward, is to link that to a larger strategic narrative. And the strategic narrative is actually there to be seized. It is about trust, dignity, all these things that, you know, 1989–1991 were all about. But, we are going to—the skill in the 21st century is going to—to do both. And we are all just figuring out how to do that.

ISIS did the same thing, by the way. ISIS change their narrative for whoever they are talking to. They do violent jihadism to get Westerners to come. In the local world, where nobody likes violent jihadis, they do truth and prosperity. They change their story everywhere.

So, everybody has—and a lot of this has got to do with the nature of media nowadays. It is very fractured. People live in their little ecosystems. So, you cannot just stand there and scream, “The Russians did MH17,” when it is too late. You know, all the research about debunking shows it does not actually work. You know, nobody listens. Everybody is in their little world. So, you have to learn how to talk to people and bring them out of it.

There is one more factor, though. And we have all been talking about, you know, how popular Putin is. And this is something that we have to look at, as well. And here, governments can really help, because it is quite expensive. We have to understand the difference between perception and behavior. So, people in Narva, in east Estonia, will tell you how much they love Russia, how they are offended at being in Estonia. And you are, like, “Where do you want your kids to go to school?” They are, like, “London, obviously.” This happens everywhere. We have to do a very different type of sociology, a real targeted audience analysis that really looks at what motivates people, and speak to that. And you will find that, half the time, they are good Westerners. You missed the start of my speech. I talked about the Instagrams and, sort of, Facebooks, or these very tragic victims of this terrible plane crash, the Russian plane that exploded over Egypt. You look at their lives, you realize, “My God, they are no different to kids in Wichita.” You know? So, we have to learn how to speak to the behavior, and suddenly we will find people’s behavior is much closer to our ideals than the nihilism that Putin talks about.

Senator MURPHY. Other—

Mr. POMERANTSEV. That was a long answer, sorry.

Senator MURPHY. Yes. No, that is fine.

Other thoughts on this? I know, Ms. Conley, I heard you make a very specific recommendation about really not trying to do one big, consolidated project. But, how do you make sure that a more diffuse effort does—just does not add to the static?

Ms. CONLEY. Well, I actually argue that the diffusive nature in the networks is actually an antidote to a very networked approach that Russian influence is showing using all tools at its disposal—culture, the church, every vehicle that they use. And we have to start thinking in a very much network-decentralized approach, where we are tapping into this. We are being much more proactive.

And, Senator Murphy, as you were talking, I almost encounter this same argument with sanctions. You know, “If we do this, we feed into Putin’s narrative of encirclement, ‘We are at war with the West.’” But, we must take actions. He is going to develop a counternarrative to whatever the West does in response to his behavior. And I think that is a challenge we just have to accept and meet. But, if we can be, in some ways, many wares on many levels, from civil society to the government to cultural use—the United States, in many ways, left the playing field after NATO and European Union expansion in 2004, and we have to return to the playing field, being engaged with civil society, being engaged with the media, not just doing technical assistance, but being present and being very proactive and countering a narrative. When that is the only narrative you have, that is what you buy.

And just to comment on Peter's question. In this survey that we did on Estonian behavior, you ask an ethnic Russian in Narva, they—yes, they listen to Russian news, but they are glad that they are in Estonia, for the benefits of Estonia. And I think we have to not overplay this, but also understand that they are, 24/7, being bombarded by lots of disinformation—how the West uses every tool of—it is a soft power, it is attractiveness, but at all levels. And we just have not been that innovative, and we have not been that omnipresent as the Russian *Russkiy Mir*, the Compatriot Policy, has been omnipresent in these societies.

Senator MURPHY. So, let me ask a question about the means of gaining omnipresence. So, we spend most of our time here talking about strategy, and we do not actually spend a lot of our time in this committee—and I can be preachy now that I am the only person here—

[Laughter.]

Senator MURPHY [continuing]. We do not actually spend a lot of time talking about resources. And, you know, the fact is, is that this guy has just a lot more resources than we are willing to devote to this project. And I think, as you correctly identified, this is not just about support for the Broadcasting Board of Governors; this is about building up civil society, because the propaganda does not come from television stations, it comes locally from churches and business groups and nonprofits and all sorts of organizations and individuals that are seeded with money and resources. And we spent the 1950s building up rule of law, building up stable democracies at a time when we were spending 3 percent of GDP on foreign aid. Today we are spending 0.1 percent of GDP on foreign aid.

