

EXPOSING AND DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR KREMLIN CRIMES ABROAD

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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EXPOSING AND DEMANDING ACCOUNT- ABILITY FOR KREMLIN CRIMES ABROAD

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA,
ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC,

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:06 p.m., via Webex, Hon. William R. Keating (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. KEATING. The House Foreign Affairs Committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any point, and all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous materials and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules. To insert something into the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address or contact the full committee staff.

Please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair.

Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you have finished speaking. Consistent with House Resolution 965 and the accompanying regulation, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate, when they are not under recognition, to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum present. I want to thank the members and the witnesses for being here. These are important times, even though we are doing this virtually, as you all are aware. This is an important subject matter, and I really appreciate the attendance of everyone.

I will now recognize myself for opening remarks.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing to discuss exposing and demanding accountability for Kremlin crimes abroad.

Just over 1 week ago, news broke alleging that Russia had placed bounties on American troops in Afghanistan, that money changed hands between the GRU, Russia's military intelligence, and the Taliban, that Americans were killed in connection with this scheme, and that our agencies have had this intelligence since last year.

These allegations have shocked our conscience. But threats from Russia are far more pervasive than even these reports indicate. Russia's activity targeting Americans has been occurring before and is occurring now and, if left unchecked by the U.S., will continue occurring in the future.

However, just as egregious as the Kremlin's actions is the utter inaction and lack of an appropriate response from the Trump administration.

I joined Chairman Engel and other members of this committee at the White House last week to be briefed on this intelligence, and our examination of this issue continues on this week, starting with this hearing today, followed by a full committee hearing on Thursday and a second hearing in the subcommittee on Friday. In the absence of action by the Trump administration, it is incumbent on Congress to act.

Targeting Americans abroad is a brazen attack on the United States. However, we should not be surprised, as the GRU was also implicated in the 2016 attack on our election and is believed to be responsible for a range of malign activities, including those occurring abroad in 2018, with the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in the U.K. and the coup attempt in Montenegro as the country approached NATO membership.

And the threat from Russia is not only specifically from Unit 29155 of the GRU. We will fail to keep Americans safe if we fail to understand the threat coming from the Kremlin itself.

The Kremlin has invested in a network of actors operating around the world with little transparency around their funding, their authority, and often their relationship to the Kremlin. These actors include traditional elements of the GRU but also nontraditional actors, like the Wagner Group, a private military company with extensive links back to the Kremlin, a group that conducts military activities that directly support Kremlin foreign policy objectives.

In fact, Wagner sources engaged directly in hostilities against U.S. forces in Syria in 2018. The Kremlin denied any connection, yet wounded survivors were reportedly thrown out of the conflict zone on Russian military aircraft. And Wagner's documented ties to the GRU and the Russian military abound.

Further, when we look behind these actors to their sources of funding, we find deep corruption and crime. One key player is the oligarch and criminal Yevgeny Prigozhin.

I was proud that Chairman Engel, along with our ranking member, Mr. Kinzinger, and a member of our subcommittee, Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, joined in introducing a resolution last month stressing that threat, the threat Prigozhin presents to the interest and security of the United States, our allies, and its partners.

Prigozhin is not only linked to the Wagner Group, he also backed the Internet Research Agency, which you will recall from our own past history was responsible for operations against Americans in the 2016 election. And reporting has further documented that Prigozhin and associates are already working to target American audiences leading up to election this November.

Bounties on American troops is a despicable escalation by Russia that demands a response. And we cannot afford to view these new revelations in a vacuum. We arrive at this moment following 3-1/2 years of what to any observer seems like a pattern of capitulation and accommodation by President Trump toward Putin.

From siding with Putin over our intelligence community about the Kremlin's attack on the 2016 elections in Helsinki, to slow-walking sanctions that passed Congress with broad, bipartisan support, to suggesting Russia should be invited back to a newly constituted G8, even though Ukraine is still occupied by Russia and Kremlin-backed forces, the Trump administration has given Russia a wide berth to maneuver within and to antagonize the U.S. and our allies.

We need a Russian policy, one that keeps Americans safe, not one that puts President Trump on good terms with the corrupt and criminal government of Vladimir Putin.

Last week, voting concluded on a constitutional referendum on Russia which would make it possible for Putin to stay in power until 2036. While no one is surprised to learn that independent election observers and experts report widely fraud, manipulation, and voter intimidation, the results of this referendum in practice means that Putin's Russia is unfortunately the Russia the U.S. must face for the foreseeable future.

I appreciate our uniquely qualified witnesses joining us today to discuss this critical juncture in our policy toward Russia. Our goal for today to examine the threat landscape and unique challenges presented in addressing instances of Russian aggression toward the United States and our allies and the malign actors the Kremlin has empowered to carry out these crimes.

I hope this hearing and the ones that follow are used to build a coherent and effective policy to address these threats from the Kremlin. American lives and our national security depends on it. For too long now the Trump administration, as we have seen, has been woefully unprepared and lacking in its commitment to meaningfully counter these threats.

I now yield to Representative Wilson for his opening statement.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you to Bill Keating for holding this important hearing on exposing and demanding accountability for Russia's crimes abroad.

I am grateful to recognize the great Russian patriot and democracy activist Vladimir Kara-Murza for being with us today. Your bravery and determination in pushing for a democratic future for the courageous Russian people continues to inspire us all and gives us hope for a better future.

Mr. Chairman, in an ideal world, the U.S. and Russia should cooperate and work together to tackle important joint challenges, but such a partnership is impossible so long as the tyrant Vladimir Putin rules Russia.

The last thing that Putin cares about is the will of the Russian people. This was evident last week when Putin orchestrated, as you correctly pointed out, a fraudulent vote to change the Russian Constitution so he can stay in power basically for his life.

But Putin is not satisfied with repressing his own people at home. He seeks to export his tyranny and oppression abroad as an alternative authoritarian form of governance to democracy. This authoritarian world view best explains his aggressive foreign policy, based upon subverting democracy throughout the world through malign influence campaigns and redrawing borders with his aggressive assaults on democracy, such as Moldova, Georgia,

and Ukraine, with 12,000 Ukrainians who have been killed due to Russian aggression.

Furthermore, there is further troubling information that Russia is increasing support of the Taliban in Afghanistan, supporting an enemy which directly threatens American families.

We must find more ways to hold Russia accountable and increase the costs of their mischief. As the chairman of the Republican Study Committee's National Security and Foreign Affairs Task Force, I released a report at the beginning of last month recommending the toughest package of sanctions on Russia ever proposed by Congress. The report also calls for important measures to support the democratic movements in Russia, including through reconstituting the U.S. Information Agency. The RSC's report was officially condemned by the Kremlin, which I took as a good sign that we did a good job.

I also am grateful for President Trump's leadership, with additional sanctions that he has put in place. Additionally, his placing of troops in Poland was very, very significant, and his backing of the NATO troops, which now are in all the countries of the Baltics. And, finally, the President's courage to provide Javelin missiles to Ukraine to stop Russian aggression.

I look forward to hearing more input from our expert witnesses here today on how we can hold Putin's feet to the fire and advocate on behalf of the Russian people.

With that, I yield back.

Ms. HALLMAN. Mr. Chairman, you are still muted, sir.

Mr. KEATING. I should be okay now. Sorry about that.

Ms. HALLMAN. Perfect. Yes, sir.

Mr. KEATING. I have now done what everyone else or so many other people will do in the course of today, so I hope you learn from my mistake.

I will introduce our panel of witnesses, and I am pleased to have them here today.

Ambassador Daniel Fried is the Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council. During his long and dedicated public service career, he served as the State Department's coordinator of sanctions policy, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and the United States Ambassador to Poland.

Ambassador Michael McFaul is the Director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, the Ken Olivier and Angela Nomellini Professor of International Studies in the Department of Political Science, and the Peter and Helen Bing senior fellow at the Hoover Institute, all at Stanford University. He served in the Obama Administration as the United States Ambassador to Russia and as Senior Director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs at the National Security Council.

Dr. Kimberly Marten is a professor and chair of the Political Science Department at Barnard College at Columbia University. She concurrently serves as a faculty member of Columbia's Harriman Institute for Russian and East-Central European Studies and the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies.

Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza serves as chairman of the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom and vice president of the Free Russia Foundation. He is a Russian democracy activist who played

a key role in the passage of the Magnitsky legislation and is a recipient of the Magnitsky Human Rights Award for his work as an outstanding Russian opposition activist.

Thank you for your courage and your dedication.

I will now recognize each witness for 5 minutes. Without objection, your prepared written statements will be made part of the record. I will go first to Ambassador Fried for his opening statement.

Ambassador Fried.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DANIEL FRIED, WEISER FAMILY DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, ATLANTIC COUNCIL (FORMER STATE DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR FOR SANCTIONS POLICY, FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS, AND FORMER UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO POLAND)

Mr. FRIED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Wilson. It is an honor to be here and with a panel of people whose work I have admired for years.

Putinism means authoritarianism and kleptocracy. It enriches Putin and his team but keeps Russia poor and backward. It is getting worse. The coronavirus has hit Russia harder than official statistics indicate. Russia's economy has been hit by the global drop in energy prices. Putin has changed the Constitution so he can stay President until 2036.

Political stagnation, economic decline, and the coronavirus make the Putin regime insecure because it cannot deliver. So the regime will likely step up repression at home and continue to attack made-up outside enemies, especially the United States and other democracies.

Putinism is not Russia's fate, but for now we need to deal with Putin's regime as it is. We have options.

First, do not extend to Putin invitations to the G8 or make other gestures that suggest the U.S. is eager to overlook his malign policies.

Beyond this, policy actions could include the following:

Strengthen NATO. After Putin's attack on Ukraine, President Obama led NATO to move battalion-strength forces to Poland and the Baltic States and deployed a rotational U.S. armored brigade to Poland. In 2019, the Trump administration announced plans to move more U.S. support forces to Poland. That was solid work. But President Trump's decision to pull forces out of Germany is wrong. The President complained about German defense spending in support for the Nord Stream II gas pipeline. He had a point. But U.S. forces in Germany do not serve German interests; they serve U.S. and NATO interests.

Support Ukraine. Ukraine's democratic, free-market transformation would be a success for Ukraine and the free world and a defeat for Putinism. It would demonstrate that a Russian-speaking country, which Ukraine partly is, can move toward European standards of governance, that Putinism is not Russia's only choice. We should support Ukraine's independence and push it to transform itself along free-market, democratic lines.

Counter disinformation. The U.S. and Europe are better placed to deal with disinformation than in 2016, though the EU is ahead of us. We should work with social media companies to expose and limit Russian disinformation, support civil society groups, and prepare thoughtful regulation to support online transparency and integrity.

European energy security. Putin has abused Russia's status as a major supplier of European natural gas for political leverage. Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltics fear that Nord Stream II will make them even more vulnerable. Many other Europeans agree. Congress has passed sanctions on Nord Stream II and is considering more. I oppose Nord Stream II. But there may be ways to mitigate its risks at less cost to U.S.-German relations.

Developments over 10 years have reduced Russian energy leverage over Central Europe: smaller gas pipelines to move gas east to Central Europe and Ukraine; more LNG from the U.S. and other sources; and the anti-monopoly provisions of the EU's Third Energy Package. The U.S., EU, Poland, and Germany should intensify efforts along these lines and support the Three Seas Initiative, notwithstanding differences over Nord Stream.

Financial transparency. Putinism relies on the Western financial system to raise capital while attacking the West. Putin and his cronies use it to safeguard and conceal their enormous personal wealth, often acquired through corruption. We should not allow Putin's team to use and abuse our own system. The U.S. needs to work with the EU and U.K. to strengthen rules for financial and investment transparency, including beneficial ownership disclosure. We should also expose and publicize the personal wealth of Putin and his chief cronies.

