

**THE ATTEMPTED COUP IN MONTENEGRO AND
MALIGN RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN EUROPE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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THE ATTEMPTED COUP IN MONTENEGRO AND MALIGN RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2017

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:34 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator John McCain (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators McCain, Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Perdue, Strange, Reed, Nelson, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, Heinrich, Warren, and Peters.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman MCCAIN. Good morning.

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning to receive testimony on the attempted coup in Montenegro and malign Russian influence in Europe.

Before we continue with the usual proceedings of the hearing, I am pleased to welcome to the committee Montenegro's Ambassador to the United States who will present an official statement to the committee on behalf of the Government of Montenegro. Mr. Ambassador, we are honored to have you here with us this morning. Please proceed.

STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY NEBOJSA KALUDJEROVIC, AMBASSADOR OF MONTENEGRO TO THE UNITED STATES

Ambassador KALUDJEROVIC. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee. I wish to thank you for the opportunity to address you today on behalf of my government, and I extend especially our appreciation for the committee's hearing on this important topic. Your interest and dedication to the issue of security in Europe, the Western Balkans, and Montenegro in this case, amid the ongoing challenges we are all facing is a considerable contribution in itself to the valued support of the United States to our region towards its future as a full part of the Euro-Atlantic community.

We are talking today about one serious destabilizing scenario orchestrated from the outside that fortunately never materialized in Montenegro on the eve of the parliamentary elections that took place in October last year. The plot in question, which virtually amounted to a coup d'etat, now subject of a trial in front of courts

in Montenegro, consisted of planned terrorist attacks to overthrow the legitimately elected government and to illegally detain or even assassinate the Prime Minister. In the worst case scenario, if the plans had succeeded, there would have been chaos and serious violence and extremely dangerous instability with intention to undermine the constitutional order and institutions of Montenegro. This would also have been a derailment of the progress of Montenegro and the entire region towards NATO and EU integration, which was a presumed motive for carrying out the entire plot.

At this moment, the public trial is ongoing, following months of investigation. The Special Chief Prosecutor in charge of the case has publicly stated that the evidence in this case is “undisputable and ironclad.”

Indictments that include two Russian nationals—evidence points to that, that they were members of military intelligence services—as well as two leading politicians and MPs [Members of Parliament] from the opposition party, Democratic Front, for conspiracy to form a criminal organization and attempt at terrorist attacks, as well as the acts against the constitutional order and public safety. Nine people so far have admitted their guilt via the plea bargain mechanism. Their confessions were included in the indictment. The witnesses identified one of the Russian nationals, former Deputy Military Attache of Russian Federation in Poland, who was declared *persona non grata* in that country for acts of espionage, as the organizer of the plot.

The involvement of Russian nationals is undisputed and Montenegrin authorities are waiting for the feedback from the Russian authorities, which acknowledged the requests, regarding the questions on the involvement of these nationals and their role in the events. By the way, so far, Russian authorities have informed us that one of the other suspects, who is not a Russian national but is currently at large in Russia, is being subjected to pre-extradition background checks following a request for the extradition by the Ministry of Justice of Montenegro. This suspect, by the way, is also banned from traveling outside the territory of Russia.

Had the plot in October succeeded, the instability would have been created not only within Montenegro’s boundaries, but would, for sure, have had a spillover effect in a region that is still not on a fully irreversible path to stability. Gratefully, the opposite the happened. First of all, Montenegrin citizens, once again like at every election since restoring our independence in 2006, have elected pro-NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and pro-European Government.

As we all know, Montenegro joined NATO on June 5th this year, and another spillover effect happened but a positive one. The example of another Western Balkans, or Southeast European, country joining the Euro-Atlantic institutions is immeasurable. It will create a long-term positive effect, offer motivation and encouragement to other aspirants from the region for EU [European Union] and NATO membership, that the prospective of membership in these organizations is alive based on merits, standards and values. No better example could have been given to our region.

Aside from the outcome of this particular matter, Russia’s view on NATO enlargement and the accession of its 29th member is not

a secret, nor is their support to the opposition parties and actors in Montenegro that are against NATO membership. Leading to the elections in October, there was a well-organized and financed public campaign to that effect. But these influences Montenegro experienced before, during, and after elections is not an isolated fact but a pattern based on notions that the facts on the ground could be changed. Membership of Montenegro to NATO is often perceived by some high level Russian officials as a temporary setback through the false narrative that NATO does not have support in Montenegro, et cetera. Therefore, we expect a continuation of pressure both aimed at Montenegro and at the region, especially those countries that have not yet become members of NATO or the European Union.

I wish to point out that Montenegro has been able to succeed in achieving its goals in becoming a member of NATO and a frontrunner in EU accession by working very hard over the past decade with friends and partners like the United States. This is an alliance based on values, and that is why it succeeds. The reforms, helped bilaterally by the United States, part of achieving NATO and EU standards, made our society better and firmly on a right path.

After all, it was thanks to those reforms aimed at strengthening the capacities and independence of institutions to uphold the rule of law that helped those very institutions to tackle such a challenge we are talking about today that would put to test much more established democracies than ours.

Where we did not have capacities ourselves, considering that the attempts were multifaceted, involving propaganda and cyberattacks, we were able to ask our partners in NATO or bilaterally like the U.S. for assistance. As an ally, we will work together with the Alliance on the capacities to address new challenges like these.

We had and do have a right to determine our alliances and our future, which we have always been clear about, as our decisions are based on our strategic visions and goals not against anybody or anything. Montenegro does not pose any sort of threat to Russia and wants to be engaged in conversation, in dialogue, and not in confrontation.

Montenegro in NATO can only mean peace and stability, and expansion of the area of welfare, regional cooperation, and good neighborly relations.

Distinguished members of the committee, what should be done?

The United States role in Europe is extremely valuable and necessary. The commitment to the vision of Europe whole, free, and at peace is as relevant today as it was before. The United States and its European partners should continue to reaffirm at every opportunity the value of transatlantic bond, NATO, and article 5 commitment, as President Trump reinforced that valuable message in Poland a few days ago. As to the Western Balkans, it is crucial to keep countering trends that seems to encourage the countries or actors in the region to find alternatives to the Euro-Atlantic integration and full embracement of values and standards that they bring.

We are thankful and grateful for the U.S. support to our NATO membership, as well as the increasing focus on the

Western Balkans issues. The support by the U.S. Congress—and the Senate has been a particular champion—is very welcome and needed, as well as from the U.S. Administration.

The upcoming visit to Montenegro by Vice President Pence is a strong message that the United States is focused on Europe and an opportunity to show continuous support to the stability and security of the Western Balkans region by supporting a clear perspective of membership both in NATO and EU as the best way to achieve those goals.

On our side, Montenegro will continue to spread the area of stability in the region and beyond and fulfill its responsibilities as a new ally. We are ready to do our part.

I thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Kaludjerovic follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. NEBOJSA KALUDJEROVIC

Mr. Chairman—Senator McCain, Ranking member Reed, distinguished members of the Committee,

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to address you today on behalf of my Government and I extend especially our appreciation for the Committee's hearing on this important topic. Your interest and dedication to the issue of security in Europe, the Western Balkans and Montenegro in this case, amid the ongoing challenges we are all facing, is a considerable contribution in itself to the valued support of the United States to our region towards its future as a *full* part of the Euro Atlantic community.

We are talking today about one serious, *destabilizing* scenario orchestrated from the outside that fortunately never materialized in Montenegro on the eve of the Parliamentary Elections that took place in October last year. The plot in question, which virtually amounted to coup d'etat, now subject of a trial in front of courts in Montenegro, consisted of planned terrorist attacks to overthrow a *legitimately elected* Government and to illegally detain or even assassinate its Prime Minister. In the worst case scenario, if the plans had succeeded there would have been chaos, serious violence and extremely dangerous instability with intention to undermine the constitutional order and institutions of Montenegro. That would also have been a *derailment* of the progress of Montenegro and the entire region towards *NATO* and *EU integration*, which was a presumed motive for carrying out the entire plot.

At this moment, the public trial is ongoing, following *months* of investigation. The Special Chief Prosecutor, in charge of the case, has publicly stated that the evidence in this case is (I quote) '*undisputable*' and '*iron clad*'.

Indictments that include two Russian nationals (evidence points to that, that they were members of GRU—Military Intelligence Services) as well as two leading politicians and MPs from the opposition party Democratic Front, for conspiracy to form a criminal organization and attempt at terrorist attacks, as well as the acts against the Constitutional order and public safety. Nine people so far have admitted their guilt via the plea—bargain mechanism. Their confessions were included in the indictment. The witnesses identified one of the Russian nationals, former Deputy Military Attache of Russian Federation in Poland *who was declared persona non grata in that country for acts of espionage*, as the organizer of the plot.

The involvement of Russian nationals is *undisputed* and Montenegrin authorities are waiting for the feedback from the Russian authorities, which acknowledged the requests, regarding the questions on the involvement of these nationals and their role in the events. (So far, Russian authorities have informed us that one of the other suspects, who is not a Russian national but is currently at large in Russia, is currently being subjected to pre-extradition background checks following a request for extradition by the Ministry of Justice of Montenegro. This suspect is also banned from traveling outside the territory of Russia).

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tion since restoring the statehood in 2006, have elected pro-NATO and pro-European Government.

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Aside from the outcome of this particular matter, Russia's view on NATO enlargement and the accession of its 29th member is not a secret, *nor* is their support to the opposition parties and actors in Montenegro that are against NATO membership. Leading to the elections in October, there was a well-organized and financed public campaign to that effect. But these influences Montenegro experienced *before, during and after* elections is not an isolated fact but a pattern based on notions that the facts on the ground could be changed. Membership of Montenegro to NATO is often perceived by some high level Russian officials as a temporary setback, through the false narrative that NATO does not have support in Montenegro etc. Therefore, we expect a continuation of pressure both aimed at Montenegro and at the Region, especially those countries that have not yet become members of NATO and/or EU.

I wish to point out that Montenegro has been able to succeed in achieving its goals in becoming a member of NATO and a *frontrunner in EU accession* by *working hard* over the past decade with friends and partners *like the United States*. That is an alliance based on *values*, and that is why it succeeds. The reforms, helped bilaterally by the United States, part of achieving NATO and EU standards, made our society better and firmly on a right path.

After all, it was thanks to *those* reforms aimed at strengthening the capacities and independence of institutions to uphold the rule of law that helped those very institutions to tackle such a challenge we are talking about today that would put to test much more established democracies than ours.

Where we did not have capacities ourselves, considering that the attempts were multifaceted, involving propaganda and cyber-attacks, we were able to ask our partners in NATO or bilaterally like U.S. for assistance. As an ally, we will work together within the Alliance on the capacities to address new challenges like these.

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Montenegro in NATO can only mean peace and stability, and expansion of the area of welfare, of regional cooperation, and good, neighborly relations.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

What should be done? The United States role in Europe is *extremely* valuable and necessary. The commitment to the vision of Europe whole, free and at peace is *as relevant today* as it was before. The United States and its European partners, should continue to reaffirm at every opportunity the value of Trans-Atlantic bond, NATO and article 5 commitment, as President Trump reinforced that valuable message in Poland few days ago. As to the Western Balkans, it is crucial to keep countering trends that seems to encourage the countries or actors in the region to find *alternatives* to the Euro Atlantic integration and full embracement of values and standards that they bring.

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Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you, Ambassador, for that statement.

Before you depart to preside over the festivities of Montenegro's statehood day, let me just say I have had the great fortune to travel to Montenegro a number of times over the years. I know the citizens of your country to be a proud and independent people, and that is the spirit you celebrate on July 13th, the day your country earned independence in 1878, the day Montenegrins defiantly rose up against fascist occupiers in 1941.

On this July 13th, Montenegro remains determined as ever to choose its own future. Montenegro has chosen the path of Euro-Atlantic integration. Montenegro has joined the defense of the free world as the 29th member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Someday, Montenegro hopes to join the European Union. The pursuit of this Euro-Atlantic future has not been without difficulty. But Montenegro has persevered and, in doing so, has sent a powerful message to [Russian President] Vladimir Putin and every other tyrant that they cannot and will not control the destiny of free people, not in Montenegro, not in Southeastern Europe, not anywhere else in the world. For that, I hope all Americans will look to our newest ally, Montenegro, with the same sense of gratitude, admiration, and solidarity that I express to you now.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for being with us this morning.

The committee is grateful to be joined by a distinguished panel of expert witnesses: Janusz Bugajski, Senior Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis; Lisa Sawyer Samp, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; and Damon Wilson, Executive Vice President of the Atlantic Council.

As the Ambassador clearly indicated, what happened in Montenegro is perhaps the most disturbing evidence to date of how far Vladimir Putin is willing to go to undermine the West, bully other nations, and achieve his neo-imperial ambitions.

Russia's goals in Montenegro were clear: to stop the country from joining NATO, to reverse its progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration, and to end Montenegro's support for sanctions against Russia imposed after its invasion of Ukraine.

The indictments in this case against the coup plotters in Montenegro read like a spy novel. On October 16th, 2016, Montenegro's election day, the coup plotters planned to storm the parliament, capture and/or kill the Prime Minister, and install a new government. With the coup underway, armed men would ambush and kill members of Montenegro's Special Anti-Terrorist Unit to prevent them from interfering with the coup. To justify the coup, other plotters disguised as police would fire into a crowd of peaceful demonstrators to create the illusion of excessive force by the pro-NATO government.

Two Russian GRU [Main Intelligence Directorate] agents, allegedly in league with Montenegrin politicians and Serbian nationalists, organized the coup plot. One of the GRU officers has been identified as the same man who under a different name served as a military attache in Poland until he was declared persona non grata and thrown out of the country for espionage. Perhaps he was more careful during the Montenegro plot, but not by much. In one case, he sent money to one of his co-conspirators from a Western Union on the same street as GRU headquarters in Moscow.

But that brazenness should not fool anyone. The plot was well along its way to succeeding. If it had not been for one conspirator who got cold feet and informed the Montenegrin authorities, it very well might have.

I believe it is critical that all Americans understand what happened in Montenegro and its implications for our security because, as I said, it shows how far Vladimir Putin is willing to go to advance his dangerous view of the world, not just in Montenegro, not just in Europe, but here in the United States as well.

Russia is embarked on a campaign to weaken the United States, to destabilize Europe, to break the NATO alliance, to undermine confidence in Western values, and to erode any and all resistance to Vladimir Putin's neo-imperial ambitions. He is using the full range of capabilities available to him.

Of course, Putin has rapidly modernized his military and grown increasingly willing to use force to achieve his objectives, as we have seen in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria.

But even more important to the spread of malign Russian influence has been the sophisticated employment of asymmetric, non-kinetic, capabilities. Indeed, Russia's Chief of General Staff has emphasized—"The role of non-military means in achieving political and strategic goals has grown and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."

This is the key insight that underpins Russia's doctrine of, "new generation warfare." It is a strategy of influence, not of brute force. Carefully tailored to local circumstances, it seeks to undermine our societies and our institutions from within through cyberattacks; psychological operations and information warfare; propaganda, both overt and covert; coercive economic pressure, especially using energy exports; targeted use of corruption to buy influence; financing political parties, think tanks, and other organizations; and more.

But even as our awareness and understanding of malign Russian influence has grown, the simple reality is that our response has been inadequate to the scale and scope of this challenge. We have to change course now because Vladimir Putin is on the offensive, and he is enjoying success at relatively low cost.

We must start by responding to aggression Russia has already committed. That is why it is so important that the House of Representatives pass the strong Russia sanctions bill that already passed the Senate by the vote of 98 to 2. It is long past time that Vladimir Putin paid a meaningful price for his attack on American democracy.

We must also develop a coherent and political policy for responding to any future aggression using the full range of U.S. diplomatic, intelligence, military, and economic tools. This is especially true in cyberspace where the United States still has no policy to deter, defend against, and respond to cyberattacks.

We must continue to rebuild conventional military deterrence in Europe. Building on the progress made through the European Deterrence Initiative, we need to repeal the Budget Control Act and make significant and sustained investments to improve the capability, capacity, readiness, and responsiveness of United States forces in Europe. We also have to continue helping our allies better

defend themselves, including by providing Ukraine the defensive lethal assistance it needs and deserves.

We have to keep the door to NATO open for those countries that are willing to do what it takes to join the Alliance and live up to the responsibilities it entails. Vladimir Putin will not let another country go the way of Montenegro without a fight. So we need to begin working with NATO aspirants to help them withstand the inevitable onslaught of Russian pressure.