And so, I will put the question back to you. I am happy to have others comment. I want to have a conversation about strategy, but, if we are going to try to do what Mr. Pomerantsev said, which is to have a subtlety of strategy that both seeds locally-based narratives while also trying to tell a consistent story line, that is just not a question of the right strategy, that is a question of resources. And we do not have it right now. That has got to be a challenge to this Congress, as well, I would assume.

Ms. CONLEY. Thank you, Senator.

I would—first, step one is focus. Mr. Putin has a singular focus. We lack that focus. So, that is step one. And a strategy of reaching and making Europe important to us, making it important to be there.

As far as the resources, again, when we were working so closely with the Baltic states and central Europe as they were looking to their aspirations to join the European Union and NATO, we were everywhere. We were engaged. The Seed Act. We were working in civil society, technical assistance. Now, everyone who has been through that period—and it was a very successful period of deep engagement, a great deal of assistance. We had technical advisors. We were everywhere at—with our European colleagues.

Now it is a success. They have entered these institutions. But, our mistake was, we said our job was done. And we have to understand that all democracies are works in progress. And what we did not realize is that these institutions in central Europe and the Baltics are still young, and democracies can backslide. Hungary is

backsliding. Bulgaria is backsliding. These are NATO allies that we have article 5 treaty obligations for. We have to reinvest in them, in their institutions and their societies. We cannot want it more than they do, but we have to return—and that is very hard to tell the American taxpayer that here is a country—European countries that are doing well, that have joined the euro and that we have to reinvest. But, that is about how we build the antibodies to growing Russian influence, because, if we are not there, Russia will step in.

So, it is a comprehensive new strategy, a reinvestment plan into Europe. And I think that would take a lot of focus and attention that I have not seen to date.

Senator MURPHY. Yes. And again, it is focus and attention. I do not disagree. But, it is also a question of whether we are willing to come up with the resources to do it.

Because we have just a few minutes left on this vote, I am going to pretend like I am back in charge of the subcommittee, and I am going to—I am going to recess it so that Senator Johnson can come back and wrap up. So—

[Laughter.]

Senator MURPHY. Oh, well done. It is all yours.

Senator JOHNSON [presiding]. I walked fast.

Thank you, Senator Murphy.

But, I have got to get my bearings, here.

Mr. Czuperski, one of other questions I wanted to ask you, you—again, there is very compelling evidence—I saw those photos of, you know, the digital footprint. How does Russia suppress that kind of information internally?

Mr. CZUPERSKI. I think the beauty of this is that it is partially hard to suppress. If you are my superior in the military, and I am an 18-year-old lad that just joined the forces, I am doing the most exciting thing in my life, and you are going to ask me to give you my phone. I will give you my throwaway phone, but I am probably going to keep my flashy smartphone, and then I am going to go off into war and start tweeting everything that is happening, because it is so exciting. And so, I think it is hard to suppress this basic human desire of sharing, especially people that are of that generation.

The second interesting point is that at times we have actually seen—some of the camps that we have seen along the Russian-Ukraine border, we have seen that soldiers actually have not been posting and leaving digital breadcrumbs from those specific camps, but the irony was that a lot of these guys have girlfriends that visit them and then post pictures on their behalf later on, once they leave the camps.

So, in a way, I think it is a—it is the beauty of the decentralized Internet. You can only suppress so much, but it is going to keep on breathing and flourishing, one way or the other.

Senator JOHNSON. So, it is hard to totally control society.

We have heard reports that Russia, the government, was threatening families who might have lost a loved one in—particularly in Moscow, but, “Do not say anything to anybody or you will not get the pensions.” I mean, are those reports largely true, or are there

other forms of threats or intimidation that Vladimir Putin is engaged in to try and suppress this information?

Mr. CZUPERSKI. I am not sure which reports specifically you are referring to, but we are aware that the cargo 200s, dead bodies that have been shipped back from Ukraine, back to Russia, times have been put to rest, the people that died, under very strict and muted circumstances, where the families were invited, but not the unit members, and so forth. So, there is definitely a concrete effort within the Russian Government to mute any noise of Russian casualties in Ukraine.

And one of the perhaps most interesting development in this recent year was a new law put in place by Mr. Putin that prohibited Russian citizens from speaking about deaths in times of war.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay. So, it was actually the law in place.