Sanctions. The U.S. designed its sanctions program on Russia with escalatory options. We should not use all of these in response to the alleged GRU bounty on U.S. forces, but we can use some: intensified restrictions for military and dual-use energy technology; reestablishment of an allied coordination mechanism for such restrictions; additional sanctions against Russian individuals, those in the GRU or oligarchs or cronies either close to Putin or the Russian military, and possibly a Russian State-owned bank or financial institution with connections to the GRU.

Finally, the United States needs to bring the free world together. We need a Russia policy that defends U.S. interests and values, brings together our allies, and reaches out to Russian society.

It is hard for this administration to articulate such a policy because the President's own view of Putin seems so charitable. Indeed, the President seems to prefer tyrants generally, not just Putin, seems to disdain the free world the U.S. has led since 1945, and regards the U.S. as an isolated, self-serving power operating along the principle of "might makes right."

That is not an approach that challenges Putin or Chinese President Xi. It is an approach that accepts their world view. It is an approach that would diminish the United States from being the leader of the free world to just another grasping great power. It would undo the basis of American leadership since 1945, a period which, despite our mistakes, inconsistencies, failures, and down-

right blunders, also generated the world's longest period of general peace and unprecedented global prosperity.

The United States needs to lead again. We need to make the rules-based international system work better, including better for more Americans. We need to grapple with new challenges—climate change, pandemics, new technologies, and more—and old problems of race, equity, and justice. We need to take our old best principles and apply them in new ways. That is how we will prevail over Putin and other authoritarians who think, mistakenly, that their time has come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to this hearing.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fried follows:]



Statement by Ambassador Daniel Fried (retired)
 Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow
 Atlantic Council

Hearing on Exposing and Demanding Accountability for Kremlin Crimes Abroad
 House Committee on Foreign Affairs
 Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and Environment
 July 7, 2020

The title of this hearing strikes me as right. Many Americans are focused, correctly, on the story of the reported Russian GRU (Russian military intelligence) bounty on US troops in Afghanistan. But the challenge the United States and Europe face is larger: Putin's malign behavior generally and what we should do about it.

I don't have special insight into reported intelligence that the GRU has been offering cash rewards for killing American soldiers in Afghanistan. I know from experience that intelligence can be complicated to evaluate and that different agencies sometimes interpret it in different ways.

But different interpretations do not mean that intelligence is fake and calling it so will not help us find a way forward in what may be an ugly action by Putin's military intelligence service. I don't like leaks of intelligence, and a firestorm of media speculation and interpretation that leaks can generate complicate policy responses. But that's life in Washington and not just these days. Our task is to think through the problem and our options.

Rather than engage in one-off responses to particular instances of Russian aggression—against Ukraine, against US elections, against US soldiers if the reports are accurate, and against our allies—the United States needs a sustainable strategy, hopefully developed and implemented with our allies, for dealing with the challenge of Putin's Russia.

The Putin Challenge

I would put that challenge this way: Putin's system of rule combines political authoritarianism and economic kleptocracy. It enriches Putin and his associates and provides opportunity for lower-level bosses to grab what they can. It's a system that keeps Russia relatively poor and backward. Russians are smart—they do well, often brilliantly, when they emigrate to the United States. But developing Russia, making Russia rich and not just individual Russians, must start with respect for the rule of law, property rights, independent institutions in and out of government, and freedom of speech and assembly.



None of these things is compatible with Putinism. These values therefore are unlikely to advance while Putin is in charge. By changing the Russian Constitution, supported by a dodgy plebiscite, Putin seems to be setting himself up to rule until 2036, essentially for life.¹ Politics in Russia seems to be stagnating to late-Soviet levels.

Russia's domestic economy was already struggling when I testified before this subcommittee about one year ago. It has since gotten worse.² The coronavirus pandemic has hit it hard. Russia's authoritarian system has not dealt with that challenge well: data about fatalities and even COVID-19 cases seem to be manipulated to minimize the public impact while the regime is putting pressure on those who attempt to tell the truth.³ The pandemic is likely to be more serious in Russia than official data indicate. That will surprise no one familiar with Russian political culture under Putin.

At the same time, Russia's economy, dependent on raw material exports like oil and natural gas, has been hit by the global drop in energy prices. (Inexplicably, Putin's ally Igor Sechin, CEO of the state-owned energy company Rosneft, contributed to this drop by initiating a production and price war with Saudi Arabia, increasing oil production and putting downward pressure on prices, just as the pandemic-related global economic drop in energy demand was accelerating.)⁴

Economic decline, political stagnation, and the impact of the Coronavirus under conditions of coverup make the Putin regime insecure. It, therefore, will likely step up its repression at home.

Simultaneously, the regime will continue to attack made-up outside enemies, especially the United States and other democracies, whose relative success the nervous regime regards as a challenge and threat by virtue of their power of example. I say "made-up" enemies because, notwithstanding the regime's propaganda, neither the United States nor any of our allies wishes ill on Russia. Our interests would benefit from Russia's successful development along the lines I suggested earlier: with a more democratic political system, more rule of law, and more generalized prosperity.

¹ Patrick Reeve, "Putin granted right to extend rule till 2036 in overwhelming referendum result," *ABC News*, July 1, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/putin-granted-extend-rule-till-2036-overwhelming-referendum/story?id=71559748>.

² "Gross domestic product (GDP) monthly growth rate in Russia from January 2019 to April 2020," Statista, May 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1009056/gdp-growth-rate-russia/>.

³ Matthew Luxmoore, "Russian Doctor Who Criticized Government's COVID-19 Response Detained" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/head-of-russian-doctors-union-arrested-on-trip-to-equip-provincial-hospitals-battling-virus/30527912.html>.

⁴ Anders Åslund "Putin concedes defeat in the oil price war", *Atlantic Council*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/putin-concedes-defeat-in-the-oil-price-war/>.



American Presidents from George H.W. Bush to Barack Obama tried to build constructive relations with Russia, but as a nation state and not an empire. None would accept Russian domination over its neighbors and former satellites as a price for such relations. None would perpetuate the line of the Iron Curtain in a post-Cold War Europe. None would accept Moscow's claim of ultimate control over Ukraine or Georgia after the end of the Soviet Union.

Putin didn't like that.

He objects to the West's policy of treating Russia's neighbors as countries in their own right. He objects to our support for their independence, their right to seek their own way in the world and, someday for some, if they meet the conditions, to join the institutions of a united Europe and undivided transatlantic world. He objects to support for pro-Western, pro-democracy political movements in Russia's neighbors. He objects to US and European support for human rights inside Russia. For these reasons, Putin regards the West and especially the United States, as his foe.

Putin's regime relishes political turmoil in the United States and other Western democracies and seeks to exacerbate it through disinformation. Putin seeks to weaken NATO, the European Union, and other institutions of what we used to call the Free World. Putin seems to have special animus for the United States, which he blames for the collapse of the Soviet Union. He will hurt us where he thinks he can.

I have referred in this context to Putin and the Putin regime. I do not believe that Russia and the United States, or Russia and the West, are fated to remain on bad terms, or that the current tensions are inevitable. Putinism is not necessarily Russia's fate. It may already be faltering. If it fails, it is possible that new Russian leadership could seek to take the country in a more constructive direction, at home and abroad, not to please us but to help Russia escape the Putinesque dead end of autocracy and stagnation. In that case, we should welcome and support such a change, and be prepared to respond accordingly.

For the present, however, we need to deal with Putin's regime as it is.

Dealing with Putin's aggression

Accountability for Putin's aggression abroad means resisting it on a strategic level. We should seek to "sharpen the contradictions" for Putin. As then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put



it after Putin's war against Georgia in 2008,⁵ Putin can seek to gain from the global system, under the condition that he respect its rules, or he can try to trash that system. But not both.

We should hold a place among leading, responsible nations for a better Russia when that day comes.

But that time is not now. Given Putin's current behavior, even apart from the possibility of Russian military intelligence offering money for the deaths of US soldiers, we should extend no invitations to the G8 or make other gestures that suggest that the United States is eager to overlook the reality of Putin's policies.

We should work with our allies, most of whom share our assessment of Putin's actions. There is a consensus waiting to be shaped by leadership, when we exercise it.

Specific policy actions could include the following, though this is not an exhaustive list:

Strengthen NATO and NATO's defenses.

Following Putin's attack on Ukraine in 2014, President Obama reversed years of US military drawdown in Europe, leading NATO to move battalion-strength forces to Poland and the Baltic States, as well as deploying a US armored brigade to Poland on a rotational basis. That was a big deal. The Trump Administration took some logical next steps, announcing in 2019 plans to move additional US support forces into Poland. That Trump Administration decision was thought through and the overall message to Putin clear: there is no option for a cost-free appearance of Russian Little Green Men in the Baltics. Strengthening NATO's deterrent capacity is one way to answer Putin's aggression abroad.

It was dismaying to learn of President Trump's sudden decision last month to pull a significant number of US forces out of Germany.⁶ That decision seemed based on the President's political irritation at Chancellor Merkel, including over German defense spending and support for the Nord Stream II gas pipeline. While the Administration has arguments on both these issues, US forces in Germany do not serve German interests. They serve US and NATO interests. Pulling them out sends a muddled message.

⁵ "Secretary Rice Addresses US-Russia Relations At The German Marshal Fund," US Department of State, September 18, 2008, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/09/109954.htm>.

⁶ Katherine Walla, "What's at stake in Trump's plan to withdraw troops from Germany," *Atlantic Council*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/whats-at-stake-in-trumps-plans-to-withdraw-troops-from-germany/>.



More broadly, the US President—whoever that is—should make the case to the American people how NATO serves the interests of the United States. NATO turned Europe from a source of wars to a center of peace and prosperity. I share the frustration of this and previous US administrations with inadequate defense spending and capacity on the part of Germany and other European allies. But some perspective: German defense spending is moving in the right direction and significantly so.⁷ Let's remember what a real European security problem looks like: Omaha Beach or Dresden, or the Berlin Wall. NATO has done a lot for us.

Support Ukraine's independence and reforms.

Since regaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine has repeatedly fallen into cycles of failed attempts at free market, democratic transformation followed by mass social protests on behalf of such reforms. Judging by their voting patterns, most Ukrainians seem to want their country to follow the successful reforms launched a generation ago in the Baltic states, Poland, and elsewhere in Central Europe. But Ukraine's reforms seem hampered by what I call an "Iron Ring" of corrupt oligarchs and their economic monopolies and politicians under their influence. News from Kyiv in recent months has not been good, with senior and credible reformist officials dismissed; the July 1 resignation by the head of the Central Bank of Ukraine was just the latest discouraging sign.⁸

Nevertheless, Ukraine remains a democracy, meaning that its rulers face real elections whose outcome is not fixed in advance. A large constituency for national transformation and modernization along European lines exists. Ukrainian activists and specialists understand what needs to be done (they remind me of the young Polish reformers a generation ago who succeeded in their country).

Ukraine's successful transformation would be a major success for Europe, the United States, and the Free World as a whole; and it would be a major defeat for Putinism. It would demonstrate that freedom in Europe, which has advanced far since 1989, still has potential. It would demonstrate, including to Russians, that a Russian speaking country, which Ukraine in large part still is, with an Eastern Orthodox religious tradition, is capable of achieving European

⁷ Dr. Diego Lopes da Silva et al, *Trends in world military expenditure, 2019*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 27, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2019>.

⁸ Anders Åslund "Ukraine's central bank chief resigns leaving Zelenskyy's reform credentials in tatters", *Atlantic Council*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraines-central-bank-chief-resigns-leaving-zelenskyy-reform-credentials-in-tatters/>.



standards of governance; that Putinism is not the only choice for Russia. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy has made just this point in remarks that gained currency inside Russia.⁹

Putin attacked Ukraine immediately after a pro-Western, democratic movement toppled his discredited client Viktor Yanukovich in 2014. He did so not simply to seize Crimea and part of Ukraine's Donbas region, but to gain leverage over Ukraine as a whole, to prevent it from realizing a reformed and European future.