We also have to begin addressing the vulnerabilities in Western societies, governments, and institutions that Russian strategy is explicitly designed to exploit. Taking on Putin's kleptocracy means enhancing the powers of our Treasury Department to trace and crack down on corrupt and illicit Russian financing that impacts the United States financial system.

Most of all, we have to stop looking at Russia and its threats to our security and our democracy through the warped lens of politics. We cannot allow Vladimir Putin to divide us from one another, weaken our resolve, undermine confidence in ourselves, or erode our belief in our own values. We must take our own side in this fight, not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans.

Ambassador and members of this panel, I know that was a long statement, and I apologize for that. It is very unusual for this committee to have a hearing of this nature. But I believe that it was a near thing. If it had not been an informant on the inside, this coup attempt could very well have succeeded not only with blood shed but with a message throughout the region. So I thought it was important to have this hearing. I thought it was important to have three distinguished witnesses come before the committee so that we have a record not only of what happened, but what we need to do.

With that, Ambassador, you are certainly free to leave, and I would like to welcome our witnesses after a statement by Senator Reed.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, the panel, and Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much.

The chairman is holding a very important hearing on the events in Montenegro and the Russian malign influence threat in Europe. Let me add my welcome to the witnesses and thank them for appearing this morning.

The events in Montenegro are deeply concerning both for their impact within that country and their broader implications. While a full accounting of what happened must await the results of the criminal trial, the case laid out in the Montenegrin indictment already makes clear that these events are a pattern of Russian aggression that has occurred repeatedly across Europe and the United States. Again and again, Russia has used a range of coercive tools at its disposal, including political pressure, economic manipulation, collaboration with corrupt local networks, propaganda, deception and denials, and increasingly military force to try to intimidate democratic countries and undermine the further integration of NATO, the European Union, and other Western institutions.

Disturbingly Russia's plotting with proxies inside Montenegro and the failed attempt to overthrow the pro-Western government and assassinate the Prime Minister marks a dangerous escalation of its malign influence activities.

Additionally, Russia's menacing actions in Montenegro have implications for other Balkan nations including Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. We should do all we can to ensure that Montenegro's accession to NATO sends a clear signal to other countries in the region, that NATO maintains its open door policy so that other countries can aspire to NATO membership without the fear of becoming the target of violent Russian aggression.

The critical question for our witnesses is how the United States and its European partners should counter the Russian malign influence threat.

In January, the unanimous conclusion of our 17 intelligence agencies was that President Putin directed an influence campaign against the 2016 United States presidential election with the aims of undermining the American people's faith in the election process. The intelligence community also warned that the significant escalation of Russian levels of interference in United States and European elections represents a new normal. As long as Moscow believes that their actions in the United States and Europe will be consequence-free, Putin and his associates will continue to escalate Russia's hybrid tactics against us and our partners to advance their interests.

We have a duty to confront Russia over its malign activities to protect our national security. Unfortunately, despite mounting evidence, the White House fails to recognize the seriousness of the national security threat posed by Russia's malign influence activities. President Trump continues to cast doubt on the unanimous collusion of our intelligence community and has failed to direct that the Kremlin be held accountable for its actions to damage our democratic processes.

Numerous witnesses have testified to Congress, including Attorney General Sessions and Secretary Mattis, that they have received no guidance from President Trump on a strategy for countering interference with our elections.

President Trump's recent meeting with President Putin at the G20 [Group of 20 Summit] was another missed opportunity to deliver a clear message to the Kremlin that its attacks on our democracy are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Instead of confronting the President, President Putin, President Trump appeased Mr. Putin accepting at face value his denials that Russia has interfered with the United States elections. This will only encourage further reckless Kremlin adventurism toward its neighboring states and efforts to claim a great power role in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Now is certainly not the time to ignore Russian interference in elections in Montenegro, France, Germany, the United States, or elsewhere and simply move forward.

Fortunately, the United States Senate has stepped up to provide leadership on this issue. Recently an overwhelming bipartisan majority in the Senate passed long overdue Russian sanctions. This legislation would codify existing sanctions and expand authorities

for additional ones. It is now incumbent upon the House to pass the Russian sanctions bill without delay and send it to the President for signature.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about additional efforts that are needed to craft a whole-of-government strategy to defend against and deter this growing Russian threat. Also, I hope you will address how the United States might coordinate with our allies and partners, many of whom have decades of experience in this fight, to effectively counter the Russian malign influence threat while remaining true to the core values and principles that the United States upholds.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Welcome to the witnesses.

Mr. Bugajski, could you begin—either you or Ms. Samp or Mr. Wilson—describe the events that took place again for the record, which is the reason for this hearing and then proceed with your statement?

STATEMENT OF JANUSZ BUGAJSKI, SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ranking Member and the members of the committee.

In terms of Montenegro, you have heard from the Ambassador the details as we know them now.

It should not come really as a surprise to us that Russia is determined to prevent new countries from entering NATO. They have cultivated their relationship with Montenegro for several years in terms of investment, in terms of propaganda, in terms of trying to corrupt the country, and they have basically failed. So one of the last resorts I think for the Russian Government was to try and change the government in Montenegro to prevent that country from moving into NATO.

As I say in my statement, this may be a trial run. We should not assume that this is the only case that Russia is going to try to unsettle a government in the region. In fact, I am sure they are preparing other scenarios of destabilization and government replacement.

So with that said, without going into—

Chairman MCCAIN. Could I just mention that scenario included people in uniform, killing of opposition? I mean, this was a very complex plot with months, if not years, in the planning. That is what is so compelling about what happened here.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. It reminds me a little bit of what happened in Crimea. Remember, Putin denied that they had planned the Crimean operation, the annexation of Crimea. In fact, they had been rehearsing this for quite a while and it has been admitted by Russian sources since.

Chairman MCCAIN. Please go ahead.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Okay. Let me begin by outlining the fundamental threats posed by the Kremlin and then place the Balkans in a broader strategic context because I think it is worth remembering it is not simply the Balkans. It is a wider Europe.

Moscow is engaged in a global shadow war in which the primary goal is to dismantle the West and project Russia as a pole of power

on an equal global footing with the United States. Europe is one of the core battlegrounds of this struggle for dominance, in which Moscow does not recognize the independence or integrity of any targeted state. There are three main components of Moscow's anti-Western offensive.

First, Russia defines itself as a distinct Eurasian pole of power, defending itself against Western encroachment, proud of its anti-Americanism and authoritarianism, determined to delegitimize the Western democratic model, and intent on playing a vanguard role among governments that reject political influence from Washington and Brussels.

Second, a key Kremlin goal is to reverse United States influences within the wider Europe. This would help Putin exert leverage over the foreign and security policies of key states, and unlike during the Cold War, there is no accepted division of Europe into Western and Russian spheres. Instead, numerous states are coerced or enticed either to join the Russian zone, to turn neutral, or to oppose United States policy. Moscow pressures former Soviet republics to relinquish their western aspirations. It promotes conflicts within and between the Balkan states. It fosters and exploits disputes over occupied territories in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, and it subverts members of both NATO and the EU.

Third, while its goals are imperial, Kremlin strategies are flexible. A diverse assortment of weapons are deployed to disarm the adversary, whether energy, business, trade, corruption, blackmail, cyberspace, espionage, politics, religion, ideology, disinformation, proxy conflicts, or outright warfare.

Moscow views both NATO and the European Union as threats to its expansionist ambitions. NATO's commitment to collective defense obstructs Russia's revisionism and its divide and conquer policy. European Union standards of legality and transparency challenge Russia's opaque business model. Western political and human rights standards undermine Russia's autocratic political model. Hence, Brexit and other problems within the EU are welcomed by Moscow as they divide the union, encourage bilateral deals with Russia, and potentially limit further EU enlargement.

Moscow benefits from political, ethnic, and social turbulence in Europe. Lucrative business deals and campaign donations enable the Kremlin to corrupt and influence targeted officials. Democratic regression or the upsurge of nationalist populism favors Russia's objectives by weakening state institutions and deepening EU divisions. Putin appeals both to leftist anti-American and ultra-nationalist Euroskeptics to foster turmoil. During election cycles, Moscow aims to discredit politicians that do not favor its interests. This can involve blackmail, fabricated news reports, and disclosure of stolen personal communications.

Briefly, the Balkan dimension. The Balkans are viewed in Moscow as Europe's soft underbelly where latent conflicts are inflamed, potential new allies courted, and economic opportunities exploited. Russia possesses four main channels of influence in the region: energy, corruption, nationalism, and propaganda. We can go into this in question time if you like because I want to be as brief as possible.

Moscow aims to disqualify the West Balkan states from NATO and EU membership. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, it encourages the Serb entity government to keep the country divided. In Kosovo, it uses the Serbian minority to uphold the specter of partition and blocks Kosovo from entering the United Nations. In Macedonia, it manipulates internal turmoil and the country's obstructed path towards NATO and the EU to gain political influence.

The coup attempt in Montenegro during national elections in October 2016 was organized by Russian military intelligence operatives to prevent the country from attaining NATO membership. The plot was uncovered in time or it could have led to mass bloodshed in Podgorica. While the Russians evaded arrest, Montenegrin courts have begun trials of suspected Serb nationalists, including members of the pro-Moscow opposition. Tellingly, the Serbian Government has been helpful to Montenegro in its efforts to investigate the plot. Belgrade I think realizes that Serbia could face a similar scenario of destabilization if it decides to loosen its links with Moscow.

We must be better prepared for future violent scenarios in the region. The Montenegrin putsch attempt could be a trial run and a warning to the region. Moscow's next conspiracy is likely to be more sophisticated and broad-based, whether to incite Serbian leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina against the Muslim population, engineering ethnic clashes between Macedonians and Albanians inside Macedonia, or provoking Serbian-Montenegrin conflicts. If it serves his interests, Putin would not be averse to igniting a regional war to test NATO resolve, distract attention from Russia's interventions elsewhere, and to undermine the process of Western integration.

Very briefly now, in the Balkans, current security challenges are not simply military, not even primarily military. They are political, ethnic, economic, financial, and informational, particularly where local disputes can be ignited through outside subversion. The United States and NATO must prevent conflict by identifying vulnerabilities, promoting interstate cooperation, bolstering energy diversification, including gas supplies from Azerbaijan, combating Russian subversion, and furnishing steps towards NATO entry.

Paradoxically, Moscow's attack on democratic elections in the United States and in Europe awakened a new sense of realism about Putin's Russia, dispelling illusions about our so-called common interests. Washington must grasp the leadership role just as it did during the Cold War because Europe remains divided and is perceived by Moscow as weak and indecisive. If the United States forfeits its role, we could witness regional crisis not only in the Balkans that shatter European stability and damage the NATO alliance.

My last word is, if you have time, I would like to include my recent co-authored book with Margarita Assenova for the record entitled "Eurasian Disunion: Russia's Vulnerable Flanks." It provides a comprehensive analysis of Moscow's strategies and ambitions toward Europe and the United States. It was published a few weeks ago—a few months ago. I have copies both for the chair and the ranking member.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bugajski follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY JANUSZ BUGAJSKI

Chairman John McCain, Ranking Member Jack Reed, and members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the growing threat from Vladimir Putin's Russia to European security and our trans-Atlantic alliance.

I will begin by outlining the fundamental threats posed by the Kremlin and then place the Balkans in this broader strategic context. Moscow is engaged in a global Shadow War in which the primary goal is to dismantle the West and project Russia as a pole of power on an equal global footing with the United States. Europe is the core battleground of this struggle for dominance, in which Moscow does not recognize the independence or integrity of any targeted state.

MOSCOW'S OBJECTIVES

Putin's Russia is engaged in a concerted campaign to restore a Moscow-centered bloc, undermine the stability of several regions stretching from the Arctic to the Caspian Basin, weaken NATO as a security provider, and devolve the European Union. There are three main components of Moscow's anti-Western offensive.

1. Russia defines itself as a distinct "Eurasian pole of power," defending itself against Western encroachment, proud of its anti-Americanism and authoritarianism, determined to delegitimize the Western democratic model, and intent on playing a vanguard role among governments that reject political influence from Washington and Brussels.
2. A key Kremlin goal is to reverse United States influences within the wider Europe. This would help Putin exert leverage over the foreign and security policies of key states. Unlike during the Cold War, there is no accepted division of Europe into Western and Russian spheres. Instead, numerous states are coerced or enticed either to join the Russian zone, turn neutral, or oppose United States policy. Moscow pressures former Soviet republics to relinquish their Western aspirations, promotes conflicts within and between the Balkan states, fosters and exploits disputes over occupied territories in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, and subverts members of both NATO and the EU.
3. While its goals are imperial, Kremlin strategies are flexible. A diverse assortment of weapons are deployed to disarm the adversary, whether energy, business, trade, corruption, blackmail, cyberspace, espionage, politics, religion, ideology, disinformation, proxy conflicts, or outright warfare.

RUSSIA TARGETS EUROPE

Moscow views both NATO and the EU as threats to its expansionist ambitions. NATO's commitment to collective defense obstructs Russia's revisionism and its "divide and conquer" policy. EU standards of legality and transparency challenge Russia's opaque business model. Western political and human rights standards undermine Russia's autocratic political model. Hence "Brexit" and other problems within the EU are welcomed by Moscow as they divide the Union, encourage bilateral deals with Russia, and limit further enlargement.

Moscow benefits from political, ethnic, and social turbulence in Europe. Lucrative business deals and campaign donations enable the Kremlin to corrupt and influence targeted officials. Democratic regression or the upsurge of nationalist populism favors Russia's objectives by weakening state institutions and deepening EU divisions. Putin appeals both to leftist anti-Americans and ultra-nationalist Euroskeptics to foster turmoil. During election cycles Moscow aims to discredit politicians that do not favor its interests. This can involve blackmail, fabricated news reports, and disclosure of stolen personal communications.

MOSCOW'S BALKAN DIMENSION

The Balkans are viewed in Moscow as Europe's "soft underbelly" where latent conflicts are enflamed, potential new allies courted, and economic opportunities exploited. Russia possesses four main channels of influence in the region: energy, corruption, nationalism, and propaganda.

1. Moscow fosters energy dependence by tying Balkan countries into energy projects, including gas supplies, pipelines, and refineries. Energy dependence can undergird diplomatic and political compliance by exposing countries to blackmail and coercion.
2. Political leaders and businesspeople are corrupted to favor Russia's interests and to either remain neutral or support Moscow's positions in its foreign policy offensives.

3. Local nationalisms are promoted to stir conflicts between rival nationalist projects, undermine support for NATO, the United States, and EU, and strengthen Moscow's role as mediator. This enables the Kremlin to retard the region's progress toward Western institutions.
4. The Kremlin engages in propaganda offensives through local media, internet, and social networks to enhance Russia's prestige and undermine state institutions. Its messages are designed to appeal to Euroskeptic, anti-American, and ultra-conservative elements in which Russia poses as the defender of traditional values.

Moscow aims to disqualify the West Balkan states from NATO and EU membership. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, it encourages the Serb entity government to keep the country divided. In Kosova, it uses the Serbian minority to uphold the specter of partition and blocks Kosova from entering the UN [United Nations]. In Macedonia, it manipulates internal turmoil and the country's obstructed path toward NATO and the EU to gain political influence.

The coup attempt in Montenegro during national elections in October 2016 was reportedly organized by Russian military intelligence operatives to prevent the country from attaining NATO membership. The plot was uncovered in time or it could have led to mass bloodshed in Podgorica. While the Russians evaded arrest, Montenegrin courts have begun trials of suspected Serb nationalist participants, including members of the pro-Moscow opposition. Tellingly, the Serbian Government has been helpful in Montenegro's efforts to investigate the plot. Belgrade realizes that Serbia could face a similar scenario of destabilization if it decides to loosen its links with Moscow.

We must better prepare for future violent scenarios. The Montenegrin putsch attempt could be a trial run and a warning to the region. Moscow's next conspiracy is likely to be more sophisticated and broad-based, whether by inciting Serbian leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina against the Muslim population, engineering ethnic clashes between Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia, or provoking Serbian-Montenegrin conflicts. If it serves his interests, Putin would not be averse to igniting a regional war to test NATO resolve, distract attention from Russia's interventions, and undermine Western integration.

WESTERN RESPONSES

United States and EU officials have claimed that there is no zero-sum competition with Russia over the allegiance of any European country. In reality, the contradiction between a country's freedom to choose its international alliances, which the West espouses, and limitations on state sovereignty, on which Moscow insists, lies at the core of the current struggle. While Putin remains at the helm, Western policy must be geared toward long-term support for the independence and integrity of countries throughout the Wider Europe.

In the Balkans, current security challenges are not primarily military but political, ethnic, economic, financial, and informational, particularly where local disputes can be ignited through outside subversion. The United States and NATO must prevent conflict by identifying vulnerabilities, promoting interstate cooperation, bolstering energy diversification (including gas supplies from Azerbaijan), combating Russian subversion, and furnishing steps toward NATO entry.