Dr. Aron, you were speaking about the growing effectiveness of Voice of America. And the comment you made was that it was superior to just normal public media outlets. Can you just explain what you are talking about there?

Dr. ARON. Well, it is—I have found—thanks—I have found that—on my trip to Ukraine, I was struck repeatedly by both media and political elites there telling us how much they appreciate the content of both Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty. And there are—how some of the top Ukrainian television networks were actually vying for the content and trying to get the rights to several flagship programs of—television programs by VOA and Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty.

You know, let me give you another example. A top democratic leader of Russia, opposition leader, Vladimir Milov, was visiting here last week, was in my office, and he said, “Without a doubt, of all the unofficial sources of political information and analysis, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, based in Moscow, is by far the most popular and by far the most credible.”

What I have found is the cache of credibility which is extremely highly praised in—I also was in Moldova. And I am sure it is probably the case in other post-Soviet nations. That is utterly precious. That is—you know, I knew that, in theory, but it was very gratifying to see it face-to-face. And this is something that we need to maintain and support.

Senator JOHNSON. Is it the strength of the brand name? Is it the quality of the content? Is it production values? I mean, that is what—I am trying to get a sense—you know, because what we do not want to do, then, if it is the brand, we do not want to change the brand name just to modernize things, if—so that—

Dr. ARON. Well—

Senator JOHNSON. If you understand the thrust—

Dr. ARON. Well—well—well—

Senator JOHNSON [continuing]. Of my question.

Dr. ARON. Well, brand is definitely there, because this was the most popular two stations during—and plus the BBC and probably Deutsche Welle—during the cold war. But, that is for the older generation, while—I was talking to younger people, as well, and they believe that—I think it is all those things that you mentioned. It is the credibility, it is the authenticity of journalistic research. It is the fact that they live by the democratic media rules, that

they will not—and partly also because they are not a government organization.

Senator JOHNSON. You mentioned the BBC. Can you kind of compare the quality, the depth, the extent of BBC verse the Voice of America?

Dr. ARON. Maybe Peter would be better off, being a British denizen.

Mr. POMERANTSEV. Well, the—well, there is hardly anything. The BBC closed its Ukrainian service, and it masterfully scaled down its Russian one. It is now going through a review, where there is talk—I know—you need someone from the BBC to answer this, but I know there was a—they applied for funding to create a BBC Russian language via a 24-hour channel, but probably will not be that. It might be, like, an online thing. So, I think the Brits have realized that, as Heather has stressed repeatedly, that they thought everything was fine in the Russian-speaking world, and, oh, my word, were they wrong. But, you know, you are the last guy standing, basically. The Russian—the BBC Russian operation is tiny compared to what it was.

Senator JOHNSON. In my opening comments, I was talking about my basic sense that, obviously, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, these things were very strong in the cold war, and we kind of almost mothballed the things. I realize it is difficult to answer it this way, but I am an accountant, I like numbers. On a scale of 1 to 10, let us say 10 is the most effective, let us say that is our countermeasures that we were employing the cold war. How low did it go, and where are at right now? And I would kind of like all of you to potentially answer that.

And, Ms. Conley, we will start with you because you were shaking your head.

Ms. CONLEY. Sorry. You know, I think presently our effectiveness on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the most effective, 1 being the least—I think we are at a 3 or 4. I think we are now finally awakening to the magnitude of the challenge, while RT, Sputnik, the purchases of European media markets by Russian oligarchs, we—and all the touch points that Russia's policy of influence reaches—we realize we have an enormous task, the resources are low. I do not think it is an information campaign only. It is a major part of the battle. And shaping public opinion is critical.

But, I just want to underscore to you, Mr. Chairman, that it is bigger than that. It reaches and touches these citizens in business, culture, economics. It really requires an enormous Western, American presence, of which we have not seen and since these countries had, you know, just achieved independence. We have to return to that.

So, I think it is a holistic approach of which the communications is one, but it is more comprehensive than that.

Senator JOHNSON. So, is RT at 10 right now?

Ms. CONLEY. I do not give them—I do not over-give them, but I would say they are a 7 to 8.

Senator JOHNSON. Pretty darn good. How low did we go, if we are at 3 now?

Ms. CONLEY. Well, as I said, I want to be optimistic that we were at a 2 and a 3, because we understand we need to grow and grow



and put resources and focus. But, I think we have a long way to climb before we can be as omnipresent as Russian influence is today.