Ukraine has become part of US politics, which serves no US interest that I can see. Our interests are best served by a two-track policy of supporting Ukraine's independence, including with sales of military equipment and diplomatically, and pushing Ukraine to break its "Iron Ring" of corruption and finally commit to transform itself. With relatively modest resources, the United States can invest in a potential major success for ourselves, for Europe, and for Ukraine, frustrating Putin's designs.

Counter-disinformation.

The United States and Europe have belatedly woken up to the challenge of Russian (and Chinese and other) disinformation campaigns and are far better placed to deal with them than in 2016. The European Union is ahead of the United States Government (USG) in development of policy to limit disinformation, but both the United States and European Union are moving in the same direction. Our tasks include working with (and when needed, put pressure on) social media companies to expose and limit Russian disinformation campaigns; supporting civil society groups that can expose disinformation campaigns sometimes in real time; and thoughtful regulation to support transparency and integrity online.¹⁰

European energy security.

Putin has used Russia's status as a major source for European (particularly East and Central European) natural gas as a basis for political leverage. The Nord Stream gas pipelines (one complete and Nord Stream II near completion), designed to bring gas through the Baltic Sea from Russia directly to Germany, have raised understandable concerns in Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltics. They fear that Germany, which supports these projects, is prepared to accept

⁹ "Zelenskyy's New Year address: everyone should answer the question: who am I?" UNIAN, January 1, 2020, <https://www.unian.info/society/10816211-zelenskyy-s-new-year-address-everyone-should-answer-the-question-who-am-i.html>.

¹⁰ Daniel Fried and Alina Polyakova, *Democratic defense against disinformation 2.0*, Atlantic Council, June 13, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/democratic-defense-against-disinformation-2-0/>.



Central and Eastern Europe becoming even more vulnerable to Kremlin energy pressure. Other European countries, some officials in the European Commission, and many in the European Parliament object to Nord Stream II on these grounds. As part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed late in 2019, Congress included sanctions on Nord Stream II in the Protecting Europe's Energy Security (PEES) Act¹¹ and additional sanctions on Nord Stream II have been introduced as part of the 2020 NDAA.¹²

I oppose Nord Stream II and am in sympathy with the aims of those who want to use sanctions to kill the project. There may be, however, alternatives that would mitigate the potential risks of Nord Stream II at less cost to US-German relations. Developments over the past ten years have already substantially reduced Russian energy leverage over Central Europe: the development of a network of smaller gas pipelines that can and have moved gas from Germany east to Central Europe and Ukraine (which now consumes no Russian gas supplied directly); greater availability of liquified natural gas (LNG) from the United States and other sources, plus greater infrastructure in Poland and the Baltic States to receive it; and the anti-monopoly provision of the European Union's "Third Energy Package."¹³ The Three Seas Initiative, a Central European infrastructure investment project supported by the United States covering energy, transport, and digital sectors, could further reduce Central European energy vulnerability.

The United States, European Union, and Germany should all work to intensify efforts along these lines. If the United States were on better terms with Germany, which it should be, one alternative to sanctions might be a US-German initiative (designed with input from the European Union, Poland, and other affected states) to advance all of these welcome trends and projects. If Nord Stream II is completed, the agreed transatlantic goal should be mitigation of Nord Stream II's strategic downsides at the least cost. Such steps could be supplemented by preparation of contingency sanctions against Russian energy targets should Nord Stream II, if completed, be used to support attempts at Russian energy leverage, e.g., politically motivated gas cutoffs, against Ukraine or any European Member State.

Financial transparency.

¹¹ Daniel Fried, "Russia gas pipeline sanctions legislation (PEES Act): A way ahead," *Atlantic Council*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-gas-pipeline-sanctions-legislation-pees-act-a-way-ahead/>

¹² "Senators Cruz, Shaheen Introduce Legislation Expanding Sanctions to Block Completion of Nord Stream 2," US Senator for Texas Ted Cruz, June 4, 2020, https://www.cruz.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=5156

¹³ Richard L. Morningstar, András Simonyi, Olga Khakova, and Jennifer T. Gordon, *European energy security and the critical role of transatlantic energy cooperation*, Atlantic Council, May 26, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/european-energy-security-and-the-critical-role-of-transatlantic-energy-cooperation/>



One of the curious features of Putinism is that he and his chief cronies and allies rely on the Western financial system to raise capital, stabilize the ruble, and attract foreign direct investment while attacking the West. At the same time, members of Putin's circle of cronies and allies seek to safeguard and conceal their enormous personal wealth, much of it gained through corruption and misappropriation of state assets, through complex money laundering schemes and opaque financial structures, again through the Western financial system.

We should not allow Putin's team to use and simultaneously abuse our own system. First, the United States needs to implement beneficial ownership legislation—we are closer than ever before to consensus on this—to shield our financial institutions, capital markets, industry, and philanthropy culture from these ill-gotten gains. Sectors such as high-end real estate and fine art are particularly vulnerable. Second, the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union need to work together to strengthen rules for financial transparency. The USG should throw its full weight behind ongoing efforts by the European Union to strengthen its watchdog capacities and close loopholes within the bloc that allow Putin's cronies to move money in and out of European jurisdiction undetected, while acquiring key stakes in European businesses and financing anti-democratic political movements.

We could supplement such measures with efforts to expose and publicize the personal wealth of Putin and his chief cronies. There is precedent for this, not involving official research: The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), an investigative journalist consortium, uncovered extensive evidence of official corruption, including Putin's, in its "Panama Papers" studies published starting in 2018.¹⁴

In addition, support for independent journalism inside Russia, a good thing in its own right, can uncover evidence of corruption among Putin and his circle. One source for such support has been Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the USG funded but independently managed television and radio stations with a storied past. The Trump Administration's sudden removal of RFE/RL's high-quality leader Jamie Fly, along with the leaders of all other USG broadcast agencies,¹⁵ unfortunately risks weakening the stations and raises questions about their willingness to go after Putin and his circle, given President Trump's positive personal attitudes toward him.

Sanctions.

¹⁴ "The Panama Papers," OCCRP, April 3, 2016, <https://www.occrp.org/en/panamapapers/>

¹⁵ Daniel Fried, Josh Lipsky, "US government broadcasters have long advanced the cause of freedom. Now they're under threat," *Atlantic Council*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/us-government-broadcasters-have-long-advanced-the-cause-of-freedom-now-theyre-under-threat/>



The United States developed its Russia sanctions program after Putin's attack on Ukraine in 2014 in coordination with the European Union and major European countries; it was designed to allow for escalation in the event of new or intensified Russian aggression against Ukraine. In response to additional acts of Russian aggression, especially against US elections in 2016, Congress and the Trump Administration built on this foundation.

We should retain options for escalation and not use all available additional sanctions tools in reaction to the alleged GRU bounty on US forces, assuming that we were confident that it had occurred. We should retain especially escalatory options for sectoral sanctions (including financial sanctions, such as sovereign debt restrictions, and energy sector sanctions) for use should Russian interference in the 2020 US elections reach new heights or should the Kremlin escalate its ongoing aggression against Ukraine, or engage in new forms of aggression. Such a contingency approach is the conceptual basis for the Graham-Menendez Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression (DASKA) Act, now voted out of Committee.¹⁶

That said, the United States does have sanctions options to retaliate for the reported GRU bounty on US soldiers. These could include:

- intensified restrictions for military and dual-use technology, initially put in place by the Obama Administration as part of the Ukraine sanctions package;
- reestablishment of an allied coordination mechanism to manage technology export restrictions to Russia in the military, dual use, and possibly cyber sector areas;
- additional sanctions against Russian individuals, either those part of the GRU, or oligarchs or cronies either close to Putin or close to the Russian military. For developing individual sanctions, the USG should start with the high-quality original version of the "Kremlin Report"—Section 241 from the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA);¹⁷ and, possibly, a Russian state-owned bank or financial institution, such as one with connections to the GRU or Russian military. (A Senate-based amendment to the NDAA along some of these lines has been filed.)¹⁸

In developing these or other sanctions options, we should work with the United Kingdom (whose forces were also reportedly targeted by the GRU bounty program) and with Germany,

¹⁶ US Congress, Senate, Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression (DASKA) Act of 2019, S 482, 116th Congress, 1st session, introduced in the Senate February 13, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116/congress/senate/bills/482>

¹⁷ Daniel Fried, Brian O'Toole, "The new Russia sanctions law: what it does and how to make it work," *Atlantic Council*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-new-russia-sanctions-law/>

¹⁸ "Menendez Unveils NDAA Amendment in Response to Kremlin Targeting of U.S. Troops," US Senator for New Jersey Bob Menendez, July 1, 2020, <https://www.menendez.senate.gov/news-and-events/press/menendez-unveils-ndaa-amendment-in-response-to-kremlin-targeting-of-us-troops>



which has asked the European Union to impose sanctions on Russian persons identified with a hack against the Bundestag a few years ago.¹⁹

If the United States does impose additional sanctions on Putin's regime for the reported bounty on US forces in Afghanistan, it should explain its actions; not appear to act with reluctance, under pressure from Congress or public opinion; and not, for example, repeat its weak rollout of sanctions last August 2 for the GRU's attempted assassination of former Russian intelligence officer on British soil.²⁰ Instead, whatever options the USG chooses should be implemented with determination and announced at senior levels, ideally in parallel with one or more ally.

Bring the Free World Together

These or other actions the United States might take to deal with Putin's aggression will succeed only if they are embedded in an overall Russia policy—consistently expressed—that seeks to resist Putin's aggression, defends US interests and values simultaneously, and holds open the possibility of a better relationship with Russia when it is on a different trajectory.

It is hard for this Administration to articulate such a policy, much less bring allies together around it, because the President's own views of Putin have been consistently and inexplicitly charitable. While some speculate about the nature of the President's dealings with Russia, I am more struck by what I consider to be a larger problem: the President's apparent preference for authoritarian rulers, including but not limited to Putin; his apparent disdain for the structures and principles of the Free World that the United States built and led since 1945; and his tendency to see the United States as an isolated, self-serving power operating along the principle of "might makes right."

That's not an approach that challenges Putin or Chinese President Xi. It's an approach that accepts their world view. It's an approach that would diminish the United States from being leader of the Free World to just another grasping Great Power. We would, in such a scenario, undo the basis of American leadership since 1945, a period which, despite our mistakes, inconsistencies, failures, and downright blunders, also generated the world's longest period of general peace and unprecedented global prosperity.

The United States and its democratic allies won the Cold War because we made democracy work better than the competition and everybody knew it.

¹⁹ Catherine Stupp, "Germany Seeks EU Sanctions for 2015 Cyberattack on Its Parliament," *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-seeks-eu-sanctions-for-2015-cyberattack-on-its-parliament-11591867801>

²⁰ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/new-russia-sanctions-justified-but-feeble-and-awkward/>



The United States needs to lead again. We need to make the rules-based international system work better, including better for more Americans. We need to grapple with new challenges: climate change, pandemics, new technologies, and more; and old problems of race, equity, and justice. We need to take our old, best principles, and apply them in new ways. That's how we'll prevail over Putin and other authoritarians who think, mistakenly, that their time has come. We need to remember who we are, when at our best, and act accordingly.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Ambassador Fried.
I now recognize Ambassador McFaul for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL MCFAUL, DIRECTOR, FREEMAN SPOGLI INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, KEN OLIVIER AND ANGELA NOMELLINI PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, PETER AND HELEN BING SENIOR FELLOW, HOOVER INSTITUTION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY (FORMER UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO RUSSIA AND FORMER SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS AT THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL)

Mr. MCFAUL. Thank you, Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Wilson, and other members of this committee, for having me today.