Paradoxically, Moscow's attack on democratic elections in the United States and Europe awakened a new sense of realism about Putin's Russia, dispelling illusions about common interests. Washington must grasp the leadership role just as it did during the Cold War, because Europe remains divided and is perceived by Moscow as weak and indecisive. If the United States forfeits its role we could witness regional crises that shatter European stability and damage the NATO alliance.

CONCLUSIONS

The United States and NATO need to be armed for the Shadow War with Moscow. In addition to deterrence, the most effective form of defense is offense with a focus on Russia's numerous vulnerabilities: economic, political informational, and cyber. The Russian Federation faces prolonged internal decay because of its structural, economic, and demographic failures. To deceive its citizens the Kremlin engages in foreign adventures: when it cannot provide bread it offers circuses. The Trump administration can craft an enduring legacy by reversing the Kremlin offensive in Europe and rebuilding a more resilient trans-Atlantic alliance. This would raise the stature of the United States as the most effective international leader and make America stronger and greater.

Lastly, I would like to include my recent co-authored book with Margarita Assenova for the record. Entitled Eurasian Disunion: Russia's Vulnerable Flanks, it

provides a comprehensive analysis of Moscow's strategies and ambitions toward Europe and the United States.

Chairman MCCAIN. Without objection, it will be included in the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[The received publication will be retained in the committees files.]

Chairman MCCAIN. Ms. Samp?

STATEMENT OF LISA SAWYER SAMP, SENIOR FELLOW, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Ms. SAMP. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the committee, good morning. I would like to begin by thanking you for holding this hearing and, more broadly, for the steps the Senate has taken to assert its oversight role and voice related to issues of Russia and Europe, including your overwhelming bipartisan support for Montenegro's accession to the NATO alliance and more recently for the Russia sanctions resolution. I do hope as well, sir, that the House will pass it quickly and in matching form.

With that said, I would like to make two brief points regarding the topic of today's hearing.

First, Russia is becoming increasingly aggressive and ambitious. The coup attempt in Montenegro and Russia's role in it is illustrative, but it is by no means unprecedented. Montenegro was not the first—

Chairman MCCAIN. When you say "unprecedented," I think it was almost unprecedented in the extent and the complexity and the willingness to kill people.

Ms. SAMP. I mean more in these terms of it is not the first time Russia has attempted to undermine the sovereign right of a nation to freely choose its political associations—

Chairman MCCAIN. I got you.

Ms. SAMP.—which we saw in both Georgia and Ukraine. But I agree it was an audacious attack.

Russia's tactics, as you know, are broad in nature. They include things like disinformation, propaganda, cyberattacks. The list goes on. A Polish colleague once described these tools to me as "not the enemy at the gates, but the enemy in your pocket." This was a reference to all the ways that Russia can now reach you through your cell phone.

Putin likely does not want a war with the West, but he is finding he can get a lot done without one. For this reason, he has no intention of stopping now. He is experimenting along the way, growing increasingly comfortable taking risks and getting better.

Three years ago, if you had asked anyone in Washington about the Russia challenge, you likely would have gotten an answer almost exclusively focused on the eastern flank, Ukraine in particular where Putin annexed Crimea and has continued to stoke violence in the country's east. Since then, thousands have died and over a million have been displaced.

Next Monday, July 17, will be the third anniversary of a day a Russian-provided missile brought down a civilian airliner in the

skies over eastern Ukraine killing all 298 people aboard, including one American.

Two years ago, if you had asked the same question about the Russia challenge of either me or one of my colleagues, our answers would have expanded to include Syria where Russia has killed thousands in indiscriminate bombing runs and extended the civil war and distracted from the fight against the Islamic State.

As of last fall, our answers would now have to reference the brazen assault that took aim at the very heart of United States democracy and another that took aim at Montenegro's.

One has to wonder what is Putin up to right now. What is he planning that we will be discussing at a hearing like this a year from now?

The steady drumbeat of increasingly aggressive and opportunistic Russian behavior means we can no longer blame surprise or ignorance for inadequate and slow responses. The coup attempt in Montenegro serves to further reinforce what we should already know, that more must urgently be done to better protect ourselves and our allies from Russia's systemic campaign to undermine the very foundations of Western society.

My second and final point gets at what to do about it. We are not outmatched, but we are being outplayed. I will pause here and ask you to think about why Russia is trying to sow instability and undermine the global order. There has been a lot written on it. I, like my colleague, also just added a bit more, and we have some copies for the chair and the ranking.

But it boils down to an easy answer. It wants to and it can without major consequences. I discuss in more detail in my written testimony the "wants to and can" part of that equation. But I want to pause for a moment and focus on the "without major consequences" part.

The steps taken by the West since 2014 remain insufficient. We are not doing enough to change Russia's calculus. Putin is still seeing more reward than risk. It is, therefore, time to increase the credibility of our threats and promises and decrease our sensitivity to Russia's knee-jerk protest to any and all NATO activity. It is time to draw a firmer line and to speak to Putin in the language he bests understands: power and resolve.

How do we do that? Well, there are no silver bullet solutions precisely because Russian aggression has manifested in so many different ways. We need a combination of measures that aim to shore up our own vulnerabilities to Russian coercion and apply greater pressure to contest it. We need more defense and, importantly, offense across the spectrum of our toolkit. This means shaping a new relationship paradigm that puts more onus on Moscow to comply with international norms rather than simply imposing consequences for breaching them.

What do I mean by that? Well, instead of saying we will lift sanctions when Russia decides to comply with the Minsk Agreements, say that we will raise them until they do. Instead of kowtowing to Russia's supposed spheres of influence, provide Ukraine the lethal assistance it so desperately needs and increase United States support to vulnerable nations in the gray zone. Instead of simply accepting Russia's unfounded claims of Western provocation, recog-

nize the vast disparity in the size of our force posture and exercises and begin to enhance deterrence.

Here it is important to step back and recall that the United States combat presence in Europe is a full brigade strength below what it was in 2012 prior to renewed tensions with Russia and that NATO's largest exercise conducted since the end of the Cold War peaked at about 30,000 troops. Meanwhile, Russia's Zapad exercise planned for later this fall may reach up to 100,000.

Instead of discussing cooperation on an impenetrable cybersecurity unit, we should be doing more to both defend our systems and employ offensive cyber techniques to expose and undermine Russia in the cyber domain.

Instead of delegitimizing or demonizing the free press, we should be doing more to promote accurate and truthful narratives using all the tools at our disposal, including those available covertly.

Instead of casting doubt on the efficacy of our alliances, we should be educating our publics on the importance of the international order and the value of the transatlantic bond. We should be strengthening and investing in NATO, not tearing it down. Our alliances are our greatest foreign policy advantage, and I think it behooves us all to remember that.

Finally, we should be practicing what we preach. The United States cannot be a credible critic of Russian aggression if it does not provide a strong alternative example. Continued United States leadership of the international order is at stake.

Now, none of this means we cannot still cooperate with Russia where it is in our interest to do so like on arms control or nuclear nonproliferation. But we must approach engagement cautiously, selectively, and with firm limits. Changing Russia's behavior will not be quick or easy, but the stakes are simply too high not to try. If Russia can be creative and adaptive, then surely we can too.

In conclusion, Russia may just be looking out for what it considers to be in its national interest, but then we need to do the same. That entails pushing back harder to protect ourselves, our allies, and the international order.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Samp follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY LISA SAWYER SAMP

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to testify before you today alongside His Excellency Nebojša Kaludjerovic, Mr. Janusz Bugajski, and Mr. Damon Wilson regarding the attempted coup in Montenegro and malign Russian influence in Europe.

This testimony is informed by a study conducted in my capacity as a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies entitled "Recalibrating United States Strategy toward Russia: A New Time for Choosing," released in March 2017. It also draws from my previous experience working European security issues on the National Security Council staff and at the Department of Defense. Given the deep expertise of my fellow witnesses on Montenegro, I will focus my remarks on the broader Russia challenge, the response of the United States and Europe, and areas in need of Congressional attention.

RUSSIA'S ACTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

The 2016 coup attempt in Montenegro was not the first, nor likely will it be the last, of Russia's attempts to undermine the sovereign right of a nation to freely choose its political associations—a right Russia itself affirmed in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and reaffirmed in the 1990 Charter of Paris. It represents a single data

point on an irrefutable trend line of increasingly aggressive and opportunistic Russian behavior. To describe the incident as new or eye-opening would be to dismiss all that has come before it. This is not meant to minimize what occurred, but to put it in proper perspective. Given the pervasiveness and severity of Moscow's known offenses, we can no longer blame surprise or ignorance for inadequate and slow responses. The coup attempt serves to further reinforce what we should already know: more must urgently be done to better protect ourselves and our allies from Russia's systemic campaign to undermine the international system that would hold it accountable to the rule of law and deny its desired spheres of influence.

President Putin has amassed a robust global toolkit comprised of a variety of conventional and unconventional tactics, to include disinformation and propaganda, cyber attacks, economic coercion, political subversion and election meddling, deniable forces in the form of "little green men," nuclear saber-rattling, aggressive air and sea maneuvers, and other malign activities. These tactics are designed to circumvent United States and NATO redlines, confuse traditional response options, and use the virtues of the West against it. Russia has experimented with the application of these tactics in varying combinations and at mutable levels of intensity—leveraging just enough to create chaos and sow instability in an effort to undermine the international system.

What began primarily as a challenge along NATO's eastern flank has steadily expanded outward, subverting Western interests and influence in all directions. To the North, Russia has increased its military presence in the Arctic and laid formal claim to 460,000 square miles of Arctic ocean seabed.¹ To the East and South, Putin has employed military force in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. In Ukraine, he annexed Crimea and continues to sow violence in the country's east. Thousands of Ukrainians have died and over a million have been displaced. We must also not forget the 298 people, including one American, who were killed when a Russian-provided anti-aircraft missile brought down a civilian airliner in the skies over Eastern Ukraine. In Syria, Russia's support for the Assad regime has extended the civil war, distracted from the fight against the Islamic State, and exacerbated human suffering. Russia is also a strategic ally of Iran and a key trading partner. Its interest in selling \$10 billion worth of arms to Iran—including T-90 tanks, artillery, aircraft, and helicopters—would increase Tehran's military capability at a time when its malign activities are already having significantly destabilizing effects across the Middle East.² In Asia, there is growing evidence that Russia is supplying weapons to the Taliban in Afghanistan.³ It is also expanding its military and energy cooperation with China and India; moves that seek to advance its interests while challenging the influence of the United States in the region.

Compounding all of this, Russia's attempts to confront the United States in the cyber and space domains could have dangerous implications for how Americans live and fight, according to former U.S. director of national intelligence James Clapper.⁴ Its violation of the INF [Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces] treaty and nuclear saber-rattling, likewise, raise worrying questions about Russia's commitment to strategic stability and to the norms that have preserved a certain degree of caution in public discussions related to nuclear weapons.

Russia's malign influence has also crossed an ocean to strike at the heart of United States democracy with its interference in the 2016 presidential election. This brazen action shows that Putin is only becoming more emboldened with time and growing increasingly comfortable taking risks. Efforts to minimize or downplay Russia's attack against the United States only increases the likelihood that similar and more ambitious election interference will occur in the future, including against our closest allies in Europe. Efforts to "move on" or ignore the incident do not serve long term U.S. interests.

¹ Carol J. Williams, "Russia claims vast Arctic territory, seeks U.N. recognition," *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 2015.

² "Russia and Iran in talks over \$10 billion arms deal: RIA," Reuters, November 14, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-iran-arms-idUSKBN1390UM>

³ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top United States general confirms," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/04/24/russia-is-sending-weapons-to-taliban-top-u-s-general-confirms/?utm_term=.639d8c8b979f.

⁴ Tess Owen, "US Spy Chief Warns of Space Wars, North Korean Nukes, and Cyber Threats," *Vice News*, February 9, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/us-spy-chief-warns-of-space-wars-north-korean-nukes-and-cyber-armeddon>.

UNDERSTANDING RUSSIA'S MOTIVATIONS

Why is Russia seeking to undermining the existing international order by sowing instability abroad? The answer is simple: It wants to and it can, while reaping more rewards than consequences.

First, it wants to for a variety of reasons that reflect a combination of: (1) Putin's domestic political calculations; (2) a desire to right historical wrongs borne of the "humiliation" that ensued following the end of the Cold War; (3) longstanding distrust of Western intentions, especially as it relates to NATO enlargement, that engender a zero-sum world view in which American's gains are seen as Russia's losses and vice versa; and (4) the need to protect a geopolitical sphere of influence that is seen as central to Russia's own security.

Second, Moscow is now more able to act on these motives than in the past due to a mix of growing strengths inside Russia and growing weaknesses inside the West. Russia, for its part, has partially recovered from the collapse of the Soviet Union. High energy prices in the 2000s helped stabilize the economy, and Putin's consolidation of political power has minimized domestic opposition that might otherwise constrain a confrontational foreign policy. Moscow's reinvestments in its armed forces since 2008 have helped Russia reemerge as a formidable military power. Though not a peer competitor to the United States military, the Russian military does enjoy local superiority across the span of its western borders in Europe. This, combined with the creative employment of niche capabilities and a low bar for the use of force, allows Russia to play to its advantages and yield considerable bang for its buck—especially since destabilization is a comparatively limited and achievable goal.

For the West's part, we have failed to adequately invest in the health of our democracies, institutions, and defenses. The end of the Cold War lulled Western societies into complacency and promoted a misguided faith in the sustaining power of good intentions absent proper upkeep. Russia has exposed and exploited the cracks in our foundation, likely with more success than even it thought possible.

Russian disinformation campaigns, for example, benefit from domestic political efforts to delegitimize or demonize the free press and intelligence agencies. Russian attempts to break Western unity is abetted by populist narratives that cast doubt on the efficacy of our alliances and institutions. Russian political and economic coercion is helped along by the ease with which assets can be held in obscurity in developed democracies and by illiberal trends that spurn transparency and oversight while rewarding corruption. Russian military threats and posturing are made more threatening by Europe's lack of defense investment and military readiness. Russian manipulation and whataboutism is legitimized by Presidential statements that draw moral equivalencies between the West and Russia. Instead of educating our publics—who have largely forgotten why NATO and the European Union were created—on the importance of the international order and the value of our alliances, some in our own societies are eager to turn public unawareness into anger in exchange for short term political gains. Sadly, Russia can only look at this and laugh.

The final piece of the equation is that Russia's current incentive structure appears to encourage more action rather than less. In other words, it is reaping more rewards than consequences. Consider, for example, that Ukraine and Georgia's progress toward NATO membership appears indefinitely stalled; Russia now controls Crimea; transatlantic cohesion is straining under the growing political divisions; and Assad has been pulled back from the brink. Meanwhile, Putin is more popular at home than ever. Sanctions have proven a convenient scapegoat for greater structural problems within Russia's economy. Russia's status as an international power player has been renewed. Russia's pattern of provocative behavior will not change until the West imposes greater consequences—until Moscow sees more risk than reward.

UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN RESPONSE

Following Russia's 2014 aggression in Ukraine, the United States and its allies imposed diplomatic and economic sanctions against Russia and quickly established an enhanced and persistent air, land, and sea presence in Eastern Europe to reassure nervous allies. All of these measures have evolved from their initial formulation.

The United States sanctions levied against Russia in response to its seizure of Crimea and continuing support of violence in Eastern Ukraine were matched by the European Union, along with every non-EU member of NATO (with the exception of Turkey) and major non-NATO partners Australia, Japan, and South Korea. It is the participation of partners and allies that has given the sanctions their bite. The trade in goods between the EU and Russia in 2015, for example, totaled \$222 billion. This

is compared to \$22 billion between the United States and Russia. In late December 2016, President Obama authorized additional United States sanctions in response to Russia's cyber operations aimed at the presidential election. President Trump could rescind these sanctions, imposed by Executive Order, at any time. Should the United States unilaterally pull its support, the international sanctions regime would likely collapse in short order.

In the security realm, NATO agreed to assurance and deterrence measures at the 2014 Wales Summit and the 2016 Warsaw Summit that aimed to enhance alliance readiness against all threats. These efforts include additional force presence in NATO's east, enhanced training and exercises, prepositioned equipment, and military infrastructure improvements. The most recent commitments have transitioned the alliance from reassurance-focused measures to those that seek to establish a longer-term credible deterrence in NATO's east. This includes, among other things, expanding the number of troops in each Baltic State from a company-sized force (approximately 150 troops) to a more capable battalion-sized force (approximately 1,000 multinational troops); updating war plans; reconfiguring prepositioned equipment to support war plan requirements (as opposed to training and exercises); standing up a rapid reaction force that would be able to quickly surge reinforcements in a crisis; establishing eight reception and staging centers along NATO's eastern flank to receive those reinforcements; updating alliance threat assessments; improving logistics to reduce barriers to the freedom of movement for troops and equipment across Europe; and reinvesting in the defense capabilities needed for territorial defense (vice expeditionary operations).