Senator JOHNSON. Anybody else—

Dr. ARON. Sure.

Senator JOHNSON. Anybody want to—

Dr. ARON. Yes. I wonder—and, you know, displaying my biases of being a governor of BBG—it depends. It depends on the country, it depends on the audience. We cannot say that—as you remember, RT is hardly this, you know, all-powerful, seductive monster. It is—you know, the credible polling that was done in western Europe, I have the numbers; I did not want to bother you with this, but I certainly will provide them.

Dr. ARON. They barely registered. I mean, they are—they barely registered as the—in the first 100th of the most watched television stations.

Senator JOHNSON. But, their target—their target really is not western Europe. It really is—

Dr. ARON. Precisely. They do not—exactly. So, we are mixing things up here a bit. In western Europe, and even in, I would say, central and—say, Poland, or the non-Russian-speaking Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. Very negligible. Russia is not—our Russia—Russia today is not all-powerful at all. In the U.S. market, it is very, very low. Very low. I mean, in—

Senator JOHNSON. But, I guess, really I am talking about the effectiveness toward the targeted market.

Dr. ARON. Exactly.

Senator JOHNSON. And—

Dr. ARON. Well—

Senator JOHNSON. You know, and let us face it, the targets are changing, which is one—

Dr. ARON. It—well—

Senator JOHNSON [continuing]. Of the questions I had.

Dr. ARON. They distinguish between targets. And I think the main target is—you know, RT is a glamour project. RT—you know, as I have written, Putin went to tour their offices, and he said, “This was a project to counter the Anglo-Saxon domination”—I swear to you—“Anglo-Saxon domination of airway.” CNN. Right? But, where the weaponization of information occurs, where it is—actually blends with Putin’s tactical needs, it is Russian TV, itself, the ability to control its content, and the ability to project it on the Russian speakers in the former Soviet Union.

So, in—as I said, in Ukraine, I think VOA and Radio Liberty or Radio Free Europe are doing fairly well. I would say it is probably better than 3 or 4, probably a 5 and 6. But, we are developing. We are a bit behind in a social media, but we create that, and we work on this.

So—but, the point is—and here I agree with Heather—the point is, is that it is a complex issue. The goal of the Russian—propaganda is just one part of it—the goal is to overwhelm Western societies with the cynicism, to show them that, “While we are bad, but nobody is good,” and, as I said in my presentation, to undermine the people’s belief and trust in democratic institutions. It is as simple, but also as grand, as that.

Senator JOHNSON. Anybody else want to weigh in?

Mr. POMERANTSEV. Yes, I would really like to add to this course. We are playing different games. What Russia—and China has got exactly the same idea in its three warfares, a lot of other groups that are seeing—you know, they are looking at the world, “How can we upset the world order as it is now? How can we upset the global commons?” And they have worked out that, if they unify all these things that we always thought were the strength of democracy—open markets, open media, multiculturalism—they can progress and achieve tactical ends. Their power is not: Russian TV over here, Russian TV over here, Gazprom over here. Their power is that, at a key moment, they can unite it all. We cannot do that. But, we have to start thinking about how we are going to manage these new challenges without sacrificing our democratic values.

So, we are playing a different game. They are—it is not about RT versus BBC. It is about a new vision of how you manage your global role versus, you know, a vacuum on our side.

Senator JOHNSON. Are you basically describing the fact that we are trying to defend the entire chessboard, and Russia is going to bring—consolidate those powers on a particular target, on a particular piece?

Mr. POMERANTSEV. And—but, with one grand—

Senator JOHNSON. At a particular point in time.

Mr. POMERANTSEV [continuing]. One grand strategic aim. The aim is never Crimea or Syria. Their aim is you. Yes? They are after you. They want to psychologically prove that America is impotent; therefore, the Pax Americana, for what it still is, is pointless; and therefore, why do we not be more corrupt, more violent, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? That is the ultimate aim. It is a—Syria is a psychological operation, a—rather than a ground operation, in that sense.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. Czuperski.

Mr. CZUPERSKI. You can actually see how they are consolidating what Peter was describing, when you look online into the digital space regarding Syria. Today, you had posts from Sputnik in Russia that they are claiming that more than 2,000 ISIS targets have been hit by Russia, which is absolutely nonsense. But, they do it effectively, because they consolidate all those outlets at the same time and leave a big footprint online that claims Russia versus ISIL, and here is the accomplishments that we make.