I have testified many times, but this is the first time I have done it in my socks.

I have submitted a longer written testimony which covers all the questions I was asked to address today. Many of them, by the way, echo what Ambassador Fried just said right now. In my 5 minutes, I just want to highlight a few points.

First, as a caveat, I want to underscore that we still need greater clarity about what Putin did in Afghanistan and how Trump responded. My testimony today is just informed by what has been in the press.

The facts so far on the intelligence that we have learned are deeply troubling, and the facts on Trump's decisionmaking regarding this intelligence are equally disturbing. Both, however, Putin's behavior and Trump's behavior follow a consistent pattern. We should be disturbed but not surprised by this latest episode.

First, Putin. I think it is really important to understand these patterns. We sometimes forget about them and just respond to the latest news. I want to remind you of the pattern. For several years now, Putin has behaved like a rogue actor in the international system, brazenly defying norms, rules, and laws and daring us to stop him.

In 2008, Putin invaded Georgia and recognized the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent States, in violent violation of international law.

In 2014, Putin annexed Crimea, violating one of the most sacred norms of the international system since the end of World War II. No Soviet leader since Stalin had ever annexed territory during the cold war.

In 2015, Putin deployed his air force to Syria to prop up a ruthless dictator, Mr. Assad, who has used illegal chemical weapons to kill innocent civilians. A U.N. panel has accused the Russian military of committing war crimes for bombing the Syrian civilians indiscriminately.

In 2016, Putin, of course, violated our sovereignty, American sovereignty, deploying multiple methods to try to influence the outcome of our Presidential election and amplify polarization in American society.

In 2018, as already mentioned by the chairman, Putin tried to assassinate Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom.

In 2019, Putin's agents allegedly murdered Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, a Chechen Georgian citizen, in Berlin.

And just last week, another Chechen dissident was assassinated in Austria.

So this latest action follows a pattern of lawless, rogue behavior.

Second, Trump. President Trump's nonresponse so far also follows a consistent pattern. As a candidate and ever since, Trump has repeatedly said admiring things about Putin and never a critical word.

In 2016, when asked about Putin's oppressive ways, Trump responded, "Well, I think our country does plenty of killing also."

In 2017, when asked about these methods again, having a chance to correct the record, Trump defended the Russian leader by criticizing the United States of America, arguing, "We've got a lot of killers. What, do you think our country is so innocent?"

In 2018, perhaps most shockingly, Trump stood next to Putin at their summit in Helsinki and sided with Putin over our own intelligence community in stating that he did not believe that Russia interfered in our 2016 Presidential election.

In 2019, in Osaka, Trump and Putin laughed together about the evils of the independent media. Trump said, "Get rid of them. 'Fake news' is great term, isn't it? You do not have this problem in Russia, but we do." Putin replied, "We also have the same."

So, in 2020, Trump's refusal to criticize Putin for his latest act, if true, is shocking and depressing but it is not surprising. It follows a pattern.

Asking, therefore, what the Trump administration should do in response I think is a futile exercise. I agree with all of the points Ambassador Fried just raised. I outline them in my written testimony. But if Trump himself will not acknowledge Putin's belligerent behavior, what good does it do to encourage him to respond to Putin?

Instead, however, I want to recommend that the Congress, independent of the White House, take three or four steps right now.

First, proceed with more hearings. I congratulate what you are doing. The American people, especially those who send their daughters and sons overseas to defend our country, have the right to know the facts.

Second, Congress should pass the DETER Act. We need to do all we can to stop Russian interference in our presidential election right now, especially on Election Day. I am really afraid of what they might do on Election Day. The DETER Act helps.

Third, Congress should enact new legislation to make Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty an independent, nongovernmental organization with an independent board and a direct appropriation from the U.S. Congress. Doing so would be one more step of many others needed to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation.

In the long run, not unlike the cold war, we need a bipartisan strategy to contain, deter, isolate, and sometimes engage Putin's Russia for the long haul. He is going to be around for a long time. I have outlined some of the broad contours of what that strategy might be in my written remarks, and I hope we might have some time in questions and answers to talk about them.

Thank you for having me.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McFaul follows:]

MCFAUL

Testimony of Ambassador Michael McFaul¹

Director of the Freeman Spogli Institute, Professor of Political Science, and Hoover Institution Senior Fellow at Stanford University

**Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment
House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

“Exposing and Demanding Accountability for Kremlin Crimes Abroad”

July 7, 2020

According to detailed reporting informed by U.S. intelligence officials in the *New York Times*, and then confirmed by several other news outlets in the United States, including *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, as well as corroborated by British officials speaking to their media, Russian President Vladimir Putin paid Taliban rebels in Afghanistan to kill American soldiers.² U.S. intelligence officials revealed to *The New York Times* that they had traced the transfer of funds for these bounties from a bank account controlled by the Russian

¹ Michael McFaul is the Ken Olivier and Angela Nomellini Professor of International Studies in Political Science, Director and Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and the Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, all at Stanford University. McFaul served for five years in the Obama administration, first as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs at the National Security Council at the White House (2009-2012), and then as U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation (2012-2014). His most recent book is *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (2018).

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-spy-unit-paid-taliban-to-attack-americans-u-s-intelligence-says-11593214584>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russian-bounties-to-taliban-linked-militants-resulted-in-deaths-of-us-troops-according-to-intelligence-assessments/2020/06/28/74ffacc2-b96a-11ea-80b9-40ccc9a701dc_story.html; and <https://news.sky.com/story/russia-paid-taliban-fighters-to-attack-british-troops-in-afghanistan-12016425>. Some experts have speculated, without first-hand knowledge, that Putin would not have known about the payment of such bounties. I am skeptical. Analysts frequently underestimate Putin's personal level of engagement in intelligence matters. He takes a particular interest in these kinds of issues. His top intelligence officers, including the head of the GRU, are highly motivated to make sure Putin is briefed on such matters. Even if true, the Russian president is still accountable for the actions of his GRU officers.

military intelligence, GRU, to a bank controlled by the Taliban.³ Later reporting based on sources in the U.S. intelligence community claimed that “Russian bounties offered to Taliban-linked militants to kill coalition forces in Afghanistan are believed to have resulted in the deaths of several U.S. service members...”⁴

We need to learn more about this latest instance of Russian belligerence against the United States before drawing definitive conclusions. Intelligence officials should continue to brief Congress. More hearings should be held with senior foreign policy decisionmakers in the Trump administration, since the administration’s explanation of the intelligence is confusing and has changed. According to NSC spokesperson, John Ullyot, “The veracity of the allegations continues to be evaluated.”⁵ Trump’s Press Secretary then asserted that there was no consensus within the intelligence community about this finding, but that claim stands in tension with the detailed reporting that asserted this intelligence appeared in the Presidential Daily Briefing (PDB) on February 27, 2020. Intelligence on sensitive matters almost never is 100% verified. But in my three years of working at the National Security Council in the Obama administration, I do not recall flimsy, unconfirmed, circumstantial, or heavily disputed intelligence appearing in the PDB; debates with the intelligence community usually are resolved before a story appears in this most precious of intelligence products (Remember, it is a serious crime to leak secret intelligence to the press, suggesting that this intelligence must have been credible and frightening enough for a U.S. official to risk going to prison in order to publicize it). At the moment of this

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/us/politics/russian-bounties-afghanistan-intelligence.html>

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russian-bounties-to-taliban-linked-militants-resulted-in-deaths-of-us-troops-according-to-intelligence-assessments/2020/06/28/74ffacc2-b96a-11ea-80b9-40ece9a701dc_story.html

⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russian-bounties-to-taliban-linked-militants-resulted-in-deaths-of-us-troops-according-to-intelligence-assessments/2020/06/28/74ffacc2-b96a-11ea-80b9-40ece9a701dc_story.html

hearing, however, the basic and detailed facts as reported in numerous media outlets have not been refuted. These latest revelations would only be an escalation of Russian support for the Taliban that started years ago.

Putin's Pattern of Growing Belligerent Behavior

If true, Putin's act against American soldiers is shameful, criminal, and reprehensible. All Americans -- as well as our allies in Afghanistan, in Europe, and around the world -- should be outraged. But we should not be surprised. For several years now, but especially since 2014, Putin has behaved like a rogue actor in the international system. In his early years as president, Putin wanted to become a respected member of the international community. He valued membership in the G-8, and enjoyed his partnership with President George W. Bush in fighting the global war on terrorism, which included the Taliban back then. Putin even assisted our war efforts in Afghanistan. President Medvedev did too. In one of his first acts of cooperation with President Obama, Medvedev signed a lethal transit agreement in July 2009, which allowed American lethal equipment to transit through Russia to Afghanistan by rail and helped to expand the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a transportation system vital for supplying our soldiers. When Putin returned for his third term as president in 2012, however, he had little interest in cooperation with the United States. By then, he believed firmly that the United States and the Obama administration were out to get him. He believes that we actively promote democracy to undermine autocratic regimes that we do not like, including his own.⁶ Putin now

⁶ For elaboration, see Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2018).

sees the United States as his central enemy. He aims to weaken the United States in all ways that he can, be it amplifying American domestic divisions through his media platforms, sowing divisions within the NATO alliance, or keeping the U.S. bogged down in Afghanistan. He not only fears our liberal, democratic values, but actively promotes a counter illiberal, orthodox, nationalist ideology. As Putin stated bluntly in an interview with *The Financial Times*, “The liberal idea has become obsolete.”⁷ He loathes the so-called “liberal international order”, which in Putin’s view, serves American hegemony and undermines Russia. With greater passion and more determination than Chinese Communist Party leader Xi Jinping, Putin seeks to weaken the United States and not just revise but destroy the international system. For years now, Putin has defied the norms, rules, and laws of the international system, and dared us to try to stop him.

The list of Putin’s illegal, belligerent acts is long and growing.

In 2008, he invaded Georgia and then recognized the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states in a violation of international law.

In 2014, Putin annexed Crimea, defying one of the most sacred rules of the international order since the end of World War II. No Soviet leader since Stalin had ever annexed territory during the Cold War. After Crimea, Putin fomented separatist movements in eastern Ukraine, resulting in over thirteen thousand people dead and roughly two million Ukrainian citizens displaced and provided the rocket that shot down MH17 over Ukraine, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crewmembers on board, another criminal act.⁸

⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ec5cbb98ed36>

⁸ <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2017/07/05/statement-by-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-on-mh17-5-july-2017>

In 2015, Putin deployed the Russian air force to Syria to prop up a ruthless dictator, Mr. Assad, who had used illegal chemical weapons to kill innocent civilians. A U.N. panel has accused the Russian military of committing “war crimes” when bombing Syrian civilians indiscriminately.⁹

In 2016, Putin violated American sovereignty, deploying multiple methods – including fake social media accounts, purchases of digital ads, the use of conventional broadcast and print media outlets, and the stealing of data from the Democratic Party -- to influence the outcome of our presidential election and amplify polarization in American society more generally.¹⁰ During the Cold War, Soviet propagandists also tried to influence American attitudes, but the scale and scope of the Russian intervention in our 2016 president election was unprecedented

In 2016, Russian intelligence agents allegedly tried to orchestrate a coup in Montenegro, just as the country was moving towards joining NATO.

In 2018, Putin tried to assassinate Sergey Skripal in Salisbury, UK using the Novichok nerve agent, which was easily traceable back to Russia. Skripal had been released from prison in Russia in a spy swap between the United States and Russia in 2010.