Much of the United States contribution to broader NATO assurance and deterrence efforts—known collectively as the Readiness Action Plan—has been funded by the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and conducted under the auspices of the Defense Department's Atlantic Resolve mission. ERI was initiated in fiscal year (FY) 2015 as a \$1 billion appropriation within the Defense Department's Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget.⁵ Former President Obama's fiscal year 2017 budget request proposed quadrupling ERI funding to \$3.4 billion, up from \$789 million in fiscal year 2016, in acknowledgement of the threat Russia poses to United States interests in Europe.

Despite continuing to reside in the one-year OCO budget, ERI is now considered a multi-year effort aimed at enhancing the United States presence, capability, and readiness in Europe after decades of decline. The most recent defense authorization bill would further expand ERI to a total of \$4.8 billion, allowing for additional prepositioned equipment and infrastructure investments. ERI does not aspire to return the United States to a Cold War-era posture. It does, however, aim to allow the United States to better defend its interests and allies and to begin to contend with Russia's military advantages in Eastern Europe by taking steps deemed minimally necessary for credible deterrence. These steps are prudent given the security environment and are neither hostile nor provocative toward Russia, regardless of Moscow's reflexive cries to the contrary.

The sum total of the measures taken by the United States and its European allies since 2014 are a good start, but they are not enough to adequately manage the Russia challenge. Notwithstanding rotational increases made possible through ERI, the United States Army combat presence in Europe remains a full brigade strength below what it was in 2012—prior to renewed tensions with Russia. Defense spending among NATO allies (not including the United States) will collectively increase by 4.3 percent in 2017 with a total increase of \$46 billion since 2014, though arguably this can and should be happening more quickly in certain cases.⁶ The European Union (EU) has held firm on sanctions (recently renewed through January 2018), though the \$11 billion, 745-mile Nord Stream 2 pipeline project remains a possibility—in violation of both the spirit of the sanctions and stated EU desires to diversify away from Russian gas supplies. Energy cooperation is likewise expanding between Russia and the increasingly autocratic governments in Turkey and Hungary.

Given that Russia's malign influence continues unabated and with growing ambition, the yardstick for measuring the success of the Western response can no longer be the ability to reach and maintain consensus around a NATO table. Rather, it

⁵ White House, "Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other United States Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners," June 3, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support>.

⁶ Ellen Mitchell, "NATO pledges to up defense spending after Trump pressure," *The Hill*, June 28, 2017. <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/339832-nato-pledges-to-up-defense-spending-after-trump-pressure>.

must be tied to outcomes; i.e., changing Russia's behavior. There remains much that can be done to press the West's advantages vis-à-vis Russia without sparking a conflict or even coming close. It is time to draw a firmer line—to decrease our sensitivity to Russia's reflexive protests and increase the credibility of our threats and promises. As Lenin reminds us about the Russian attitude toward power, "You probe with bayonets. If you find mush, you push. If you find steel you withdraw." A steel spine is required in defense of the international system that has served the United States and its allies so well over the past 70 years.

THE WAY FORWARD

I, along with my co-authors, offer a comprehensive strategy for managing the Russia challenge in a CSIS report entitled "Recalibrating United States Strategy toward Russia: A New Time for Choosing." This strategy seeks to strengthen Western institutions, contest Russia's aggression, and pursue cooperation where advantageous and feasible (such as in the areas of arms control and nuclear nonproliferation) without degenerating into endless accommodation.

Without recreating that work here, I wish to highlight a few of the high priority recommendations that Congress can advance:

- *Pass the Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017.* The Senate's overwhelming bipartisan support (98–2) for the "Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017" in Senate Resolution 722 on June 15, 2017, is a necessary and appropriate step that will ensure Russia continues to be held accountable for its aggressive and destabilizing actions; further deter it from undertaking similar acts in the future; and positively assert Congress's vital oversight role in matters pertaining to United States national security.

Beyond codifying the current sanctions regime, the Senate resolution seeks to dissuade those that would do business with the Russian intelligence and defense sectors, a vital element of the legislation that would both further punish Russia for its interference in the 2016 United States elections and inhibit the growth and development of its defense capabilities. The legislation also expands sanctions related to Russia's energy sector and further restricts access to debt financing; levies new sanctions against Russian actors engaged in corruption and human rights abuses, and those supplying weapons to the Assad regime or conducting cyberattacks on behalf of the Russian Government; and, importantly, authorizes assistance to allies and partners in Central and Eastern Europe to counter malign Russian influence and disinformation. These are needed steps that will help provide the United States with leverage in managing the Russia challenge.

The United States Congress—Republicans and Democrats alike—must unite to send a clear message to Russia and others that our core democratic practices are not a playground for bullies and dictators—that we will punish and oppose any violation of our sovereignty and that of our allies and partners. The United States House of Representatives should take immediate action to pass a matching resolution.

- *Increase and optimize the United States conventional military presence in Europe.* United States forces in Europe today are not adequate to deter Russian aggression at a remaining level of risk that should be acceptable to United States policymakers or members of Congress. This does not mean that the United States should return to the massive Cold War-era military presence it once kept in Europe. There are reasonable steps, however, that could be taken to enhance the credibility of our deterrence in Europe. To start, The United States should forward station an armored brigade combat team and additional Army enabling units in Europe; restore a full-strength combat aviation brigade; retain at least six Air Force fighter squadrons in Europe with the ability to rapidly flow in more aircraft as necessary; and ensure a robust naval presence in and around European waters. There should be at least as many combat forces in Europe today as there were in 2012.

The European Reassurance Initiative—or rather its successor, the European Deterrence Initiative—will need to continue to be funded at similar or slightly higher levels and should be codified in the Defense Department's base budget, rather than be considered as part of the Overseas Contingency Operations account. This will provide greater stability and predictability to the Defense Department's Europe planning. The Russia threat is not going away anytime soon and the budget should reflect this reality.

- *Support Ukraine and other partners in the so-called gray zone.* The United States has committed more than \$600 million in security assistance to

Ukraine—the cornerstone of which is train, equip, and advise efforts that help build the capacity of Ukraine’s forces, while also advancing institutional reform. Ukraine will require additional support—conditioned on its continued progress in implementing necessary anticorruption and transparency reforms—across the spectrum of its security, economic, and governance needs.

Congress should continue the authorization of lethal aid to Ukraine as a signal of support for necessary policy changes that would increase the costs to Russia for any further aggression. Also needed is greater engagement with and support to the other vulnerable non-NATO partners in the Caucasus, Balkans, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe as a means to check Russia attempts to undermine their sovereignty and foment regional instability. Funding for State Department resilience efforts in Europe will be key.

A REINFORCEMENT MODEL FOR DETERRENCE IN EUROPE

NATO’s conventional deterrence strategy in Europe is based upon a reinforcement model that depends on: (1) small, yet capable, tripwire forces; (2) rapid-response forces that can be mobilized on short notice; and (3) the ability to get follow-on forces to the fight quickly. While much of the alliance’s focus has been on ground forces, the United States and its allies would also be expected to surge air and naval forces to the region in a crisis, both of which add significant capabilities to counter Russia.

- The tripwire forces in the Baltic States and Poland are known as NATO’s *Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)*, which began deploying in February 2017 and recently reached full operational capability. The eFP is comprised of four multinational battalions, or battlegroups, led by the United States (in Poland), the UK (in Estonia), Canada (in Latvia), and Germany (in Lithuania), with contributions from several other nations augmenting or in some cases rounding out the deployments by these framework nations. NATO’s eFP framework essentially replaces the continuous United States deployments of company-sized elements to each of the Baltic States and Poland. The United States troop presence that was once thinly spread across the eastern flank is smartly being consolidated in Poland as the United States-led eFP battalion. Outside of the eFP framework, the United States has separately deployed to Poland elements of a rotational armored brigade, which will have other elements available for exercises and training elsewhere. Additionally, NATO has established eight *NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIUs)* in countries along NATO’s eastern flank—the three Baltic States, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary—that will be able to act as rapidly expandable reception and staging centers for arriving reinforcements.
- The rapid response forces are comprised of NATO’s *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)*, an approximately brigade-sized multinational force led on a rotational basis by participating allies; headquarter elements comprising NATO’s Rapid Deployable Corps; and other immediately available support elements found within the NATO Force Structure. The United States Army forces permanently stationed in Europe—the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (Stryker brigade) based in Vilseck, Germany, and the 173rd Airborne brigade based in Vicenza, Italy—would also be able to quickly respond in a crisis, along with the United States’ rotational armored brigade, made possible by ERI. Given NATO’s requirement for political consensus before deploying the VJTF, the U.S. Forces would likely be the most readily available first responders in certain contingencies.
- The follow-on forces would be comprised of forces based in the United States that could relatively quickly fall in on the war-fighting equipment that has been prepositioned in Western Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium). These *Army Prepositioned Stocks* were added under the fiscal year 2017 ERI. Follow-on forces could also potentially include the expanded *NATO Response Force*, including its Initial Follow-on Forces Group and its air, maritime, and SOF components, along with any allied national forces joining the fight.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you.
Mr. Wilson?

**STATEMENT OF DAMON WILSON, EXECUTIVE VICE
PRESIDENT, THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL**

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee. I want to begin and bed this in a little bit of the story of understanding what happened and why it matters.

In June 2014, NATO foreign ministers met in Brussels to consider Montenegro's accession to NATO. Just 3 months prior, the Russian Federation had annexed Crimea. So many argued at the time that the NATO's decision to invite Montenegro into the Alliance was not only merited on its own terms, but would also contribute to a decisive response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Others, however, urged delay, emphasizing de-escalation of the crisis unfolding in Ukraine.

In the end, it was ambivalence among key allies and, frankly, opposition by the United States that led the Alliance to punt the decision, agreeing to reconsider the issue by the end of 2015, which would be 18 months later.

So as NATO ministers failed to reach consensus on Montenegro that tumultuous summer, Moscow saw an opening. NATO had blinked. With the successful seizure of Crimea and the emergence of what the Kremlin believed would become Novorossiya, Russia was on offense. The West was stunned, and true to form, Moscow's success emboldened the Kremlin to pursue further success. The thinking in Moscow was that the seizure of Ukrainian territory would surely block Ukraine's move towards NATO and the EU. But might the Kremlin also be able to stop the integration process in Southeast Europe?

So it is during this period that the plot for Montenegro was hatched when Aleksandar Sindjelic, the leader of the paramilitary Serbian Wolves, began Serbian fighters to fight in Ukraine, himself included. It is there that Russian nationalists introduced him to two Russian military intelligence agents, GRU agents, Eduard Shirokov and Vladimir Popov. Open source reporting provides a compelling case that the GRU and its associates were directly involved in orchestrating the attempted coup. Sindjelic received money from these Russian contacts to purchase weapons and supplies used in the Montenegro operation and to recruit participants. The details are sensational, and since, Senator McCain, you asked, I will add a few more of the details to put that in the record.

We should remember that this was plan B. Plan A was for the Russians to tip the balance of the elections. I have had the opportunity to travel to Montenegro regularly, almost every year for the past several years, and in the run-up to this election, it was pretty remarkable to see street signs, billboards all across the country anti-NATO campaign. So the plan was to defeat the pro-NATO forces in this election through using the Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, a telecommunications company, and a media empire. This small country of 600,000 was flooded with resources to tip the balance. In fact, the main Serbian opposition party was not radical enough, and the Russians sidelined them, picked a fringe party called the Democratic Front and, through its resources, it went from being irrelevant on the Montenegro political

scene to now being the leading opposition. Two of its leaders now are being tried for the coup attempt. That was plan A.

Plan B was that on October 16th, 2016, if the pro-NATO forces were to succeed at the election, to enter parliament dressed as Montenegro security services, open fire on opposition supporters that the organizers had cynically gathered and called to convene in front of the parliament themselves, kidnap or assassinate the Prime Minister, declare the elections invalid, and install the Democratic Front taking power, this followed very rapidly by a series of very strange developments.

On October 24th, after Serbs doubting it, announced that they had found complicit information about co-conspirators in Belgrade. 2 days later, the head of the—Patrushev, the head of the Russian National Security Council, arrives in Belgrade, supposedly privately to apologize for a botched operation, but also to provide cover for the deportation of two Russians that departed Belgrade, some just before and some again on November 11th. December 12th, Lavrov is there seen pictured with one of the co-conspirators in this coup.

It is a spy novel. It is hard to believe.

If the coup would have succeeded, it would have dealt an immeasurable blow to the Alliance. It would have brought a halt to the process of NATO enlargement as well.

This incident is part of Russia's strategy to make the world safe for autocracy and kleptocracy. Russia seeks to reverse the Cold War order and undermine both NATO and the EU from within through malign influence operations.

In response, the United States and the European Union have enacted tough sanctions. I very much support the congressional effort to toughen those sanctions with the bill that is pending. But sanctions should be part of a strategy rather than the strategy. This administration has yet to articulate clearly the nature of the Russian challenge, much less the strategy to counter it. Nonetheless, I believe the key elements of a response are in place or within reach.

To tackle malign Russian influence, I would advocate a five-part strategy: promoting prosperity, bolstering our defense capabilities, pursuing a concerted engagement strategy exposing Russian actions, and anchoring our actions and our ideals. That is offering our vision of what it is we are seeking to achieve rather than simply countering Russian moves.

Russia is able to advance its malign influence where there is a nexus of corruption, organized crime, and under-development. To tackle this, the head of an allied intelligence service recently told me that prosperity is the best antidote, as it increases the resilience of nations particularly in the Balkans and Southeast and Eastern Europe.

I think this is why President Trump's endorsement of the Three Seas Initiative in Warsaw is important. It is an initiative that brings together the 12 EU member states between the Adriatic, the Baltic, and the Black Seas with the aim of advancing cross-border energy, transportation, and telecommunications infrastructure to better integrate their economies, unlock growth potential, and ensure that Russia cannot hold their economies hostage. This is why

the congressional move to lift restrictions on LNG [Liquefied Natural Gas] exports to Europe is so important as well.

So I actually believe an American prosperity agenda should advance U.S. investment in the region, putting economic ties on par with our security ties. It is entrepreneurship, after all, that provides jobs outside the control of political patronage networks, which are subject to Russian manipulation.

Second, we need to project our military strength as a stabilizing force. The \$4.8 billion European Deterrence Initiative request is a great contribution, especially on the eastern flank. But just as we have positioned forces, modest forces, in the east, we should do so in the southeast. This means transforming our forces that are in KFOR [Kosovo Forces], modest as they are, at Camp Bondsteel into what I would call a permanent presence to project security throughout the region and bolstering Black Sea security by approving the pending Patriot sale to Romania and providing lethal military assistance to Ukraine and Georgia.

Third, the United States needs a sustained diplomatic offensive in the region. Our engagement is too episodic and not at a sufficient political level. Vice President Pence will soon visit Tallinn, Podgorica, and Tbilisi where he can follow up on the Three Seas prosperity agenda and I hope announce more steps to bolster our security commitments. But even as we work to ensure Montenegro's NATO membership is a success, we should have a diplomatic strategy that pursues a historic rapprochement with Serbia that ends Belgrade's dangerous hedging, which is why President [Aleksandar] Vucic's visit to Washington next week is so important.

The United States should also resume its leadership in resolving the name dispute between Greece and Macedonia, paving the way for the latter's membership in NATO. To start, we should welcome the Greek Prime Minister to Washington to ensure Athens is a partner rather than an obstacle in the region, not tempted by Russian manipulation.

Fourth, the most effective means to counter Russian malign influence is to expose it. As our electorates become educated on Russian influence operations, they become inoculated to its impact. This is why the Atlantic Council just last week in Warsaw convened the first-ever Open Source Summit to train journalists and activists on using unclassified techniques to expose and combat Russian influence. Through this work, we have been able to document in great detail what unfolded in Montenegro in an unclassified setting. We need to empower this type of work across the Alliance as it makes our democracies more resilient and our electorates less susceptible to manipulation.

But most importantly, I think we need to keep our values as our guiding star and restore a credible vision of a Europe whole and free. Our message should be clear that as a result of reforms at home, all European states can ultimately be part of a secure and prosperous transatlantic community. Advancing a Europe whole and free should be a central plank of a broader effort to rally the West, as President Trump perhaps suggested in his Warsaw speech. I prefer the term "free world" to connote our community is not one of geography but one of ideas. Senator McCain, you put it,

defense of the free world is the purpose where we try to rally folks around democratic institutions, rule of law, free media.