And so, perhaps representing the digital generation on this panel, the space that we are most incompetent in is the space that we have created, and that is online. We tweet, but we tweet to send long press releases to someone that, quite frankly, no one really cares about, and we send out YouTube videos that put us to sleep. Whereas, Russia today—today, in fact, is able to claim to have more than 2 billion viewers as the largest network—Russian news network—online. And so, they are just transforming completely the way that you communicate online, while we still use 20th century methods to communicate in the 21st century platform, and that is online. So, we have to transform the way we communicate in that space; otherwise, we are going to lose the battle.

Senator JOHNSON. I will give you each a chance to kind of make a closing comment. But, one of the things I just—you know, in your

closing comments, if you could just kind of address—it sounds like we are making progress. How much more progress do we need to make? I mean, are we on a pretty good path, or do we need to, here, Congress of the United States, allocate more resources, devote more time to push this to the next level?

We will start with you, Dr. Aron.

Dr. ARON. Well, if you do not mind, I just—I will just say what I said before, that the most effective antidote, the most effective medicine is a rich, diverse, and uncensored democratic media environment. Now, I think if we talk about strategy, and not from—you know, rushing from putting one fire after another—the idea is to try and build this type of environment in—where—in places that are most vulnerable to the Russian propaganda. Now, again, it immediately gets to what Heather was talking about. You cannot build a democratic, vibrant media in a society that only half free or half authoritarian. So, immediately, you hit certain institutional walls. But, I think the direction should be that.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Dr. Aron.

And actually, Dr. Aron mentioned a word I was going to ask you, Mr. Pomerantsev, because you said we need a strategy. Can you kind of describe what your concept of that strategy would be in your closing comments?

Mr. POMERANTSEV. Sure. It starts from recognition that in the 21st century, misinformation is a huge problem, that it is a threat to democracy and a rules-based global order. We will need institutions as wide-ranging as the ones we created in the 20th century, a completely different—a supercharged public diplomacy, reinvigorated. New NGOs. We will need NGOs that—for disinformation; in other words, as big as Amnesty International was for human rights. We will need centers of research focusing on the way damaging digital means spread. That is possible to do, but you—you know, Google can do it commercially, but we are not putting any resources, that I know of, into doing it in the foreign policy field.

So, we are actually talking about a completely new set of institutions and practices. We can get into—there is action being taken on micro things, little things, like—little bit more for anticorruption, little bit more for investigative journalism. But, I have not heard of a vision anywhere yet.

So, weirdly, we are way behind. We invented it, as both Maks and, I think, Leon have said, but we are kind of way behind in really understanding the consequences.

Senator JOHNSON. So, we have a ways to go.

Mr. Czuperski.

Mr. CZUPERSKI. So, I think—sorry, thanks—perhaps the most important thing to do as we navigate this new Engagement Age is to equip the public with methods to create something called information defense, as laid out by our friend Ben Nimmo, where we proactively are able to have a set of skills in place ready to debunk facts as they occur. So, the next time a plane downs, we are not falling trap to Russia claiming a certain thing. And the best way to do that is, as Peter said, putting the funding to NGOs, putting the funding to civil society and journalists so they, themselves, can create the tool and develop them further. And especially in the dig-

ital space. If we do not seize the digital space that we created, then we—it is going to turn back onto us.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you.

Ms. Conley.

Ms. CONLEY. Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding these types of hearings. This is how we have to attack the problem and build awareness. We do need a long-term strategy. It is going to require a reinvestment of the United States in all of these countries, with new resources at all levels of society. This is ideological. We like to say this is not the cold war, but it is liberal versus illiberal, cynicism versus optimism, open societies versus authoritarian. This is our great challenge. We rose to the occasion during the cold war. We are going to have to rise to the occasion again using a 21st century toolkit.

But, make no mistake, this is a confrontation of great magnitude. And when the West diminishes its presence, Russia will step in and fill that vacuum, whether that is in Syria, whether that is in Ukraine. And so, that is our great challenge.

And I thank you for holding this hearing and continuing to raise awareness and focus on this issue.

Senator JOHNSON. Well, thank you.

I want to, again, thank all the witnesses for taking the time, and your thoughtful testimony and your thoughtful answers to our questions.

The hearing record will remain open until November 6 at 5 p.m. for the submission of statements and questions for the record.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:33 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