In 2019, Putin’s agents allegedly murdered Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, a Chechen Georgian citizen, in Berlin.¹¹ Last week, another Chechen dissident was assassinated in Austria.¹²

⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/03/united-nations-accuses-russia-of-war-crimes-in-syria.html>

¹⁰ For details of Russian methods as well as dozens of policy recommendation for how to prevent Russian meddling in the future, see Michael McFaul, ed., *Securing American Elections: Prescriptions for Enhancing the Integrity and Independence of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond*, (Stanford University, June 2019).

¹¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-18/germany-says-russian-officials-ordered-killing-in-berlin-park>

¹² <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/07/05/chechen-dissident-shot-dead-in-austria-a70786>

Now in 2020, American intelligence revealed that Putin offered Taliban fighter bounties to kill U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. The pattern is clear.

Moreover, Putin tightened his autocratic control of Russian society through suppression of the civil society and independent media, firmer control of regional leaders, and greater state ownership in the economy, throughout this period of time. Russian opposition figures have been harassed and arrested, including episodically one of Putin's most vocal critics today, Aleksey Navalny; assassinated, including in 2015 one of Russia's leading opposition leaders at the time, Boris Nemtsov; and poisoned, including most notably Vladimir Kara-Murza. The deepening of autocracy at home has correlated with Putin's growing belligerence abroad.

Trump's Pattern of Indifference to Putin's Belligerent Behavior

To date, President Trump has not responded, rhetorically or otherwise, to Putin's bounty killings of American soldiers. President Trump could have easily said the following, "My administration takes very seriously the protection of every American soldier. We are investigating seriously these allegations and asking hard questions of our Russian counterparts." He chose not to take even this simplest of actions.

His alibis for a nonresponse are changing and disturbing as well. Trump's first defense for why he did not do anything was that he had not been briefed on the matter. If true, that excuse is shocking and suggests a fundamental breakdown in the process for providing the president with vital intelligence. Many senior White House officials, including National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien and his senior team, as well as cabinet secretaries, receive the PDB every day. Even if Trump did not read about Putin's sinister actions against our soldiers in

Afghanistan (according to multiple sources, Trump does not take the time to read the PDB) and these action were “unconfirmed,” surely O’Brien should have told the president about this intelligence. This is especially true since Trump was making controversial policy decisions regarding Russia at the time, including inviting Putin to the G7 summit, announcing troop reductions in Germany, and calling Putin an amazing six times between March 30, 2020 and June 1, 2020. Trump’s alibi later changed when he claimed that the whole thing was “just another Hoax.”¹³ Trump was taking no action because Putin allegedly did not do anything wrong.

Tragically, Trump’s nonresponse follows a consistent pattern. President Trump has changed his mind on many foreign policy issues. His own former National Security Advisor, John Bolton, observed, “There really isn’t any guiding principle [in foreign policy] that I was able to discern other than what’s good for Donald Trump’s reelection...”¹⁴ But when it comes to Putin, Trump has maintained a firm and consistent view for four years. Trump wants to befriend Putin. In pursuit of that goal, the President of the United States of America has parted ways with the rest of his administration, his own Intelligence Community (IC), and maybe his own domestic political interests to praise Putin and excuse reckless, belligerent behavior.

In 2016, candidate Trump promised to look into recognizing Crimea as a part of Russia and lift sanctions, and made excuses for Putin’s criminal behavior with a classic of ‘whataboutism’ defense. He argued, “Well, I think our country does plenty of killing also...”¹⁵

¹³ <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1278284552679624705>

¹⁴ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/21/john-bolton-trump-re-election-book-333086>

¹⁵ <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/donald-trump-defends-putins-murder-of-journalists-our-country-does-plenty-of-killing-also/>

As president, Trump has consistently tried to befriend Putin, even when it was considered politically unwise to do so and when nearly his entire administration opposed his approach.¹⁶

In 2017, in an interview with Bill O'Reilly on Fox, President Trump affirmed his respect for Putin. When O'Reilly challenged Trump by calling the Russian president a "killer," Trump defended Putin, whom he has never met, by criticizing the United States: "We've got a lot of killers. What do you think? Our country's so innocent?"¹⁷

In 2018, Trump delivered his most shocking display of fealty before Putin at their summit in Helsinki. During a press conference after their meeting, Trump stood next to Putin and told the world that agreed with the Russian president and disagreed with his own intelligence community in believing that Russia did not interfere in the 2016 presidential election.¹⁸ At that same summit, Trump also embraced Putin's crazy proposal of allowing Russian government prosecutors to interrogate U.S. officials who Putin claimed falsely had committed crimes against Russia.¹⁹ After their one-on-one meeting with Putin, Trump refused to debrief his senior staff. According to one senior White House official, "He didn't want to share ... His mind-set was: This is between me and my friend."²⁰

In 2019, at their meeting in Osaka, Japan, Trump and Putin laughed together about the evils of the independent media. Trump said, "Get rid of them ... Fake news is a great term, isn't

¹⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/16/sorry-trump-is-not-tough-russia/>

¹⁷ <https://video.foxnews.com/v/5311148976001#sp=show-clips>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44852812>

¹⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/putin-wanted-to-interrogate-me-trump-called-it-an-incredible-offer-why/2018/07/26/7bb11552-90d2-11e8-b769-e3ff17f0689_story.html?noredirect=on

²⁰ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/29/what-fiona-hill-learned-in-the-white-house>

it? You don't have this problem in Russia, but we do." Putin replied, "We also have... It's the same."²¹

So, Trump's decision in 2020 to not criticize Putin follows a consistent pattern. Trump's unbridled embrace of Putin may be his most consistent foreign policy over the last four years.

Trump's desire to appease Putin has gone well beyond words. Trump has taken several foreign policy decisions that benefit the Russian president, including ordering American soldiers to leave Syria, announcing his decisions to reduce the number of American soldiers stationed in Germany, and inviting Putin to attend the G-7 summit planned for 2020 in Washington, a decision that no other G-7 leader supported. Even on small issues of little relevance to American national interests, Trump has sided with Putin, to include defending the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan or suggesting that Montenegro might spark World War III.

Ideologically, Trump shares Putin's hostility towards liberalism (the European use of the word, not the American) and multilateralism and embraces populist, nationalist, orthodox ideas championed by Putin. Trump and Putin have courted the same group of illiberal leaders in Europe, including Viktor Orban in Hungary, Matteo Salvini in Italy, Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, and Marie Le Pen in France. Conversely, both Trump and Putin have tepid relations with Chancellor Merkel in Germany.

How Trump's Embrace of Putin Undermines American National Interests

Nearly every American president has been compelled to negotiate with world leaders who do not share our values in order to pursue American security interests. Close personal

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/us/politics/trump-putin-election.html>

relationships with world leaders can be useful in pursuing U.S. national interests. Trump is not the first American president to forge a personal bond with a Russian leader.

What is different about Trump's diplomacy, however, is that he has defined a "good relationship" with Putin as the goal of his efforts, rather than as a means for securing some concrete benefit for the American people. To date, Trump's courtship has not produced one tangible foreign policy objective, or as the U.S. government refers to them, "deliverables."

Trump and Putin have not signed a nuclear arms control deal or even extended the existing New START Treaty. Putin has not helped Trump prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, or aided Trump's diplomacy regarding North Korea. Putin obviously is not facilitating American diplomatic and military objectives in Afghanistan. In our conflicts with China, Putin always sides with President Xi. As a result of Trump's embrace of Putin, the United States and Russia have not signed any trade deals. Trump has not succeeded in convincing his Russian friend to allow Americans to adopt Russian orphans again or to release falsely indicted Paul Whelan from a Russian prison.

Trump's over personalization of American diplomacy has gradually undermined many sound policies of his administration regarding Russia. In his administration's early years, reporters and analysts were told to watch what the administration does and ignore what the President himself says. However, on almost every major policy issue concerning Russia, there was a deep divide between Trump and the rest of his administration. With time, Trump has damaged his own administration's national security achievements.

The Trump administration has rightly continued to enhance America's commitments to NATO and encouraged other allies to do the same. In June 2014, in response to Russia's intervention in Ukraine, President Obama launched the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to

spend \$3.4 billion to enhance America's military presence in Europe. At the 2014 NATO summit, country leaders agreed to increase their defense spending to 2 percent of GDP, and the Trump administration has continued to press NATO allies to meet that commitment. In 2018, the Trump administration renamed the program the European Defense Initiative (EDI) and increased funding to \$6.5 billion by FY 2019.²² At the 2018 NATO summit in Brussels, the Trump administration provided leadership in launching the "Four Thirties" NATO Readiness Initiative, which established a goal for the alliance to be able to deploy thirty land battalions (roughly 300,000 soldiers), thirty naval combatant ships, and thirty air squadrons (approximately 300 aircraft) within thirty days to the eastern-most member states by 2020.²³ President Trump personally, however, has done major damage to the alliance's unity and cohesiveness. His constant attacks on NATO leaders, including first and foremost Angela Merkel, his incorrect accusation that NATO countries "owe" the United States payments, and his general disdain for the alliance undermined the NATO's credibility to defend against Russian attacks. Popular support of the United States in NATO countries now hovers at dangerously low numbers, which could undermine our collective response to a future Russian belligerent action in Europe.

The Trump administration made the right policy decision to provide lethal military assistance to Ukraine as well. This provision of javelin anti-tank missiles helped to deepen ties between the United States and Ukraine.²⁴ Yet again, Trump personally undermined the benefits

²² https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/EDI_Format_FINAL.pdf

²³ <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-defense-ministers-put-aside-tariff-tensions-to-approve-new-four-thirties-plan/a-44116264>

²⁴ In 2016, Trump's campaign tried to remove support for lethal assistance from the Republican Party Platform. Numerous reports have suggested that Trump personally never supported the shipment of this lethal military assistance. See <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/15/trump-resisted-ukraine-sale-javelin-antitank-missile/>

of this decision by conditioning the shipment of military assistance to the opening of an investigation into Joe Biden's business activities in Ukraine, despite no evidence whatsoever of any wrongdoing. U.S.-Ukraine relations today are more strained than any time since Ukrainian independence in 1991.

In 2017, the U. S. Congress, supported by some in the Trump administration, rightly passed the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) in response to Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. election, violation of human rights, annexation of Crimea, and military operations in eastern Ukraine.²⁵ Nonetheless, Trump personally has never endorsed sanctions, reluctantly signed into law CAATSA because of veto-proof majorities in Congress, and then mysteriously lifted sanctions on three Russian companies in 2019 controlled by Oleg Deripaska, a Putin ally and one of Russia's richest oligarchs.²⁶

The Trump administration rightly sustained and expanded Operation Inherent Resolve, launched by President Obama in 2014 to destroy ISIS in Iraq and Syria. But in 2018, Trump personally announced his decision to withdraw American armed forces from Syria, an abrupt choice made without inter-agency deliberation which triggered the resignation of Secretary of

²⁵ H.R.3364 - Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, *U.S. Congress website*, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/115/congress/house-bills/3364/text>. In April 2018, the Trump administration implemented additional sanctions against seven Russian oligarchs and twelve companies that they owned or controlled, 17 senior Russian government officials, and a state-owned Russian weapons trading company and its subsidiary, a Russian bank. In August 2018, the Trump administration rightly implemented additional sanctions in accordance with the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991 (CBWE Act), after issuing a finding that the Russian government used illegal chemical weapons to try to assassinate Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the United Kingdom.

²⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47023004>

Defense James Mattis.²⁷ The American hasty withdrawal was a gift to Putin but had the added advantage for Moscow of producing Mattis' departure from the administration.²⁸

Trump administration officials, including the current U.S. ambassador to the Russian Federation, John Sullivan, have rightly criticized human rights violations in Russia. Ambassador Sullivan recently flew a rainbow pride flag outside of the U.S. embassy to celebrate LGBT Pride Month, an act that earned him ridicule from Putin. American non-government organizations continue to receive funds from the Trump administration to support Russian civil society, independent media, and rule of law. Even still, President Trump personally has never criticized Putin or his government for anti-democratic actions or defended human rights. Trump (to the best of my knowledge) has never met with a Russian civil society leader. Trump's indifference to advancing democracy abroad while at the same embracing autocrats around the world has undermined the moral authority of the United States on issues of human rights and democracy internationally, including in Russia.