As part of this strategy, the United States itself must remain a force for integration, not fragmentation in Europe. We cannot be ambivalent about this. We should never become an enabler of the Kremlin strategy to divide and weaken the European Union.

Excluding the invasions of Ukraine and Georgia, the coup in Montenegro may be among the most brazen of Russia's influence operations. Its significance is that the Russians almost got away with it. But it is not unique. There are incidents. In October 2014, Russian Cossacks entered Banja Luka poised to intervene if Milorad Dodik had lost his election. Arms caches have been found in Hungary with ties to GRU agents. Russian fingerprints are on spectacular kidnappings in Estonia, instability and violence in Macedonia, efforts to stoke separatism in Gagauzia in Moldova, and to delegitimize Kosovo as a state, on top of the financing of extreme political parties across the continent.

The Kremlin has drawn its own lessons from the muted response of the free world. I think it is important that we must end the cycle of impunity, continuing to raise the costs of not only Russia's actions in Ukraine, but also its interference in our democratic societies, even as we work to eliminate the opportunities for its malign influence throughout Europe.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wilson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY DAMON M. WILSON

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee:

In June 2014, NATO foreign ministers met in Brussels to consider Montenegro's accession to NATO. Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was working hard toward a consensus that Montenegro would be invited to begin accession talks to become NATO's next ally.

Just three months prior, the Russian Federation had annexed Crimea. Many, including me, argued at the time that a NATO decision to invite Montenegro into the Alliance was not only merited on its own terms, but would also contribute to a decisive response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Others urged a delay, emphasizing de-escalation of the crisis unfolding in Ukraine.

In the end, ambivalence among key allies and opposition by the United States led the Alliance to punt, forcing an exasperated Secretary General to announce that NATO would reconsider the issue by the end of 2015, 18 months later, removing this decision from the agenda of NATO leaders who would meet in Wales that September.

As NATO ministers failed to reach consensus on Montenegro that tumultuous summer, Moscow saw an opening. NATO had blinked. With the successful seizure of Crimea and the emergence of what the Kremlin believed would become Novorossiia, Russia was on offense. The West was stunned. True to form, Moscow's success emboldened the Kremlin. The thinking in Moscow was that its seizure of Ukrainian territory would surely block Ukraine's move toward NATO and the European Union (EU). But might the Kremlin also be able to stop the integration process in Southeast Europe? The lack of a NATO decision on Montenegro signaled ambivalence, leaving a vacuum which Moscow was intent to fill.

It was during this time that Aleksandar Sindjelic, leader of the paramilitary "Serbian Wolves," began sending Serbian fighters to Ukraine to support Russia's seizure of Crimea and insurgency in the Donbass. While in Ukraine, Sindjelic worked with Russian nationalists who introduced him to Eduard Shirokov (he is also known as Eduard Shishmakov) and Vladimir Popov. Open source reporting has verified both

as Russian military intelligence, or GRU, agents.¹ Their encounter set in train the attempted coup in Montenegro.

Thanks to what we at the Atlantic Council call #DigitalSherlocks, or our digital forensic open source researchers, we know that Shirokov formerly served as deputy military attache at the Russian Embassy in Warsaw, where he was accused of espionage, declared persona non grata, and expelled in June 2014. His registered address in Russia is a GRU-owned residence. He was issued a false passport in August 2016, two months before traveling to the Balkans. Popov, who had been spotted in Moldova with Gagauzian separatists in 2014, joined Shirokov in hosting Sindjelic in Moscow in September 2015, where they proposed the plot to derail Montenegro's NATO bid. Sindjelic received money from these Russian contacts to purchase weapons and supplies used in the operation, and to recruit participants.

These events set in motion the extraordinarily brazen attempted coup in Montenegro last October. Open source reporting provides a compelling case that the GRU and its associates were directly involved in orchestrating this attempted coup in an effort to install a government friendly to Moscow and derail Montenegro's NATO accession. If the coup would have succeeded, it would have dealt an immeasurable blow to the Alliance and its credibility. It also would have brought to a halt the process of NATO enlargement.

This incident is part of Russia's strategy to, in effect, make the world safe for autocracy and kleptocracy. As Russia itself has become more of an authoritarian kleptocracy, it has sought to reverse the post-Cold War order that has been so successful in advancing freedom, prosperity, and security in Europe. To achieve its objectives, Russia need only disrupt this process. Moscow however escalates its objectives with success, meaning that Russia has seen an opportunity to undermine both NATO and the EU from within through its malign influence operations.

To date, the West has been flat footed. During the Obama administration, the United States and the EU enacted tough sanctions. But sanctions should be part of a strategy, not the entire strategy. The Trump administration has yet to articulate the nature of the Russian challenge, much less a strategy to counter it. Nonetheless, key elements of a response are in place or within reach.

I would argue that the best defense is offense. Building on the president's recent address in Warsaw, we should focus on rallying the free world to defend itself and the values that underpin our freedom. To tackle malign Russian influence, I advocate a five-part strategy: promoting prosperity, bolstering our deterrent capabilities, pursuing a concerted diplomatic engagement strategy, exposing Russian actions, and anchoring our actions in our ideals—that is, offering our vision of what it is we are seeking to achieve rather than simply countering Russian moves.

Russia is able to advance its malign influence where there is a nexus of corruption, organized crime, and underdevelopment. To tackle this, the head of an allied intelligence service recently told me that the best answer is to promote economic growth. Prosperity is the antidote as it increases the resilience of nations, particularly in Europe's East and Southeast.

This is why President Trump's endorsement of the Three Seas Initiative in Warsaw is important. This initiative brings together the 12 EU members between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas with the aim of advancing cross-border energy, transportation, and telecommunications infrastructure to better integrate their economies, unlock growth potential, and ensure Russia cannot hold their economies hostage. In effect, this Initiative is about completing Europe within these currently segmented markets. At the same time, this effort should aim to connect these EU members to non-EU members in Southeast Europe and Europe's East, helping to integrate structurally these economies into Europe.

An American prosperity agenda should advance U.S. investment and financing in the region, putting our economic relationship on par with our security relationship in many of these nations. Furthermore, a United States policy of advancing one of our soft power strengths, entrepreneurship, would also help provide job growth outside the control of political patronage networks which are subject to Russian manipulation.

Second, we need to project our military strength as a stabilizing force, especially in Europe's East and Southeast. I applaud the request, and urge Congressional approval, of the increase in funding for the European Deterrence Initiative from \$3.4 billion to nearly \$4.8 billion. In addition, to counter malign Russian influence in Southeast Europe, the United States should transform its presence within KFOR into a permanent United States military presence at Camp Bondsteel, aimed at projecting security throughout the region. Congress should also approve the sale of the

¹ <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/25/balkan-gambit-part-2-montenegro-zugzwang/>

Patriot system to Romania, reinforcing the deterrent effect of the recent agreement to sell Patriots to Poland. Furthermore, Congress should return to the idea of providing substantial defensive lethal weaponry and combat training for Ukraine and Georgia.

Third, the United States has an opportunity to build on President Trump's visit to Warsaw with a sustained diplomatic offensive in the region. Our engagement in the region is too episodic and not at a sufficient political level. Vice President Pence will soon visit Tallinn, Podgorica, and Tbilisi—providing an excellent opportunity to offer concrete follow up on the Three Seas prosperity agenda and announcing steps to bolster our security commitments. The President should agree to meet with Three Seas leaders at their summit in Bucharest next year, and end the isolation of the Hungarian Government which has only made its leaders more susceptible to Russian pressure. We must work to ensure Montenegro's NATO membership is a success and sharpen the message that reforms at home can lead to membership in NATO and the EU. We should pursue an historic rapprochement with Serbia that ends Belgrade's dangerous hedging. In this regard, I applaud the Vice President's hosting of Serbian President Vucic on Monday. The United States should also resume its leadership in resolving the name dispute between Greece and Macedonia, paving the way for the latter's membership in NATO as it consolidates domestic reforms. To start, we should welcome Greek Prime Minister Tsipras to Washington and work to ensure Athens is a joint partner in the region rather than an obstacle. Robust United States engagement deprives Russia's strategy of the void it seeks to fill.

Fourth, in our open democratic societies, often the most effective means to counter Russian malign influence is to expose it. We do not need to counter disinformation with propaganda of our own. However, we need our own citizens to expose Russian actions and disinformation. As our electorates become educated on Russian influence operations, they become inoculated to its impact. To this end, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab with its partner Bellingcat last week hosted in Warsaw the first Open Source ("OS 360") summit to train journalists and activists on using unclassified techniques to expose and combat Russian influence. We need to empower this type of work across our Alliance as it makes our democracies more resilient and our electorates less susceptible to manipulation.

Most importantly, we need to keep our values as our guiding star and restore a credible vision of a Europe whole and free. The lack of a North Star has opened a tempting new front for the Kremlin's efforts to rewrite the rules of the post-Cold War era. The United States should join with the EU to re-establish a clear, common vision for the continent. Our message should be that as a result of reforms at home, all European states can ultimately be part of a secure and prosperous transatlantic community. Advancing a Europe whole and free should be a central plank of a broader effort to rally the West, as President Trump suggested in his Warsaw Speech. I prefer the term "free world" to connote our community is not one of geography, but one of ideals—democratic institutions, human rights, rule of law, free media, and a vibrant civil society.

As part of this strategy, the United States must remain a force for integration, not fragmentation, in Europe. Russia's strategy is to undermine the EU. The administration cannot be ambivalent about this. We should never become an enabler of the Kremlin strategy to divide and weaken the EU.

Excluding the invasions of Ukraine and Georgia, the coup in Montenegro may be among the most brazen of Russia's influence operations. Its significance is that the Russians almost got away with it. But it is by no means unique. In October 2014, Russian Cossacks entered Banja Luka poised to intervene if Milorad Dodik had lost his election. Arms caches have been found in Hungary with ties to GRU agents. Russian fingerprints are on a spectacular kidnapping in Estonia, instability and violence in Macedonia, efforts to stoke separatism in Moldova and delegitimize Kosovo as a state, and financing of extreme political parties across the continent.

The Kremlin has drawn its own lessons from the muted response of the free world. We must end the cycle of impunity, continuing to raise the costs of not only Russia's actions in Ukraine, but also its interference in our own societies, even as we work to eliminate opportunities for its malign influence throughout Europe.

The painful lesson of the 20th century is that American ambivalence only increases the likelihood of conflict in Europe and a direct challenge to our national interests. Through sustained leadership and engagement, anchored in our own values and vision, we can counter the malign influence of Putin's Russia.

Chairman McCAIN. Well, thank you, Mr. Wilson, and thank the witnesses.

Let us talk for a minute, Mr. Wilson, about Serbia. There are unique ties between Serbia and Russia. Mr. Vucic seems to be almost schizophrenic. He wants good relations with the United States. Yet he also understands the Serbian people's affinity to Russia. Yet he also understands the Serbian people's look is to the West, not to the East. As you say, he is coming to town next week. That could be a very seminal event. I had a long lunch with him in Belgrade.

How do you think we should treat Mr. Vucic?

Mr. WILSON. I think this is a strategic opening and we should play, play for Serbia, not in a way that—I am not unaware of some of the challenges to Serbian democracy internally. But I think we need to recognize that Vucic has been hedging between Russia and Europe and the West in part because he sees the EU as distant and uncertain in its commitment to Serbia's place in Europe and the United States is an inconsistent and somewhat distant partner. But we have an opportunity right now.

I had the opportunity to meet with President Vucic in Belgrade at the beginning of this year. This coup in Montenegro is a wakeup call not just for us but for those sitting in Belgrade. It was forces within his intelligence services, for which he probably was completely unaware, that were complicit in this. Shortly after the exposure of this coup, an arms cache was found in Belgrade on the route that is driven from his family's house. I think this has had a psychological impact.

The Serbs believe that they can hedge and play both sides. Most Serbs know the reality is their economy is overwhelmingly anchored in Europe. Their interests are overwhelmingly anchored in Europe. I think with clarity from the United States, coordinated with Germany and the European Union, that we can help Mr. Vucic understand that hedging is actually playing with fire and that their ability to maneuver this poses actual risk to Serbia and its future over time.

One of the challenges we have is that unfortunately Serbia allowed the opening of a civilian emergency response base in Nis in southern Serbia where the Russians have been breathing down his neck to obtain diplomatic immunity for their—it is the Ministry of Emergencies. The Ministry of Emergencies has a notorious record of being involved in nefarious activities in this region. I think part of what our presence can do by transforming our own presence at Bondsteel, saying it is a presence for the region, is to help signal to Serbia that we will not be a fair-weather friend. This is not a partisan issue. We can have a consistent American strategy of engagement, supporting their transformation at home and welcoming them in our community.

Chairman MCCAIN. Ms. Samp, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. SAMP. I am sorry. I thought you were asking a separate question.

I completely endorse what Damon said and I do not have anything of substance to add.

Chairman MCCAIN. What about the influence of the church, Ms. Samp, which is clearly Russia-aligned?

Ms. SAMP. It is yet another tool. It is yet another way that they can—you know, attempts at coercion. It is one they leverage to great success with the people. I think it is not something that gives them an advantage that cannot be overcome, but it certainly does create strong ties, both historical, cultural, and other, with the region. It is yet another tool that the Russians have in the region.

Chairman MCCAIN. Mr. Bugajski?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. I fully agree with Damon. I would simply add a couple of things about Serbia's position.

I think Serbia now stands in front of a choice. Does it ally itself with a Russia that is increasingly aggressive, assertive, and expansionist in Europe and anti-American? Or does it align itself with the European Union, with the Western community, with the international alliance, including NATO, which does not mean NATO membership straight away but eventually?

I would add this also. Vucic has to be careful because Putin could possibly pull Serbia into a conflict that he engineers in a neighboring country, whether in Bosnia-Herzegovina, if he pushes for separatism. We have already heard about this in terms of Russian activities in Republika Srpska, in the Serbian entity in Bosnia. Both Croatia and Serbia could be brought into a conflict. Similarly in Kosovo. If Russia were to provoke some sort of conflict with the minority, Serbia itself could be drawn into the conflict. Similarly in Macedonia.

So what I would say to Vucic is be on the right side of history here. Russia does not have your interests at heart. We do. Russia does not want you to make an independent choice in terms of your international alliances. Russia is willing to drag you into a conflict. We want to give you security.

Chairman MCCAIN. Yet the ethnic and historic affinity between Russia and Serbia is also very well known.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Can I add to that?

Chairman MCCAIN. Yes, go ahead.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. I think that is exaggerated. If you look at history, even recent history, which country broke first with Stalin? It was Yugoslavia. It was Tito. So it was a relatively non-aligned country.

Chairman MCCAIN. Good point.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. If you look through history, Russia has manipulated both Serbia and Bulgaria in its policies in the Balkans at different times. Of course, it taps into that historical memory and exaggerates it in order to have influence in both countries.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Reed?

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the panel for excellent testimony.

Ms. Samp, you raised an interesting sort of situation where you said a year ago, we would have predicted that or we would not have predicted. So let us look ahead. What is their plan, more or less—the Russians? What is the vulnerable point that they are trying to exploit right now or points?

Ms. SAMP. I mean, I wish I knew, sir, where we could expect them to go next precisely. I think what we know for sure is that they will continue what they are doing. They will continue to try to undermine the international order. They want to cut the United States down a notch. They want to break Western unity. So we

cannot call shots they do not like or hold them accountable to the rule of law. So what we can say is this kind of destabilizing activity will continue.

I think if you look across the map, there is instability in Central Asia. I think the Balkans are a target-rich environment. They already have peacekeepers in Moldova. So I think continued agitation in Ukraine is something that we can expect. It is hard to know exactly precisely because they like to experiment, but the one thing that we do know for sure is that they will continue to sow instability. So we have to better prepare for it.

Senator REED. Mr. Wilson, any specific details you would add?

Ms. SAMP. In terms of better preparing?

Senator REED. No, no. To Mr. Wilson, are you picking up anything where they are beginning to focus or coalesce on a particular target or targets, or is it just instability everywhere, exploit ad hoc what you can?

Mr. WILSON. I do have specific concerns. I think we have seen Russian tactics actually quite savvy in that they know they cannot actually compete head on and they cannot compete against tough targets. So they go for the vulnerable targets, places where they know where our response would be mixed, weak, or the pushback would be ambiguous because they do appreciate they would fail in a head-on confrontation.