The Trump Administration's National Security Strategy, published in 2017, labeled both China and Russia as revisionist powers, stating bluntly, "China and Russia began to reassert their influence regionally and globally... In short, they are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor."²⁹ Trump personally, however, has never used such language to describe Russian actions in the world. Never.

²⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-announces-mattis-will-leave-as-defense-secretary-at-the-end-of-february/2018/12/20/e1a846ee-e147-11e8-ab2c-b31dc53ca6b_story.html

²⁸ In Kremlin circles, both Generals Mattis and McMaster were perceived as hawks on Russia, constraining Trump from doing the allegedly right thing regarding U.S. policy towards Russia.

²⁹ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>, p. 27.

Possible Immediate Trump Administration Responses

It Trump wanted to push back on Putin's actions in Afghanistan, he has a wide menu of options.³⁰ Most importantly and easily, President Trump could simply state the facts that the U.S. intelligence community has reported to him, even if it needed to be caveated, and criticize Putin for aiding the Taliban. Trump could announce that he has asked his government to continue to investigate this intelligence reporting and will hold Putin accountable for any American deaths underwritten by Russian financial assistance to the Taliban. Since Trump has never criticized Putin before, the very act of such a statement would have profound, positive consequences for U.S.-Russian relations.

Second, and again very easily, the U.S. could demarche the Russian government, calling in the Russian ambassador to the State Department to demand an explanation of Russian anti-American activities in Afghanistan. Demarches are used frequently and are very low-cost diplomatic acts.

Third, to strengthen his case and embarrass Putin, Trump could declassify the intelligence. Previous presidents have declassified intelligence to advance foreign policy objectives.³¹ According to reporting in *The New York Times*, the United States knows which bank accounts were used to transfer funds to the Taliban. Trump could publicize this information, including the names of the banks that facilitated the transactions.

³⁰ According to press accounts, the National Security Council convened a meeting in March to discuss such options, suggesting that the U.S. administration had taken seriously the intelligence reporting. As a former NSC official, I can report that this organization does not normally organize meeting to discuss policy options in response to flimsy, unsubstantiated intelligence.

³¹ For instance, during the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2009, the Obama administration declassified intelligence about Iran's nuclear program. The act of declassification helped to produce international support, including from Russia, for new sanctions against Iran, codified in May 2009 in UNSCR 1929.

Fourth, the Trump administration could request discussions of these allegations at the United Nations, the OSCE, NATO, and other international forums to bring more attention to Russian belligerent behavior.

Fifth, the Trump administration could sanction Russian officials involved in this bounty program policy, including banks and companies that facilitated these operations. U.S. prosecutors could seek indictments against Russian officials involved in any criminal activity, send those indictments to INTERPOL, and thereby limit the international travel of these Russians agents.

This list could go on. But Trump will not even take the first step. So, listing subsequent possible steps is a futile exercise.

Immediate Congressional Responses

The U.S. Congress has limited levers to pull in response, but three are available immediately. First, the U.S Congress must continue to demand direct briefings from the Intelligence Community and demand testimonies from Trump administration officials to learn more about the updated intelligence and facts concerning the current national security decision-making process. Did Trump really call Putin several times without being briefed by his national security staff about this intelligence? Did Trump actually know about the intelligence but proceeded anyway? Especially four months before an election, the American people have a right to know how these decisions are being made.

Second, the U.S. Congress must pass immediately the DETER Act, which obligates the U.S. government to implement new sanctions in the event of Russian interference in the 2020

presidential election. Putin does not have the same means available sway American voter preferences. However, Putin and his proxies still have many ways to undermine the legitimacy of our presidential election, including hacking registration lists in Election Day, spinning false stories about election fraud or voter suppression, or amplifying suspicions about the accuracy of the vote count. Republicans and Democrats should share a common interest in wanting to avoid such a scenario on Election Day. Passing the DETER Acts would help to decrease Russian meddling.

Third, the U.S. Congress should hold hearings and then draft legislation to make Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) an independent non-government organization, no longer affiliated with U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). RFE/RL has done its most effective work in providing independent reporting to Russia and other countries in the region when it had greatest distance from the U.S. government. The lines between RFE/RL independence and the U.S. government have become blurred by recent leadership changes and board removals.³² The Trump administration as well as future presidents need international media outlets to explain their policies and advance their values, but that is a different function from the kind of reporting that RFE/RL has done so successfully in the past. The U.S. Congress should pass legislation to create a permanent firewall between RFE/RL (and other private grantees), and Voice of America and the U.S. government more generally. RFE/RL should no longer be a grantee of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, but instead receive a direct appropriation from the U.S. Congress. The CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media should not have the power to appoint or dismiss the leadership of RFE/RL. Instead, RFE/RL leaderships should be appointed by

³² On recent troubling decisions made by CEO Michael Pack at USAGM, see <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2020/06/18/its-not-broke-and-youre-not-fixing-it/?utm-access=newsletter>

a bipartisan, independent board. The funding mechanism and governance structure of the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States or the BBC in the United Kingdom could serve as useful models. A similar restructuring may be useful for other grantees of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) -- Radio Free Asia, the Middle East Broadcasting Network, and the Open Technology Fund.

The Long Game: The Need for a Bipartisan Grand Strategy to Contain Putin's Russia

Short-term reactions to Putin's latest actions are not enough. In the long run, American foreign policymakers -- Republicans and Democrats together, the executive and legislative branches together -- must craft and sustain a comprehensive strategy for containing Putin's belligerent actions abroad and simultaneously cooperate with Moscow on a small set of issues of mutual benefit. Putin is an old man, set in his ways after twenty years in power. He is not going to change his mind suddenly about his perceptions of the American threat, so trying to restart a major positive bilateral agenda will fail. Last week, he amended the Russian constitution to allow him to rule until 2036. Washington must accept that Putin is here to stay and will not end his assault on democracy, liberalism, and multilateral institutions anytime soon. Instead, American policymakers must dig in for the long haul, and articulate a bipartisan, nuanced, long-term, grand strategy for addressing the challenges of dealing with Putin's Russia today similar in scale and scope to our strategy of containment during the Cold War. We must not romanticize the merits of containment or the glory days of confronting the Soviet threat. There are many differences

between the Cold War and our current era; some less threatening, some more.³³ Compared to the Cold War, our current debate, policymaking, and policy implementation towards Russia seems disjointed, politically polarized, and tactical, not strategic. There is a better way. A new strategy must include a big dose of containment, combined with smaller doses of selective engagement and selective isolation. Like a successful, sustainable strategy for responding to China's rise in the 21st century, U.S. foreign policymakers must deploy a complicated set of policies designed to both contain and engage Russia, to both deter and cooperate with Putin, and all the while pursue ways to connect directly with Russian society. Washington must find ways to deepen containment of the Kremlin's economic, military, and political influence, while also working with the Kremlin when doing so is truly necessary.

Enhancing Resilience at Home

Containment must start at home. Limiting Putin's ability to influence U.S. elections should be priority number one. As already mentioned, a most immediate and easy step would be for Congress to pass the DETER Act.

More generally, our entire election infrastructure needs enhanced cybersecurity resilience. If the federal government can require all cars to have seat belts, then federal authorities can require elementary cybersecurity protections such as dual authentication for all processes related to voting during a presidential election. Since we know that Russian cyber actors probed our electoral machinery in 2016, we must focus particular attention on enhancing

³³ I deliberately call our current era the "Hot Peace" to echo the Cold War parallels but still distinguish it from the specific circumstances of the Cold War. On the comparison, see McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace*.

the security of computers and networks involved in voter registries and the vote count. Those who operate these computer and network systems must be required to adopt specified cybersecurity protocols (e.g. dual authentication) and receive training about phishing, false identities, and other methods for preventing hacking attempts. Several states still have some precincts that lack paper trails for each ballot cast. These sloppy practices have to end. Every precinct must be able to produce a paper record for every vote.

Congress should also pass laws to provide greater transparency about Russian media activities inside the United States. The U.S. government must develop clearer rules and regulations for constraining foreign activities of influence -- especially through traditional media and social media -- during our elections and more generally. Progress has been made. American social media companies independently have taken a series of measures to reduce disinformation and increase transparency.³⁴ But the norms, rules, and laws for defending American sovereignty are still poorly developed.

³⁴ "Defending Democracy Program," *Microsoft*, <https://news.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/topic/defending-democracy-program/>; "Making Ads and Pages More Transparent," *Facebook Newsroom*, April 6, 2018, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/04/transparent-ads-and-pages/>; "We're Making Our Terms and Data Policy Clearer, Without New Rights to Use Your Data on Facebook," *Facebook Terms Update*, <https://www.facebook.com/about/terms-updates>; "Hard Questions: What is Facebook Doing to Protect Election Security?" *Facebook Newsroom*, March 29, 2018, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/03/hard-questions-election-security/>; Michee Smith, "Introducing a new transparency report for political ads," *Google Blog*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.blog.google/technology/ads/introducing-new-transparency-report-political-ads/>; "Transparency Report, Political Advertising on Google," *Google*, <https://transparencyreport.google.com/political-ads/overview>; Vijaya Gadde, Bruce Falck, "Increasing Transparency for Political Campaigning Ads on Twitter," *Twitter Blog*, May 24, 2018, https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/Increasing-Transparency-for-Political-Campaigning-Ads-on-Twitter.html; Ads Transparency Center, Twitter, <https://ads.twitter.com/transparency>; Bruce Falck, "Providing more transparency around advertising on Twitter," *Twitter Blog*, June 28, 2018, https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/Providing-More-Transparency-Around-Advertising-on-Twitter.html

Beyond elections, the American federal government must devote greater resources towards containing Russian cyber threats against critical infrastructure.

Strengthening NATO

To contain Putin in Europe, NATO's deterrent capabilities must be enhanced. After the annexation of Crimea and military intervention in eastern Ukraine, NATO leaders rightly initiated new measures to strengthen deterrence, including a pledge by all members to increase defense spending to 2% of GDP, forward deployments of light-armed brigades in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, and greater resources for countering cyber and disinformation operations. Regarding conventional ground forces, however, NATO lacks the capability to repel a Russian attack. NATO's southern flank is especially vulnerable.³⁵ Military mobility between countries in the alliance is constrained. And political divisions within the alliance are worse than ever before.