That raises for me two concerns. One is Belarus. Ms. Samp mentioned the Zapad exercise. This is traditionally the largest exercise in the western military district of Russia. In the past, they have used it to exercise a nuclear strike on Warsaw, for example. My fear right now is given the tenuous relationship between President Lukashenko in Minsk, Belarus and Mr. Putin, that with a major movement of Russian forces on the territory of Belarus as part of Zapad, that perhaps they do not leave or that perhaps they do something that tightens their grip around Belarus, knowing that this is a soft target. This would allow actually Putin to continue to rally the nationalist card at home, demonstrate his greatness, and probably not encounter the wrath of the West in the way that Donbas has turned into a bigger problem for him.

Second, I do watch very closely on Moldova. There is an agreement right now between the Moldovans and the Ukrainians to finally try to impose border controls on the eastern flank of Transnistria, the slice of territory where Russian troops are stationed. It is an agreement that the Ukrainians would allow the Moldovan border units to be based on Ukrainian territory since they cannot be on Transnistrian territory. This would be an excellent way to control illicit flows across that border, but it also would put up a greater barrier to Russia's potential freedom of maneuver. I do not think they would accept that very easily. They were hoping to do that this summer, and I think it could be a flashpoint.

Senator REED. Mr. Bugajski, please. Any comments? I have just a minute.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Thank you. I would reiterate what Damon has said in terms of flashpoints.

I would add one more. South Caucasus. Even as we speak, Russia has been moving the border of South Ossetia, which is occupied territory, deeper into Georgia. The danger there is—I think the ob-

jective is eventually to threaten and cut off pipelines and transportation systems between the Caspian Basin and Europe because there is a thin wedge of Georgia through which major energy, gas and oil, resources go through transportation to the coast and then out to Turkey to the Balkans and into Europe. Russia is now within a few hundred yards of capabilities of cutting off this pipeline in the event of conflict.

In addition, the conflict over Nagorna-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan—that has to be watched extremely carefully. Every so often it flares up. I think the Azeris are coming to a point where they are now extremely frustrated with ever getting these occupied territories back. There seems to be no progress in any agreements. It is a bit like the Minsk process. It is their own Minsk process that is frozen.

So these potential flashpoints either Russia engineers or some local conflict mushrooms into a Russian intervention.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Inhofe?

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Wilson, you touched on this very briefly, and I think my overemphasizing it, which I have been doing admittedly, is not because I am from an oil and gas State, because it seems so obvious to me that what is going right now could have a huge impact on Russia and on everything we have been talking about this morning. General [Philip M.] Breedlove, when he was talking to this committee just the other day—he said Russia is very apt to use energy dependence and energy capabilities as one of the tools, and so more available sources I think would help to defuse the tool that they use. We are talking about all the dependency that those countries that we are so concerned with have on Russia because they have the control. Now, to a lesser degree, I guess you could argue that Iran also has exports. But in the case of Russia, 68 percent of their exports are oil and gas.

I was very proud of the President the other day when he was in Poland and he drove this home. For all those people who think maybe he is too cozy with Putin, this statement did not help him any. They should defuse some of that notion. He said we are committed to securing your access to energy so Poland and its neighbors are never again held hostage to a single supplier of energy.

So I would like to hear from each one of you how significant you think this is. The ban has lifted. We now no longer have the war on fossil fuels. So I think good things are going to happen. What do you think?

Mr. WILSON. Senator, I think it is terrific. I had the opportunity—I was at the President's speech in Warsaw, and that particular line was received extremely well. Many of our friends in this region remember the two dramatic gas cutoffs that sent literal shivers through their populations, that the Russians have undoubtedly proved that they will use this as a weapon not just as a tool of coercion, which they do on a daily basis.

The lifting of the LNG export restrictions was significant both for psychological impact, as well as for a commercial impact. At the end of the day, we do not need to force all of Russian natural re-

sources out of the market. We need Russia to be restricted so that it has to play by the market. I think this is where it is a fairly significant thing. The beginning of an American LNG shipment had arrived in Poland just in the past 6 weeks. This is the news of the year in Poland.

The announcement last month of a breakthrough in negotiating an LNG terminal on Kirk Island in Croatia that would be linked up to Hungary through a small pipeline is the lifeline that Hungary needs itself. So there are two areas where we have real problems, Hungary and Serbia, in large part because the Russians have a stranglehold on both energy supplies and energy distribution.

Senator INHOFE. I think others agree with the significance of that.

I was actually invited to Lithuania by the President when they were opening their first LNG terminal, and they had other countries coming in who were just elated with that.

Mr. Bugajski, when you look at the other aspirants, of course, we saw that Montenegro went through all kinds of coercion. I am kind of thinking now how the fact that they were able to come out ahead on this thing—what affect do you think this has on the other countries, Bosnia and Macedonia, Kosovo and the others, the fact that they won, Russia lost? What do you think?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. There are two things I would say. Montenegro, the fact that it withstood a Russian attempt at overthrowing the government, sends a warning, if you like, to the region that Russia may not be averse to attempting a similar scenario in other countries. So in other words, they are going to be better prepared, hopefully with our assistance, to withstand such an assault.

Secondly, I would say the positive results of Montenegro's NATO membership. In other words, remember, this is a country that only recently regained its independence, that many dismissed as being unviable, too small. Now this country is becoming successful. It has entered our security alliance. It is part of our security system.

Senator INHOFE. The others are watching.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. The others are watching carefully. There are several countries that would like to join, at least most of Bosnia would. Certainly Kosovo would. Macedonia is desperate for NATO membership, but it is blocked, unfortunately, by this name dispute with Greece.

I think we have to refocus attention on the region to see—and this I think would be the best way to push the Russians back, to try and move these countries as quickly as possible and as effectively as possible into the Alliance because they will contribute. They are very pro-American. They want to contribute to the Alliance.

Senator INHOFE. I appreciate that.

My time has expired, but one last question to Ms. Samp. You made the comment, "The Army combat presence in Europe remains a full brigade strength below what it was in 2012 prior to the renewed tensions with Russia." I am wondering what some of our allies over there think because the budget that the President came out with is about the same as we were criticizing, you and I was also prior to this. What kind of effect that might have on our allies over there.

Ms. SAMP. So United States combat force presence in Europe, as you know, has decreased quite dramatically since the end of the Cold War. This was a recognition of a new threat environment, and so it rightfully went down from about 35,000 troops in the mid-1980s. We are now at about 62,000 troops. The rotational forces that we have added under the European Reassurance Initiative has brought us by about 6,000. So for the first time in 25 years, the trend line of combat forces in Europe has begun to tick up.

There was a decision made in 2012 that was quite controversial at the time to remove two heavy brigades, two armored brigade combat teams from the European continent, which left us with only two BCTs [Brigade Combat Team], one infantry airborne and another striker. So we have no heavy armored forces in Europe at the moment, save for a rotational force added under ERI.

At the time the decision was not well received by allies. If U.S. troops are the most physical manifestation of the commitment of the United States, then the removal of those forces did send a message that the United States is ready to leave Europe and pivot perhaps to Asia.

With a return of forces to the continent, I think the message would be welcomed by allies for one and also be seen by Russia as a symbol of commitment to deterrence. I think it would increase our leverage in the region.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Blumenthal?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here today.

Earlier this year, Senator Gardner and I introduced a resolution reaffirming the United States' unwavering commitment to NATO. As you well know, questions have been raised, notably in the White House by the President, about that commitment. The resolution is cosponsored by Senators Rubio, McCaskill, Portman, Feinstein, Johnson, Kaine, Shaheen, and Booker, a good bipartisan group.

During these times of extraordinary global uncertainty, even as our President is in France as we speak, and increasingly troubling Russian aggression, I believe—and many of my colleagues do as well—that we need to reassure our NATO allies that the United States remains strongly committed to this essential alliance.

I understand the Ambassador from Montenegro has left and decided, understandably, not to take questions. But I wonder how Montenegro's accession to NATO benefits the Alliance and the United States in particular. If you have comments on that topic, I would appreciate them, to all of the witnesses.

Ms. SAMP. Thank you for that question.

I was firmly in the camp of supporting Montenegro's accession to the Alliance. Not only did I think it added more assets than liabilities in terms of its geography, it plugged an important hole in the NATO map along the Adriatic, which a couple years earlier Russia had tried to exploit and put ships in a port there. Their military forces are small but they do bring niche capabilities. They only have about 2,000 forces. They spend about 1.6 percent on defense. None of this makes them a super star new ally, but it also does not make them the least in any of the categories that NATO ranks allies against. That is one. That is kind of the more, I guess, concrete considerations.

Now there are also symbolic considerations, and these I think were even more important in Montenegro's case because it affirmed NATO's open door which, as we just discussed, are important to other aspirants for the Alliance. More importantly, it showed that Russia is not going to have veto power over the decisions of NATO. So I think for both concrete and symbolic reasons, allowing Montenegro into the Alliance made us all stronger.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. By symbolic, I assume you mean moral reasons as well. Here is a people who wants to defend themselves against Russian aggression. We do not care whether it is a small country. We do not care whether it is a large country. We do not care whether it is powerful or not. America believes in defending freedom, and NATO is a means to do it in Europe. Our commitment to NATO is based not just on the strength of specific allies in numbers of troops or tanks or planes, but on their will to defend themselves and their commitment to freedom.

Ms. SAMP. Exactly. We gave them a list of things that they needed to do to join this club. They did it. They met their commitments, and we needed to meet ours and, as I said, reinforce NATO's open door, which is a tenet of the Washington Treaty.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I welcome other comments if you have any.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. I would add that it also sends a very positive signal to other countries in the region to meet the standards for NATO entry. Remember, entering NATO is not just a question of asking for it. You have to meet certain standards, civil military standards, military organization, and so forth. If Montenegro can do it, then other countries can do it.

Also to Serbia it sends a very positive signal. In other words, would you want to be linked with the most modern, sophisticated, effective military organization in the world, or with an increasingly obsolete Russian military? In other words, I know Serbia has been training with NATO, but it has also participated in exercises with Russian and Belarussian forces. They have to be weaned away from that dependency relationship that Russia is trying to create with them, and I think NATO is one of the ways it can be done.

Mr. WILSON. I just briefly would add, sir, I think the decision to welcome Montenegro not only sort of projects confidence in our Alliance, but I think it was in part because of some of our ambivalence in the process that the Russians smelled an opening. So I think it is the clarity of our views on this that it actually is part of our preventive defense.

It does do some things that are strategically useful, closing the northern littoral of the Mediterranean. This is the last strip of land, which does not sound all that significant to us, and yet that is why the Russians were focused on the potential of Bar Port, potentially as the one place where their fleet could have port call rights. They pressured the government several years ago to give them that and the government turned them down. This was significant for the Russians, and we have taken that off the board.

Senator McCain mentioned the role of the Orthodox Church. A country like Montenegro has a deeply sophisticated understanding of how the Orthodox Church is used as an instrument of advancing Russian geopolitical instruments. That is a pretty useful contribu-

tion to the Alliance for them to be in that network and to be sharing that type of information. Importantly, I think it is the stabilizing force for the region.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Ernst?

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today. This has been a very, very helpful discussion I think not only for the folks here but also those that serve on other various important committees here in the United States Senate as well.

As we witness continued Russian influence throughout the Baltics and the Balkans, I am really worried that we are going to see another Crimea-like scenario. Specifically, I am concerned about Russia's activities in Serbia and its impact on Iowa's sister state, Kosovo. In fact, just this March, General Scaparrotti echoed these very same concerns.

This is for all of our panelists, please. Can you describe to me how Serbia is attempting to undermine Kosovo and what that means for the stability of the region overall?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Well, to begin with, thank you for the question.

To begin with, Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state.

Senator ERNST. Exactly.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Neither do five European Union countries. This is where I think we could be more effective in trying to convince those five countries that do not recognize Kosovo to go ahead and do so. That would complete the picture in European Union.

Russia blocks Kosovo's entry into the United Nations and to the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] and other international organizations. There has to be pushback on this as well. If we are serious about creating and consolidating a democratic state in Kosovo, I think it has to be a member of all international organizations.

Serbia will not recognize Kosovo anytime soon, but there are things that can be done. Quite a few things have been done in recent years to try and normalize relations. But I think ultimately Serbia's entry into the European Union and eventual entry into NATO hinges on recognizing Kosovo as an equal, in other words, as an independent state. I think, again, we could do more with Vucic to try and persuade him, if not recognition, at least to not allow Russia to use Serbia to put pressure on Kosovo.

I will tell you one very interesting thing from the Russian angle. We have this idea that the Russian-Serbian relationship is so close. Do you know that the Russians have threatened Serbia that if you petition to join NATO, we will no longer block Kosovo's entry into the United Nations? In other words, they are using Kosovo as a tool against Serbia. We have to think of creative ways in which we deny them that tool to influence Serbia.

Senator ERNST. Very good. Thank you for that input.

Yes, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. I might just add to Mr. Bugajski that we have seen Russian efforts and sometimes Russian through Serbia efforts to delegitimize Kosovo as a state, to block it as it tries to join

UNESCO [United States Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization], things like that that have to trappings of state hold. We have seen more disturbingly sort of provocations, this extraordinary Orthodox draped train that sent down to the border over the summer very much as a provocation. It is true that Belgrade now has sort of extinguished democratic choice among the Serbs in Kosovo, and they really are under control of Belgrade right now.

Our task should be to work with the EU to broker this agreement, a more durable agreement, between Serbia and Kosovo to orchestrate our own historic reconciliation with Serbia, recognizing that the story of our NATO alliance as former adversaries coming together as allies. That is the entire narrative of what this process has been.

I do think that we could do something further. We have about maybe 700 forces in KFOR at Camp Bondsteel, and oftentimes the—I remember when I served at NATO, it was always the pressure. Every 6 months, the U.S. Defense Secretary would want to know how can we draw down these forces, how many more troops can come out. I think if we actually just with some clarity said that our presence there is an enduring presence to project stability for the region, capacity building for the region, that Camp Bondsteel remains, it actually would change the mentality of the region not just seeing it limited as a stabilizing force in Kosovo, but as an expression of America's security commitment to the entire region. I think this would both, strangely enough, reassure Serbia that Kosovo will be under control while also actually providing incentives for Serbia to work with us.

Senator ERNST. I think our Kosovo friends would greatly appreciate that as well.

Ms. Samp, as you mentioned, just very briefly in your testimony, Russia has been engaged in a lot of nefarious activities in the gray zone, including propaganda, economic coercion, and political subversion and various types of interference. In your opinion, what should the United States and our NATO allies be doing to discourage the type of activities that we see at the gray zone?

Ms. SAMP. Thank you for that question.

The gray zone is one of our hardest challenges. Obviously, it does not have the article 5 guarantee that Russia so respects and that keeps Russia's conventional interference in allied territory at bay. We saw them push into the gray zone in Georgia, Ukraine, and in other ways in countries that we are talking about in the Balkans today.

So what can we do to help shore up their defenses? A lot of this is going to be things not by the U.S. Military, but by the U.S. State Department. It is going to be things that build their resistance, their resilience, increase their media train so that their journalists are able to identify and attribute stories instead of just copying and pasting from RT [Russia Today] or Sputnik. It is going to be things that enhance and share lessons learned on cyber defenses. It is going to be doing things that add oversight to their processes to decrease corruption and increase transparency. So I would not say there is a huge role for NATO in the gray zone other than to continue to partner with these countries, continue to build their capacity, their capability, involve them in exercises. I do not see a U.S.

troop presence, for example, in gray zone territory, but I think this is going to be a lot of work on the resilience side and through the State Department.

Senator ERNST. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Heinrich?

Senator HEINRICH. I am going to take the opportunity here to sort of follow up on Senator Ernst's questions with regard to the gray zone in particular. Have you had a chance, Ms. Samp, to look at any of the authorization language that we recently passed trying to get our hands around better tools for working in that kind of an environment in Eastern Europe and trying to apply some of the lessons learned from other conflicts in the world?

Ms. SAMP. I was happy to see that the fiscal year 2017 NDAA approved the Global Engagement Center. I was less happy to see that its funding was cut at the same time its mandate was expanded. But I know that there have been other efforts.

Senator HEINRICH. I would love to, in follow-up to this, share some language that we incorporated—Senator Ernst and I—in the Emerging Threats Subcommittee to try and wrap our hands around some of these challenges and see what you think of that, really for all of you.

I was glad to hear you talk about the importance of our State Department and public diplomacy efforts in this region. You know, a major part of our strategy for Russian malign influence has to be proactive not just reactive, and we certainly need a robust public diplomacy effort and transparency if we are going to be able to combat the kind of propaganda vacuum that they often operate in. In some places, there just is not a counterbalancing communications effort to RT or Sputnik.