The United States must signal recommitment to defending our allies and work with allied leaders to enhance military readiness. A first easy step would be to reverse Trump's decision to reduce the number of American soldiers deployed in Germany.³⁶ U.S. leaders must continue to encourage all NATO allies to meet their pledges from 2014 of spending 2% on defense. NATO countries must spend more to enhance military mobility, reduce the time to cross borders, and enhance command and control regarding transportation operations.³⁷ More resources and

³⁵ For a list of several concrete steps to strengthen deterrence on this flank, see <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/nato-needs-a-coherent-approach-to-defending-its-eastern-flank/>

³⁶ <https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-says-washington-benefits-from-us-troops-in-germany/a-53831996>

³⁷ For more concrete recommendations on how to enhance mobility, see General Curtis Scaparotti, Ambassador Collen Ball, *Moving Out: A Comprehensive Assessment of European Military Mobility* (Washington: Atlantic

planning must be devoted to improving NATO's reactionary ability on its southern flank, which has not received the same level of attention as our Baltic allies.³⁸ NATO should deploy greater attention and resources to better deterrence in the most northern borders of the alliance, especially in the "GIUK Gap," seas between Greenland and Iceland and the United Kingdom.³⁹ Last updated in 2011, NATO's maritime strategy must be refreshed as well.⁴⁰ New weapon systems must be deployed. As Juliane Smith and Jerry Hendrix have recommended, "Big-ticket items such as Anti-submarine warfare (ASW)-equipped frigates, nuclear and conventionally powered submarines (if national budgets and technical expertise allow), and maritime patrol aircraft should be priorities for certain allies' defense acquisition plans. Nations with larger and more technically advanced economies should focus more on high-end capabilities, but maritime nations with smaller economies must also contribute some ASW capabilities in proportion with their abilities."⁴¹ U.S. officials must demonstrate leadership within NATO to improve decision-making within the alliance.⁴² More broadly, American leaders must understand the relationship between economic development, energy diversification, and security in that part of Europe closest to Russia and then seek ways to enhance development on all three of these fronts simultaneously.⁴³ Providing greater support of

Council. 2019). <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/press-releases/atlantic-council-releases-landmark-report-assessing-european-military-mobility/>

³⁸ For a list of several concrete steps to strengthen deterrence on this flank, see <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/nato-needs-a-coherent-approach-to-defending-its-eastern-flank/>

³⁹ <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/forgotten-waters>

⁴⁰ <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/forgotten-waters>

⁴¹ <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/forgotten-waters>

⁴² For a list of detailed reforms, see <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/nato-seventy-alliance-crisis>

⁴³ For detailed recommendations, see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42405.pdf>

the Three Seas Initiative, for instance, is one concrete step.⁴⁴ Doctrinally, NATO must return to its core mission of a defensive mission within Europe and spend less resources and strategic thinking on expeditionary forces and missions outside of Europe. Furthermore, NATO must develop a new doctrine for addressing the challenge of China's rise for European security.⁴⁵ Finally, NATO must enhance communication channels with Russia. Given the newly modernized weaponry on both sides, but especially Russia's new deployments of missiles previously prohibited by the INF Treaty, neither NATO nor Russia can afford an escalation of confrontation based on misperceptions or bad information.

In affirming our commitments to the alliance, U.S. leaders should remind Putin that NATO is a defensive alliance that has never attacked Russia and would be insane to ever do so. Enhanced NATO military capacity within allied countries bordering Russia is only threatening the Russian armed forces if they attack a NATO ally. Making the Russian military option more costly preserves peace; or as President Ronald Reagan once said, "peace through strength." The best way to keep the peace in Europe is to ensure Putin knows the high costs of military operations against a NATO member.

Lastly, the United States should stop opposing independent European security initiatives, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defense Fund (EDF). Instead, the U.S. should see these efforts as contributing in win-win ways to common American and European security interests.

⁴⁴ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11547>

⁴⁵ For some concrete new ideas, including the creation of a NATO-China Council, see <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-role-in-a-transatlantic-strategy-on-china/>. See also <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/09/nato-respond-china-power>

Maintaining and Lifting (at the Appropriate Time) Economic Sanctions

Another pillar of containment must be to maintain the current economic sanctions regime against Russian companies and individuals until Putin changes his behavior. As Putin himself has said, “Every crime must have its punishment.”⁴⁶ The crime of annexation must have a punishment. The crime of interfering in American elections must have a punishment. The crime of assassination, especially on foreign soil, must have a punishment.

The United States worked closely with allies and partners to put in place the most comprehensive set of sanctions against Russia ever as a punishment for its outrageous annexation and military intervention in Ukraine. Economic sanctions are a blunt, but necessary tool for reprimanding illegal, belligerent Russian government behavior. U.S. diplomats must maintain these sanctions now, as fatigue is growing in Europe. To lift sanctions before Putin changes his actions in Ukraine would send a terrible signal.

Some have argued that sanctions have not worked, and they should therefore be abandoned. Sanctions have produced direct, lasting negative economic effects on the Russian economy, but have not compelled Putin to quit his war in eastern Ukraine, leave Crimea, abandon Assad, or stop sowing division in American society.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there are increasing signs of Russian societal dissatisfaction. Putin’s approval rating recently fell to its

⁴⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ec5cbb98ed36>

⁴⁷ Russia is not a democracy, so societal pressure for policy change is difficult to achieve at all and most certainly will not come quickly. In all targeted countries, the feedback loop from sanctions to economic downturn to foreign policy change is a long and indirect one. In Iran, for instance, it took several years (and a presidential election producing a new leader) before sanctions deployed in 2010 helped to pressure the theocratic regime to negotiate a nuclear deal.

lowest level in several years.⁴⁸ Economic elites show incremental but growing signs of division, especially between those who need access to the global economy to prosper (that is, those who need access to international markets, especially capitals markets, as well as trade, foreign investment, and technology) compared to those more focused on Russia's domestic economy. If Russia's economy continues to grow at anemic rates, we should expect these anxieties about Putin's current foreign policy course to grow. Perhaps the best evidence that sanctions are working is Putin's irritation with them and his efforts to lift them. Even before Trump took office, Russian envoys and officials were discussing the need to lift sanctions with Trump's campaign, and the Russian government has continued to denounce American sanctions today. At the Helsinki summit in July 2018, Putin made clear his obsession with the Magnitsky Act, and its main champion, Bill Browder, by devoting several minutes of the joint press conference to spinning a fabricated tale about how U.S. government officials helped Browder launder money out of Russia to help finance the Clinton campaign. On August 10, 2018, in response to press reports about new sanctions legislation, Prime Minister Medvedev stated most aggressively that new sanctions against Russian banks would be a "declaration of economic war" and that Russia would retaliate "economically, politically, or, if needed, by other means".⁴⁹ If sanctions were so ineffective, why are all of these Russian government officials working so hard to lift them? Clearly, sanctions matter. Lifting them before Putin changes his behavior would signal American weakness.

⁴⁸ <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/>

⁴⁹ "U.S. curbs on Russian banks would be act of economic war - PM Medvedev," *Reuters*, August 10, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-russia-sanctions-moscow-reaction/u-s-curbs-on-russian-banks-would-be-act-of-economic-war-pm-idUKKBN1KV0FM>

To the extent possible, private American interests – individuals, companies, and shareholders – should not be adversely affected by existing or new sanctions. Our aim should be to deter and punish Putin, his government, and their proxies, not American traders and investors engaging in the Russian private sector. The growth of the Russian private sector – autonomous from the Russian state and cooperating with the American private sector – still serves American national interests, as actors in this sector of the Russian economy are the most likely to pressure Putin to stop isolating Russia through aggressive foreign policy actions.

In addition, U.S. diplomats must publicly articulate that economic sanctions against Russian companies and individuals are not designed to weaken Russia or trigger regime change. Rather, they were put in place in response to very specific actions made by Putin, and will be lifted when Putin reverses those specific actions.

Helping Ukrainian Democracy Succeed

No theater in the fight to contain Putin is more important than Ukraine. Ukraine is the new West Germany of today's "Hot Peace." Building a secure, wealthy, democratic Ukraine, even if parts of the country remain under occupation for a long time, is the best way to contain Russian ideological and military aggression in Europe. A successful democracy in Ukraine is also the best means for inspiring new democratic possibilities inside Russia and other former Soviet republics. Conversely, a failed state in Ukraine will confirm Putin's flawed hypothesis about the shortcomings of U.S.-sponsored democratic revolutions. Therefore, we must increase our military, political and economic support for Ukraine.

Under difficult circumstances, the Ukrainian government has achieved success since being invaded by Russia in 2014. In close cooperation with the IMF, the Ukrainian government has reduced its expenditures, raised heating tariffs, tightened monetary policy, and eliminated energy dependence on Russia – all difficult but important reforms for stimulating economic growth. Despite such progress, more needs to be done. Above all else, the political influence of Ukrainian big business conglomerates needs to be reduced. After positive signs at the beginning of his administration, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has made some personnel and policy decisions that undermined his commitment to fighting corruption and economic reform. After an initial push of assistance from Europe, the United States, and the IMF, disappointment with President Zelensky is returning among Western policy circles. The recent politicization of U.S.-Ukrainian relations by Trump's team in and out of the U.S. government has not helped. Senior U.S. government engagement in supporting democratic consolidation in Ukraine is missing. Many U.S. agencies, the U.S. Congress, American business, and the NGO community must engage more deeply with the Ukrainian government and society to assist democratic and market reforms. Nothing scares Putin more than a thriving economy and liberal democracy on his border.

The United States and our European allies should be doing more to reach out, nurture, and support directly the people in the Donbas, including the 1-1.5 million of them currently displaced in other parts of Ukraine. They need short-term humanitarian assistance, as well as long-term support — education, housing, and retraining — to rebuild their futures.

Expanding American Diplomacy and Enhancing Energy Diversification in Europe

Western countries must develop a coherent strategy to contain possibly coercive Russian government's economic activities in Europe, including first and foremost reducing dependence on Russian energy exports. Any policy that diversifies European energy supplies, including American exports of LNG gas, and reduces European dependence on Russian energy exports must be pursued. Projects like Nord Stream II do not serve that policy objective.

More generally, American foreign policymakers must devote more attention to Europe. Putin is courting individual European leaders. Opposite Putin, we must improve our diplomatic game in Europe. Above all else, the United States must stop framing all interactions with our European allies as zero-sum transactions. That holds true for NATO spending. That also holds true for trade negotiations. Threatening tariffs against allies should be a last resort and done through the WTO rather than on a bilateral basis. American presidents must stop appointing major campaign donors as ambassadors to our major European allies as well, and instead hire experienced foreign policy specialists – either career foreign service or political appointees – to these posts. Collectively, we must work more closely with democracies in Europe to combat Russian disinformation and devote more time and resources to promoting our allies' values as well as our own.

Enhancing Transparency about Russian Money in the United States and Around the World

The United States and the West should develop a coherent strategy of economic containment of the Russian government and its proxies (but not the Russian private sector). Putin uses these companies to advance his foreign policy interests.

The reporting in the United States about a bank account controlled by the GRU transferring funds to a bank account controlled by the Taliban once again showed the incredible capabilities of the American Intelligence Community (IC). The degree of detail about Russian illiberal activities documented in the Mueller Report that produced indictments of GRU intelligence officers was another illustration of our outstanding intelligence gathering capacity. This tool of deterrence is underutilized. While protecting methods of sources, American foreign policymakers should seek to declassify more information about Russian financial transfers and money laundering first inside the United States and second around the world. Russians should know how their leaders are spending and investing their money abroad. American and Russian voters have a right to know if Russian money is being used to buy political influence in the United States. In the United States, new legislation should be adopted to eliminate anonymous ownership of corporations and real estate as well as the transfer of funds abroad through law firms.⁵⁰

In conjunction with these more transparent policies, genuine private sector companies inside Russia should be encouraged to engage with Western investors and markets. The strategic goal should be to underscore the economic benefits of markets and Western integration and the economic costs of state ownership and mercantilist behavior.

Suspend Russia from INTERPOL

⁵⁰ See for instance, S.1717, The Corporate Transparency Act of 2017: <https://www.congress.gov/bills/115/congress/senate-bill/1717>. Anders Aslund details how these mechanisms are used to launder money from Russia to the United States in *How the United States Can Combat Russia's Kleptocracy* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council, July 31, 2018): http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/How_the_United_States_Can_Combat_Russia_s_Kleptocracy.pdf

The Kremlin's abuse of INTERPOL – through the inappropriate use of red notices and red diffusions – must be stopped. INTERPOL's constitution forbids the use of the organization for political purposes, yet the Russian government has attempted to use red notices and red diffusion mechanisms to silence and threaten critics. The U.S. Congress should codify in law the specific sanctions that the U.S. government will implement in response to future abuses of INTERPOL's red notice and red diffusion mechanisms.