Can you talk a little bit about the strength and capability of that? What authorities and, frankly, resources do we lack in terms of that effort? Go ahead, Ms. Samp.

Ms. SAMP. So I would say our officials who conduct public diplomacy are very skilled. When I say that we lack capacity in the region, it is not to in any way impugn—

Senator HEINRICH. It is not the quality of the individuals.

Ms. SAMP.—the quality of the people doing the work. That said, there is not enough of them. It is not coordinated enough. It does not have enough money. Russia spends a billion dollars a year on propaganda efforts. I would say we are also not using every tool that we have available to us. Why are we not using military information support teams in Eastern Europe? Why are we not using that? That is a tool that would allow us to present truthful information to publics that would otherwise be impenetrable to a U.S. message. It does this by veiling attribution. This is not against our values, but it does allow us to press advantages. Why are we not doing that? Why are we not working more with the public sector, with social media, with advertising? Again, as I said, I think if Russia can be creative, then we need to be too, and this is an area where we have not gotten our act together, quite frankly.

Senator HEINRICH. Mr. Wilson, you listed exposing Russian actions as one of your five—the list of things that we should be doing

aggressively. Can you talk a little bit more about that and how we make that more robust and more assertive and fill that vacuum?

Mr. WILSON. Certainly. Let me pick up on that last word, the “vacuum.” I actually think the gray zone, as you call it, is one of the most important parts of where this will play out because it is where Russia sees its buffer. It is where Russia intentionally sows chaos and insecurity. From our interests, if these countries not just survive but if they thrive, this is an existential challenge to the model of corrupt authoritarianism. Therefore, Mr. Putin sees their success as something that actually painfully knocks on his door close to home.

That is why I think part of our strategy, yes, is to expose. Ukrainian journalists are actually at the forefront of actually understanding how to manage this now. We can learn from them.

But I think more importantly the people in the region understand that their future is uncertain, that Brussels and Washington are not quite certain what to do about it. I think the best thing we could do to fill the vacuum is to actually have clarity that our goal ultimately is to eliminate the uncertainty of where these countries lie, that they are not going to be in some gray zone between East and West. They have an opportunity to gain a rightful place as part of the free world, if you will, and thereby a concerted joint NATO–United States–EU strategy that is focused on growing their economies, strengthening their defense capacities and their militaries, and helping to create Europe on their ground, visa-free travel, independent media, this I think is part of the broader strategy if they could see a coordinated effort out of Washington, Brussels, Berlin that was committed to operationalizing the fact that they have a future option in the free world if they can get it right at home.

Senator HEINRICH. I am out of time, but just a real quick yes or no. Is it a problem that we seem to be sending all of our allies mixed messages, that we undermine transparency, and we are creating overtures—the President to Vladimir Putin—at the same time as we are saying, hey, we are going to be with you, you can rely on us?

Mr. WILSON. I think it is a problem.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. I would say there is a lot of confusion in Europe what is going on.

Ms. SAMP. It only helps Putin.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Sullivan?

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the witnesses’ testimony here on a very important topic.

I wanted to go back to the issue Senator Inhofe raised on energy, and being from an energy-producing State like he is, I think we are just scratching the surface on finally realizing how important this instrument of United States power can be to bolster our allies and push back on the Russians, to be perfectly honest.

Mr. Wilson, you and I worked in the Bush administration on an important energy project, the southern corridor pipeline, or the B–T–C pipeline that a lot of people know it by, Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan, that is a dual oil and gas pipeline from the Caspian Sea out into the Mediterranean into southern Europe. When we worked on that,

the Russians certainly were not supportive of that initiative. Were they?

Mr. WILSON. Dramatically opposed.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes, and that was U.S. diplomacy and leadership that drove that very important southern corridor strategy.

We passed, and I was a big supporter recently of the Iran and Russia sanctions bill. There are elements of that, though—it is now becoming apparent—that could possibly undermine the completion of that southern corridor pipeline, particularly on the gas side. Are you aware of that at all?

Mr. WILSON. In the legislation or—

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes, in the legislation.

Mr. WILSON. I do not know the details of that.

Senator SULLIVAN. We can get that to you. I would welcome the panel's opinion. There might be an opportunity to tweak some of the legislation on the House side or in the conference to make sure that we are not undermining actually one of the big geostrategic plays that we undertook against Russia, which was to help those countries to develop that southern corridor. Would you be supportive of that if we were somehow inadvertently undermining actually a very good energy strategy that we have been undertaking?

By the way, the Clinton administration, then the Bush administration, and even the Obama administration were all supporters of the southern corridor pipeline.

Mr. WILSON. I think we have yet to fully maximize our harnessing of America's energy strength. You cited the example of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which was a huge strategic and commercial success. We have not had the win that we need still in finishing the southern corridor effort, and it is in part—I think as Senator Inhofe mentioned, adding LNG exports into the mix is useful. But there are still real challenges in the pipeline structure, particularly when it comes to the Western Balkans, Serbia, Hungary in particular. I think this is an area where in the absence of a combined, concerted diplomatic effort that is based in the commerciality, it is really hard to get these done. At the same time, we have undermined our own interests and efforts because Nordstream 1, Nordstream 2 have really helped drain—negatively impacted some of the economics that would be required to get this right.

Senator SULLIVAN. Let me turn to the issue of allies that I think most members of the committee here are focused on. Would you agree that one of the most important strategic advantages that we have as a country globally, but particularly in Europe, is that the United States is an ally-rich nation and our adversaries and potential adversaries like Russia are ally-poor?

Mr. WILSON. I think this is sometimes something that we do not fully as a Nation appreciate, the historically unique asset we have in a global network of alliances of countries that will stand with us, go into the fight with us, and that this is a huge force multiplying effect for our influence and our power in the world.

Senator SULLIVAN. Is it not also true that we—do you not believe that we should be looking to deepen those alliances and expand them particularly when it is very clear that Russia's—one of their top strategic goals, as was pointed out in testimony, is to undermine and split our alliances?

Mr. WILSON. I think that is right. I mean, nations around the world understand that Russia's strong relationships are often based on coercion and intimidation. That is not how we operate. So I think the value that these alliances represent for us means that we actually have to invest in them—they do not work without our leadership—and look for opportunities to actually be able to welcome others into those camps.

Senator SULLIVAN. Let me just pose one final question to the entire panel on this issue of allies. You know, a number of us, myself included, had some concerns about when President Trump was a candidate talking about alliances, he did not seem to understand the importance, and a number of us had concerns about maybe the Trump administration was not focusing enough on our alliances. This is in addition to the Obama administration. Some of you might remember the Atlantic piece last year entitled "The Obama Doctrine," and if you read it, it essentially was President Obama openly being dismissive of most of the leaders of our key allies. It certainly was not an ally-building exercise as well.

What more can the Trump administration or the Members of Congress be doing to enable us to deepen and expand our alliances, which clearly would help advance the national security interests of the United States?

Ms. SAMP. Thank you for that question.

I think it is incredibly important that we strengthen our alliances. Our alliances are our greatest foreign policy advantage. Period. Full stop. It is what other authoritarian states look at and say I want that. Can I have that? There is no magnetism. As Damon said, Russia's alliances are built off of coercion. So we need to protect them. The way that we can do that—Damon also mentioned U.S. leadership—is incredibly important in NATO. NATO does not work without U.S. leadership. Deterrence does not work without U.S. leadership, and so attending meetings, holding back maybe when you would like to criticize aloud, and keeping things inside a room, I think these all are important signals. Right? It is optics but it is important when you are talking about alliance because you are not just sending messages to friends. You are sending messages to adversaries about the U.S. commitment.

As you know, credible deterrence is built off of two things: capability and intent. Putin has to believe that we not only have the power to defend our alliances, but that we have the will and intent to defend our alliances. The statements that I have seen so far I think undermine that deterrence.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. If I could add, I think this administration has actually quite a strong national security team. The next step, though, would be for that national security team to devise a strong national security doctrine, which includes the purpose and capabilities of the NATO alliance. I think deeds are more important than words as well. In other words, this enhanced forward presence that we are now building in the Baltic states, in Poland, extremely important, started late, unfortunately, but at least started under Obama. It is important that this administration, Trump administration, is reinforcing and continuing with that.

But I think we need to look at other factors. Look at our allies, particularly those most vulnerable along the eastern flank and ask

them what is it that you need. Air defense, missile defense, territorial defense? We can help you in all this. So I think deed, as well as word, is essential.

Mr. WILSON. I would just add I think it is absolutely right to keep the pressure on our allies to do more in terms of defense investment, as has been a consistent bipartisan policy and certainly from this body. But I also think there is a difference in understanding that our alliances, our relationships are not just transactional with them. These are long-term relationships. In fact, we have permanent alliances. Understanding the value of consulting them on big decisions and recognizing that a third of the forces, for example, in Afghanistan are provided by our allies. They are in the fight with us. These are not transactional relationships alone.

I also think the more that this body can help actually make the case to your constituents as well about how alliances are force multipliers for our interests and our values and not just a taxpayer burden, I think it is an important message to take to the American people as well.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you. Very helpful.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator King?

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, we all on this side of the dais are often prone to bragging about our own States, but in this case, I cannot fail to mention that a lot of the preparation for Montenegro's accession to NATO on the military and security side came through the partnership with the Maine National Guard. We have been working with Montenegro since 2006, and I am extremely proud of the work that our men and women have done in order to facilitate a very important geopolitical development. So I wanted to preface my remarks with a real recognition of the work that was done by those good people from Maine.

I have often thought that if you woke up somebody in 1780 in England and said when are you living, very few would have said, oh, the industrial revolution, or an Italian in 1500, oh, the renaissance, of course. In other words, we are not really aware of the era in which we live.

But listening to you today has helped me to focus my thinking. I think we are in a new era of conflict. We talk about the Cold War. We talk about hot war. We are in a warm war with Russia that involves everything from cyber to disinformation to political disruption to coup attempts and military invasion in the Ukraine, for example. I think that is a very important insight that we cannot just act like this is a continuation of what has gone on for the past 10 years or 20 years or 50 years.

The second piece of that recognition—and this goes to your testimony—Mr. Wilson, you had a chilling observation I wrote down. The Kremlin has drawn its own lessons from the muted response of the free world. We are not treating this with the seriousness that it deserves.

Mr. Bugajski, would you comment on those thoughts?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Absolutely. The Kremlin knows that it cannot confront this directly. So it uses every available, if you like, soft power

tool to conduct a campaign of subversion to divide and eventually dismantle the West. I actually put this in my—

Senator KING. This is an active strategy.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Active strategy from the very top around the presidential administration. There is a strategy. We often heard that Putin is an opportunist. He uses opportunities to conduct his strategy, but there is a strategy. There is a purpose. There is an ambition. It does not necessarily mean Russia will be successful. In fact, many times, as we have seen in Montenegro, it has had the reverse effect.

Senator KING. But they will be if we do not respond.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. We have to respond. We have to respond. We have to not only push back, I would say even further we have to go more on the offensive vis-à-vis Russia, not militarily but in the soft power tools. Where they use disinformation, we should use counter-disinformation, in other words, to inform the Russian public more accurately what the Russian Government is not telling them.

Senator KING. Well, in 1999, we dismantled USIA [United States Information Agency], for example, a terrible geopolitical mistake in my opinion.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Absolutely. I think VOA [Voice of America], RFE [Radio Free Europe], any other tool of information that we have either at our disposal or that we fund I think we should be helping. Throughout the countries that are most vulnerable, we should be strengthening their institutions. One of the main institutions is a free media. Also the social media. We have not touched on this, but the social media—there are initiatives in different parts of central eastern Europe, for example, the elves in Lithuania that are fighting the trolls on the Internet to get accurate information across. This is something we should be focusing on. We actually could learn quite a bit from the Central Europeans that are, let us say, the most vulnerable countries on the border of Russia.

Senator KING. I have always thought it was ironic that we seem to be losing the information war, and we are the people that invented Facebook and Hollywood.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Precisely because they have subverted that and used it for their purposes. You know, these instruments are neutral. It depends on how they are used. We assume they will be used for the right purposes, that people would be smarter and get more intelligent. That is not necessarily the case.

Senator KING. In a few seconds, I want to go to a much more specific question. Mr. Wilson, we have been talking a lot about gas and energy as a geopolitical—“weapon” is not the right word, but a geopolitical force. The difference is, though—and I wanted to ask you in more detail and maybe you can get back to me on the record. The differential between the price of pipeline-delivered gas and LNG—there is a \$3 to \$4 premium on LNG, to liquefy, ship, and de-liquefy. My question is can the Russians counter the LNG threat, if you will, simply by lowering the price of their pipeline-delivered gas, which currently in the U.S.—Henry Hub I think is about 3 bucks. So a brief answer if you would on that question. In other words, is LNG the weapon we think—I hate to use the word “weapon”—the force that we think it might be because of the price differential delivered to the customer?

Mr. WILSON. Right. It does have an impact. I have just come back from Hungary, which is a particular challenge with this. What LNG has done in the region, both psychological—American LNG is in the game—and commercial—Gazprom has already said in Hungary we will sell \$1 cheaper than any offer you get in LNG through Kirk Island terminal—

Senator KING. Which they can do because they do not have to pay the shipping.

Mr. WILSON. But that still has a real concrete effect of introducing market economics into pricing. Frankly, if they are taking Russian gas, but they have an option of others, if the Russians are forced to play into the market, that is where we win, and that is the problem we have right now.

Senator KING. People are willing to make those pretty substantial capital investments for LNG liquification and de-liquification.

Mr. WILSON. I would say it is not a simple answer. It took far, far too long to build the first LNG terminal to get this Kirk Island pipeline going. So it is not clean cut. This is partly why we have been focused on these infrastructure connections running north-south through Central and Eastern Europe because the Soviets built everything west-east, and the EU structural fund started to do east-west. There are these major gaps in the energy corridors running north-south through the eastern flank of our Alliance, and that is a problem here.

Senator KING. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, thank you, and I thank you for your holding this hearing. I think this is a very, very important hearing.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Wicker?

Senator WICKER. I too agree. This is a profoundly important hearing, and I want to thank the chairman and ranking member for scheduling it, for taking the time to make sure it was thorough.

This was a scandalous, outrageous act on the part of Vladimir Putin's Russia. The fact that it largely went under the radar screen here in the West is indicative of a lot of things about our foreign policy.

Let me just make an observation or two and then perhaps you can comment.

I happen to be chairman of the Helsinki Commission. That is the American participation in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We just got back from Minsk, Belarus with a delegation of 11 House and Senate Members, Republicans and Democrats, and of course, we in the Parliamentary Assembly are part of the larger diplomatic OSCE organization which only day before yesterday now has a complete diplomatic corps of leadership at the four top positions.

If any of you want to comment about the value of OSCE, feel free to do so.

The military exercise in Belarus was mentioned by one of you. I was told by President Lukashenko that this would be about 15,000 military personnel. One of you, I think, speculated 100,000 personnel. I was also told in no uncertain terms by President Lukashenko that Americans were welcomed as observers, and I have not yet gotten that back to the administration, but at least from the President, we are welcomed as observers. What is the sig-

nificance and what do we need to worry about about this military exercise in Belarus?

Then maybe I can start by recognizing Mr. Wilson because, Mr. Wilson, you talked about the five-part strategy, one of which was exposing Russian actions. I think someone today said let us not counter their disinformation with our version of disinformation. I do not think we do very well in public diplomacy in the United States, and part of that is that we resist propaganda. There is a lot to be said for letting the light shine on what is happening, and so if any of you could comment about a better way of thinking of how our Government can let the light of day shine internationally on what is coming out of Putin's Russia. So I will start with you, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Senator.

Let me connect your last point to your opening with the Helsinki Commission. Thank you. Kudos for the Helsinki Commission. It plays an extraordinarily important role on many of the key issues.

There is a connection to the information propaganda issue. Sometimes I think we lose the information war not because we do not have enough assets or better public diplomacy offers. It is because we have lost the clarity of what our purpose is and to be able to have a unity of message coming from leaders across Europe, the United States.

What we have witnessed over the past years is the advance of authoritarian kleptocracy on the one hand and radical extremism out of ISIS on the other in a way that has come to challenge the sense of the free world. We have had a rough patch. We have had economic troubles. We have had long wars, and there are reasons that our populations have been rambunctious, if you will. But the power of the free world is that we can rejuvenate ourselves. We are self-correcting.

I think the key to the information war is not the next budget cycle, although that is not insignificant. It is can we find the clarity of voice across the Atlantic on the purpose of how to actually adapt—yes, adapt—revitalize and defend the free world, and that this onslaught of authoritarian kleptocracy or radical extremism—that is not the future. I think uniformity in that messaging would actually go far more effective in helping us to get the propaganda wars right because we do not fight propaganda with propaganda. We fight it with who we are and what our purpose is, which is why the Helsinki Commission values matter.

Just very briefly on Zapad, the observer offer is significant because, as far as I am aware of, the Russians always turn us down for observers at some of these. So that would be significant to take President Lukashenko up on his offer.

The exercise itself is concerning because it is a tool of intimidation of its neighbors. It is a real exercising of massive troop movements to demonstrate the utility and potential for them to use their military modernization program. Frankly, I worry about what this means for Belarus' own sovereignty.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me join my colleagues in thanking you and Ranking Member Reed for holding this hearing. I think it is very important that we

continue to, as the Senate Armed Services Committee, raise the concerns about what is happening in the Balkans and Russia's intent in going after Western democracies.

Ms. Samp, I want to go back to something I understand you said while I was out at another hearing, and that is that credible deterrence is a combination of capabilities and intent and that we have to wary of how we are signaling intent to friends and adversaries.

It is my understanding that shortly after Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov threatened that we must return the two dachas that were seized back in December as the result of Russian interference in our elections, that the State Department rescheduled a meeting that had been pulled down between Deputy Secretary Shannon and Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov. One of the reasons that meeting had been pulled down in St. Petersburg was because of our seizure of the dachas and our, so far, unwillingness to give those back to Russia.

Can you talk about what it suggests that we have now suddenly rescheduled this meeting shortly after Russian Foreign Secretary Lavrov threatened us around those two dachas?

Ms. SAMP. Yes, I would be happy to because I can tell you it does not send a good signal, a strong signal to Russia that we are going to be doing what it takes to push back against their aggression. Quite frankly, it only emboldens them to further action.

The seizure of those two facilities were part of the United States response in the wake of Russia's interference in our elections. This was something undertaken by President Obama in 2016, along with the imposition of additional sanctions. So overturning those decisions I think sends a message that we are going to let Russia get away with it, that we want to move on, and that we are not going to stand up in any real way or push back. I think that is absolutely the wrong signal to be sending at the worst possible time.

Senator SHAHEEN. I certainly agree with that. Can I ask, Mr. Wilson, do you share that view?

Mr. WILSON. I do. I think the Russians have come to have an expectation that through American political transitions, they can gain some leverage. Water under the bridge, new team. We have seen this, frankly, through the past three transitions. I can think of very specific examples where the Russians have leveraged this. They will respect our coming to the table in a position of confidence and strength, and I think that is what we need to take to the table with the Russians.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Bugajski, do you also agree?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. I agree, and I would like to put in a broader context. I think the Russians increasingly see us as a soft target, not forcefully enough, not resilient enough to Russian pressure not only overseas but maybe even here. They are exploiting our own divisions, our political polarization, access to our media, let us say, financial greed and political ambition. This is exactly what they exploit in Western democracies, and it has come here now, and it is time to act. It is time to push back.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

You all have talked about the various hybrid tools that Russia uses, whether it is disinformation, cyber, illicit financing, the various tools that they have been using. In your opinion, which of

those tools is the most difficult for us to respond to, and can you describe any areas where we have been successful? I would throw that out to any of you to respond or all of you.

Ms. SAMP. I want to highlight the propaganda issue not because we have not already spoken about it but because I do think it is a serious challenge. The lack of objective truth in our society is a serious challenge. It makes it easier for Russia to be able to manipulate the narrative. If we are not even speaking with one voice inside the United States Government, how much more difficult does it make it for the American people to understand how they should be thinking about and looking at Russia. So I think this discontinuity in the message, the lack of objective truth, and Russia's preying upon that weakness in our society with propaganda, disinformation, and influence operations is one of the harder challenges we face.

I think going back to our strengths, of course, this is nothing that we do not have the tools to address. It is whether or not we have the will to address it. Our allies, our institutions, we have the strongest military in the world. We have the strongest economy in the world. We should not be falling victim to these sorts of tactics, and I think if we really leverage the advantages that we have and harness them in a single direction instead of multiple directions, that would help us to be able to manage the Russia challenge.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I am actually out of time, but I could not agree more that disinformation is I think the biggest challenge we face. Actually, Mr. Wilson, I would argue that the Atlantic Council needs to do its open source summit in the United States.

Senator REED [presiding]. Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, Senator Perdue, please.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you, Chair.

I just want to thank the witnesses today for their careers of work in this area. This is a really important area right now and we need help.

Mr. Bugajski, you have written about these frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe. We have seen Russia ignore territorial sovereignty, occupy land in Moldova, eastern Ukraine, Crimea, Georgia. It has been 9 years since Russian troops invaded Georgia, and they have created a frozen conflict. I never heard of that before coming to the Senate. But this is outrageous.

I would like all of you to comment on this question. We have seen Russia from Murmansk to—Kaliningrad right now is bristling. It is a bristling military enclave. We have seen them in Sebastapol have access to warm waters and now in Latakia and Tortus in Syria build permanent installations circling Eastern Europe. I mean, it looks to me like—from a tactical standpoint it is pretty obvious what they are doing.

My questions, though, are very specific about these frozen conflicts. What is NATO doing? What are we doing? What should we be doing to make sure that the Georgia conflict does not remain frozen and that the Ukraine/Crimea conflict does not become a frozen conflict?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Excellent question. Thank you, Senator.

I would say this. We need to understand what Russia is up to with these so-called frozen conflicts, or unresolved conflicts. The idea is to freeze the state within which the conflict is taking place, and we see this clearly in the case of Ukraine and Georgia to prevent these countries from moving into NATO; in the Moldovan case, to prevent Moldova from moving into the European Union; in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, keeping both Azerbaijan and Armenia dependent on Russia to try and resolve the conflict. We can be more active in some of the—particularly I would say in Georgia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the case of Ukraine, I would say it is very important for the Ukrainian Government to be able to prevent Russia from expanding its territorial hold on Ukraine and using the frozen conflict as a tool of pressure to prevent Ukraine from moving into Western institutions.

Senator PERDUE. I am sorry. Should the United States arm the Ukraine with offensive weapons?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Absolutely. I would give them any weapons they want. In a way, you could say Ukraine is a test for our resolve in stopping Putin. If Putin is successful in Ukraine, can you imagine the ambition that will be raised? If he is stopped in Ukraine, that will not only stop him from meddling in other countries, but could have a blowback inside Russia as well.

Ms. SAMP. I would just add that I think Putin has already been successful in Ukraine. I do not think his intention was ever to take Kiev. I think it was to destabilize just enough to make Ukraine an unattractive partner for NATO and for the West. How do we support these governments? I support arming them not quite to giving them any weapon they would want, but they do need lethal assistance.

A bigger challenge, though, is making sure the part of the country that has not fallen under Russian control continues to integrate with the West, continues on its path of anti-corruption and transparency measures to be the best model of governance it can be so that the part of the country that is inside of a frozen conflict sort of falls under the weight of its own corruption and problems and challenges. Now you have sort of the other half—three-fourths of a country that is successful and that creates its own magnetism and draw.

Then finally, the most probably important piece of the equation is patience. None of these frozen conflicts are going to be resolved in the near future. But having a clear non-recognition policy which is tied up in our sanctions I think is important. We had a non-recognition policy with the Baltic states for 50 years, and that was very important to their prospects for one day integrating with the West.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you.

Mr. Wilson?

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Senator. I would just add that the frozen conflicts are a means for the Russians to take out a long-term insurance policy that these countries will never be able to join NATO or the EU because they have been occupied. This is their objective. They do not need to depend on the word or commitment of one political leader that may come or go with an election. It is their insurance policy.

The status quo in these endless negotiations, five plus two for Transnistria, the Geneva process in Georgia, Minsk with Ukraine—suit the Russian interests and get us trapped in a kabuki game. Many of our allies are quite pleased to have a process at least ongoing, but I actually do not think they serve our interests. So I think we need to change the equation. In part, we told the Russians or the Russians read our own doctrines that say if there is occupied territory in a country, it cannot join our Alliance. That is in NATO study in 1996 as we were beginning our enlargement process to incentivize nations, essentially Europe, to resolve their borders. It made sense at that time.

I think we should be a little bit more brazen and change that and say Russian occupation will not stand as a permanent block on nations joining the EU and NATO even if that means the jurisdiction of the EU or NATO may not apply to those territories. Simply the rhetorical switch of that is how you begin to change Russia's calculations.

I do agree with my colleagues on I think it is important that we give them the strength of a porcupine defense and help arm them in a way that it makes the costs too high for the Russians to invade.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you all.

Thank you, Chair.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Peters, please, on behalf of the chairman.

Senator PETERS. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Thank you to each of our panelists today for some excellent testimony, very thought-provoking testimony.

I serve as the co-chair of the Senate Albanian Issues Caucus with my colleague Senator Ernst, who you heard from earlier. I am certainly very proud to represent a very dynamic, very active Albanian American community in Michigan, many of which have very strong roots to Montenegro. So I am sure they are watching and following the discussion here today. But they also have roots in Kosovo and in Macedonia as well. I know Senator Ernst brought up the issue of Kosovo. So I would like to talk a little bit about what we are seeing in Macedonia.

Mr. Bugajski, you suggested in your opening statement the clashes between Albanians and Macedonians may be engineered by Moscow as part of its efforts to destabilize the region, as we have been discussing today, test NATO resolve, which is a huge issue, and distract attention from their other interventions.

I understand that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia have been frustrated with government policy and political polarization and are demanding greater rights for their community in Macedonia. In turn, Macedonian politics has been increasingly disruptive, and there is a growing nationalist movement as well that threatens to fracture the society and perhaps weaken government structures.

If you could provide some more context to us on the tensions between Albanians and Macedonians, the current level of severity of that tension, and expand on possible Russian involvement fostering that.

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Thank you very much, Senator.

Macedonia is stuck because of its name dispute with Greece. A country that has actually qualified for NATO cannot make any progress because of the fact that it cannot resolve that name dispute. That is having an effect on internal politics and inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia because, as you know from your constituents, Albanians, being probably some of the most pro-American and pro-NATO populations anywhere in Europe, would like to follow Albania in pulling Macedonia into NATO as well.

The longer that conflict continues, that standoff continues, the more that nationalists will exploit them. We saw this during the previous administration that nationalism was manipulated in an international but also a domestic context.

Macedonia now has a new chance. It has a new government. It is a coalition government with an Albanian partner. I think it is very important—and I know Vice President Pence has talked to Zaev—for the United States to become more closely involved in resolving this name dispute, or at least getting Macedonia into NATO even if that dispute is not finally resolved. That would help to if not settle at least to pacify any possibilities for inter-ethnic conflicts within Macedonia.

Senator PETERS. You mentioned the strong relationship between Albania and the United States. Do you want to elaborate on how important our relationship with Albania is to securing that region?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. Albania is one of the key countries in the region. Let us say it is still a developing democracy. It is a NATO member. It contributes to security. It is very pro-American. It sends a very positive message to other Albanian communities in terms of their Western and NATO aspirations.

The problems, of course, they have internally are problems common to many Balkan states, lack of judicial reform, corruption, poor governance in some places. Again, these are areas where we have to, let us say, not cut our funding but help them to achieve the standards of other European countries, not only in Albania but elsewhere. As I said earlier, there is not a more pro-American population—maybe in Kosovo. But we had a strong role in helping to create—President Berisha, as you know, in creating the first Albania and several recent presidents in creating—consolidating Kosovo as a state, and they remember that and they will always remember that.

The Albanian population, I would say, in the Balkans is one of the key factors that we need to keep our eye on and to make sure that any kind of program for greater Albania is resisted, but the Albanians are integrated and empowered in each of the countries that should be part of NATO, including, as we have said, Macedonia and Montenegro, which has already entered.

Senator PETERS. Well, thank you.

I am running out of time. So I am not going to have an opportunity to get an answer to this question, but I will submit it to you and hopefully we will hear back.

I just recently returned from a trip to Latvia and Lithuania, folks who have been dealing with miscommunication and propaganda from Russian media. In fact, when I was there at the NATO STRATCOM [Strategic Command], they showed me a Facebook post that the Russians were sending around the country that the

Americans had apparently bombed a building in Latvia. It had pictures of a burning building, but of course, did not exist, but nevertheless, was being used to create anti-American tensions.

I know, however, that the Baltic states have also been pretty effective in pushing back against some of that misinformation. I met with a group of journalists who are working actively to get folks to question what they see and what they hear.

But I would certainly love to have each of your assessments as to lessons learned in the Baltics that may apply to us broadly. We are out of time, but would hope that you could respond in written form to me. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Peters.

On behalf of the chairman, Senator Warren.

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you all for your work for many decades.

It looks like I am in final position here. So I just want to start by summarizing where I think we are from this. Russia is actively working to destabilize countries along its borders and to undermine European Union and NATO. They are doing it through indirect tactics like enabling separatist forces and disseminating propaganda and fake news, as well as launching cyberattacks against the American electoral system and others in Europe.

Now, all of you have said this requires a strong response, and last month, the Senate tried to do something about it by passing a bill that both expands sanctions and ensures enforcement of existing sanctions against Russia. I know you touched on this in your testimony, but I just want to draw a line under it because I think it is so important right now.

Ms. Samp and Mr. Wilson, would these new Russia sanctions passed by the Senate be helpful or harmful in responding to Russian aggression? Ms. Samp?

Ms. SAMP. Thank you.

I think they would be extremely helpful. We have to do more to change Russia's risk calculus. We are all saying the same thing here, Democrats and Republicans alike. Ultimately, this comes down to how serious do we want to be about Russia's interference in our election? If this was a fundamental assault on our democracy, then we need to be pretty serious. The Russia Sanctions Act is a monumental piece of legislation that says to Russia, enough. You are not going to get away with it anymore. I know that the longer we wait to act, the more emboldened Russia is going to feel. The Germans have elections coming up. I do not think we want them feeling emboldened going into the fall or even into 2018 in our own society.

So I think the House should take immediate action to pass the bill as is. I think any efforts to water it down or delay it should be considered a dereliction of duty on their part.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. That is pretty strong, and I appreciate that and agree with it.

Mr. Wilson, would you like to add anything?

Mr. WILSON. Yes. I very much agree that it is extraordinarily helpful. I am in Europe a lot, and one of the things that is coming through is despite sometimes the nature of our partisan debate and lack of clarity in messaging, it is coming through loud and clear,

an extraordinarily strong bipartisan consensus in the United States on standing up to Russian revisionism and aggression. That is coming through loud and clear. Essentially the vote for Montenegro, 97 to 2, was whether the United States would leave a vacuum in the Balkans and stand up to Russia. The vote on the sanctions—every one we speak to, when we were traveling through Europe, watches that in great detail and sees it is very helpful to get done.

We do need to recognize that Russia is doing this in part because Putin is insecure at home. He does want to demonize the West as a threat to Russia, and so he will use what we do to play up the nationalist card at home, and so we need to combine raising the costs with Russia with a real strength of confidence in our own democracies and democratic institutions because that is actually what he is afraid of.

Senator WARREN. I very much appreciate your comments on this, and you are right. This was strongly bipartisan. I was one of the cosponsors. Many others were, both sides of the aisle.

The fact that the House is dragging its feet is not only bad for us here at home, but as you say, this sends a terrible signal both to Europe and to NATO and to Russia, and I think it is time for the House just to do this, to pass this bill and for the President to sign it into law.

I am really concerned, after the President's behavior at the G20, that we cannot keep waiting for the President of the United States to take leadership on this. I think this is a place where Congress has to step up, and we have really got to put it out there and get this bill passed and put it on the President's desk and urge the President to sign it.

Did you want to add here?

Mr. BUGAJSKI. I just want to add one thing. We keep talking about information and disinformation. I think it is very important that we underscore why sanctions are important, and I do not think we have done enough of that. I think a lot of times people will say—in fact, the Russians are saying, well, the sanctions do not really affect us. You should lift them because they are actually just spoiling relations. But they are having an impact on the oligarchs, the companies that are closely tied to the Kremlin that engage in some of these human rights and subversive activities abroad. We need to be a little bit clear in getting the information out on why sanctions are important and why this bill is now extremely important.

Senator WARREN. I very embrace your point on this. You know, we had hearings on this over in the Banking Committee, and one of the points raised there is it does have an economic impact. But as you all say, it also has a powerful political impact.

So I think we speak with one voice on both sides of the aisle. The House needs to pass the sanctions bill now, and we need to get it over to the President to be signed.

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me thank you for your excellence testimony. We look forward to working with you as we go for-

ward on these issues and many more. But, again, thank you very much.

On behalf of the chairman, let me call this hearing adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 11:48 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