Countering Russian Propaganda

The United States government should not seek to counter Russian propaganda with American propaganda. Instead, the best method for countering disinformation is real reporting from credible journalists in Russia, Ukraine, and other countries in the region. American direct funding of these media outlets would taint them. Instead, our focus should be on providing short-term training opportunities, year-long fellowships at American and European universities, and internships at Western media organizations. Education and the free-flow of information are our best tools in this long struggle against Russian propaganda. The United States and other democracies, in partnership with the philanthropic world, should unite to provide more permissive conditions for independent journalism, including when possible, in the Russian language (both inside and outside of Russia). For instance, funding for investigative journalists, support to locate servers outside of Russia, and aid to hide the virtual identities of journalists and their sources are just a few small steps for supporting independent media. Equally important, as already mentioned, RFE/RL must become in an independent, non-governmental organization.

More generally, it is essential that the United States seeks to contain, degrade, and counter Putin's international ideological campaign. American policymakers have to encourage social media platforms to demote Kremlin content. Algorithms organizing content on YouTube, Google, or Bing searches should not over represent information distributed by the Russian government through its propaganda channels. Readers must know when they are seeing content created by Russian state media sources. When that content does appear in searches, social media companies should provide sources from more reliable news organizations simultaneously; every time an RT article or video appears, a BBC story should pop up next to it. The United States must organize democracies around the world to develop a common set of laws and protocols for regulating Russian government-controlled media, including bots and trolls.

Selective Engagement

In parallel to an overall strategy of containment, U.S. policymakers need to engage the Kremlin on a small number of mutually beneficial issues. We did so during the Cold War. We can do both again.

Most immediately, the Trump administration must work with Putin's government to extend the New START treaty. Not only does this treaty prevent a needless nuclear arms race, but its comprehensive verification measures provide valuable information about Russia's nuclear weapons and modernizing systems. The treaty's limitations especially serve American national interests today when Russia is investing heavily in the development of new nuclear weapons, and we are not. Preservation of the inspection regime helps us to keep the peace. Uncertainty about the other side's capabilities is always destabilizing, causing military strategists to develop war

plans based on worst-case scenarios. The intelligence we obtain from inspections is invaluable for making accurate assessments of Russia's nuclear capabilities. "Don't trust, only verify," should be the new slogan of our Hot Peace era. Moreover, if we pull out of this treaty, we will need to spend billions more on deploying additional nuclear weapons of little strategic value and billions more in trying to gather intelligence about Russia's nuclear modernization program that we can now collect intelligence more easily on through procedures codified in the New START Treaty. Trump's idea of requiring China to join these talks must be retired. Instead, the United States and Russia should extend the New START treaty, an outcome that serves U.S. national security interests, and U.S. arms control negotiators should begin discussions with their Chinese and Russian counterparts about a future multilateral treaty to limit the deployments of nuclear weapons. But these two actions should not be linked. Instead, they should be sequenced.

There are a number of other areas where cooperation can and should occur. American diplomats at the highest levels should engage with their Russian counterparts in the Minsk Process designed to end the war in eastern Ukraine. Our absence has been detrimental to progress. Washington and Moscow can also cooperate on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. American and Russian officials should cooperate on our common agenda regarding climate change and nuclear nonproliferation, especially regarding Iran. Finally, we should seek to negotiate a minimal agreement on limiting cyber-attacks against each other. Infrastructure targets, for instance, should be off limits.

Greater Indifference

Similar to robust containment, American foreign policymakers must pursue greater isolation and indifference towards the Russian government. During the post-Cold War era, American presidents were eager to give their Kremlin counterparts symbolic leadership roles as a way to signal respect. Those days are over. Conversations about Russia rejoining the G-8 must end. Western government delegations should stop showing up at sporting events in Russia (Let the athletes play, but without government officials in the stands). Putin's bad behavior should not be forgotten in the pursuit of new eras of détente or rapprochement.

Concerning our most vital national security interests, the United States does not need Russian cooperation. Too often, American and European leaders exaggerate the importance of "better relations" with Putin for achieving security and economic goals. For instance, U.S. officials frequently highlight cooperation with Russia on fighting terrorism as a lowest common denominator of shared interests. Yet, even this issue area is hard to cooperate with Putin's government on since their definition of terrorist organizations are different than ours. Sometimes, as we have witnessed recently in Afghanistan and Syria, Russia is supporting directly and indirectly the very forces we are fighting. Indifference and isolation, rather than engagement and courtship, can be a better strategy on many issues. U.S. officials can devote a lot of time and energy chasing Russians to cooperate when that time and energy might achieve greater results without Russia in the mix.

American and European leaders are impatient and seek a return to more normal relations with Russia. Cooperative relations with Moscow are better than noncooperative relations. However, the pursuit of improved relations cannot come at the expense of forgetting Putin's past behavior. A more prudent and effective policy is to soberly realize that the status quo stalemate

is the best that can be accomplished right now. While Putin rules Russia, simply mitigating deterioration in our relations would be a major achievement.

Engaging Russians; Combatting Russophobia

While American leaders seek to implement a strategy of containment and limited engagement with Putin's government, non-governmental organizations, business leaders, and universities must expand direct contacts with their counterparts in Russian society. Not all Russians support Putin's autocratic policies at home or abroad. Those inside Russia who still seek to return to democracy and rejoin the West should be encouraged, not isolated. Putin's regime seeks to limit and prevent such contacts; we must discover new modalities for expanding them.

One of those modalities for closer cooperation is more permissive conditions for Russian immigration to the United States. Rather than erecting more barriers, the United States should be welcoming the best and the brightest from around the world, including from Russia.

American elected officials, commentators and journalists must stop demonizing the Russian (and Chinese) people. Above all else, American government officials as well as U.S. media outlets must distinguish between Russia and Russians – between Putin and the Russian people. They are not synonymous. "Russia" did not annex Crimea; Putin did. "Russians" did not interfere in our elections in 2016; Putin did. Not every Russian working in the United States is trying to steal American intellectual property. Not every Russian on Twitter criticizing U.S. policy is a bot controlled by the Kremlin. Not every Russian student studying in the United States is a spy. Our current conflict with the Russian government is not determined by Russian

culture or history; Putin the individual has made choices that have fueled this confrontation. Fueling “Russophobia” or propagating stereotypes about Russian national proclivities for imperialism or dictatorship only serves Putin’s political objectives.

Revitalizing American Democracy

The United States will be engaged in an ideological struggle with the Russian and Chinese autocracies for decades to come. To win that argument requires democratic renewal and better governance performance – a democracy that delivers – at home. American leaders need to better appreciate that poorly run elections damage the image of American democracy abroad. Voter disenfranchisement, police violence, elections that compel citizens to stand in lines for hours, gerrymandering, weak campaign finance laws, and elections which result in winners who do not win the popular votes all undermine America’s reputation as a functioning, inspiring democracy. Likewise, our poor performance in combatting COVID-19 offers autocrats the opportunity to argue that their systems of government works better than ours. Reviewing the long list of reforms needed to strengthen our democracy and improve our social and economic outcomes would be inappropriate at this hearing, but failing to see the connection between our democracy’s declining performance at home and our ability to fight and win the ideological battle with autocracy abroad would be a strategic error. Most immediately, there would be no greater gift to Putin and autocrats around the world than if we failed to conduct a free and fair election on November 3, 2020.⁵¹ It is imperative that we do all we can to guarantee a safe,

⁵¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/15/we-need-start-preparing-november-election-now/>

legitimate presidential election with results that are recognized by all for the future of democracy both in the United States and around the world.

Accepting Again Leadership of the Free World and the Liberal International Order

Finally, the United States is more likely to succeed in containing Putin's Russia by accepting greater leadership as the world's most powerful democracy and reengaging and reforming, and stop withdrawing from, the liberal international order. Going it alone is a suboptimal strategy. If Putin wants to undermine democracy and the liberal international order, then we should be seeking to build the largest coalition possible to defend democracy and the liberal international order. Easy first steps would be to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal (the JCPOA) and the Paris Climate accords. The United States also should seek to join The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea would help us achieve our national security objectives vis-a-vis Russia in the Arctic (and China in the South China Sea). Demonstrating greater leadership to reform and reinvigorate the Community of Democracies, the OSCE, UN Human Rights Council, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) also would help to draw clearer lines between democracies and autocracies in the world. Countries threatened by Russian coercion want to see the U.S. return as a more active player in the Caucasus and Central Asia. American withdrawal from international agreements and multilateral institutions in parallel to greater indifference to promoting democracy has created new opportunities for Russia (and China) to fill the global vacuum. It's time to reverse course.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Ambassador.

Now we will recognize Dr. Marten for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF DR. KIMBERLY MARTEN, PROFESSOR AND
CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, BARNARD
COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

Dr. MARTEN. Thank you, Chairman Keating and Ranking Member Wilson and members of the subcommittee, for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

My written testimony contains a lot more detailed information, but in the 5 minutes that I have here I am going to use my introductory remarks to highlight two things. The first is how the Russian political system operates today, and the second is to talk about the Wagner Group and how it fits within it. I have been doing deep research on the Wagner Group and Yevgeny Prigozhin for the past 2-1/2 years, and that is the basis for my testimony today.

As Chairman Keating pointed out, the Wagner Group is often called a private military company, but it really is not. It is very closely connected to the GRU, to the Russian military intelligence agency. And, in fact, the Wagner Group has changed so much over the years that, rather than thinking of it as a company or a firm with an organizational structure, we might think of it as just a name for an activity that the Russian State carries out.

So what about how the Russian system operates? The Russian system is based on interlocking patronage networks among the elite. What do I mean when I say "patronage"? It means people at the top are expected to take care of the people underneath them in the hierarchy, and people who are lower down in the hierarchy are expected to be loyal to those at the top.

And, in Russia, laws are actually made to be broken, and when you are in the patronage network, you understand who is allowed to break the laws and how. And so those who are within that network are given a roof, they are given protection to break the laws. And the people who go to prison in Russia are either outsiders who are not in that network or people who have showed disloyalty to the network. So you are in prison not for the crimes you have committed but for the disloyalty that you have shown to those above you in the hierarchy.

Now, everyone at the top or almost everyone at the top has broken a lot of laws, and that makes everybody vulnerable, and that is what keeps the Russian system operating. That is why we can have Putin potentially stay in power until 2036 and, despite the problems in Russia, there is unlikely to be a lot of effort to try to change the system drastically. Because the people who benefit, who have power from the current system, are all vulnerable if they are trying to get out, and everybody is protecting each other.

Into this mix we find the Wagner Group, which first appeared in 2014 in eastern Ukraine. Now, private military companies are technically illegal, even unconstitutional, in Russia today. Yet Putin has mentioned Wagner publicly and has said, "Let them do whatever they want to, all over the world. Let them make money doing it, as long as they do not break any laws at home." But since they are illegal at home, that gives you a sense of just how corrupt and two-faced the Russian system is when it comes to illegality.

A lot of people have referred to the Wagner Group as mercenaries, but they are really not. They do work for pay when they are going out on contract, but they are fiercely patriotic, and they only act when they believe they are doing so on behalf of the Russian State. And, in fact, all the evidence we have about where they have operated indicates that a Russian State ministry of one kind or another has always helped negotiate the contracts for where they are employed abroad. So they are really a member of the Russian state, as has been talked about previously.

The owner, or contractor, was revealed to be Yevgeny Prigozhin in 2016. And, as Chairman Keating noted, he should be familiar to everybody for being under indictment and sanctions in the United States. Everywhere that Wagner goes, Prigozhin has some sort of a mining contract or energy contract, where Wagner troops are also being employed to guard those mining and energy fields for his private benefit.

To the Wagner Group is used so often because it gives Putin plausible deniability for the many military adventures that he is conducting abroad. And the plausible deniability does not matter so much for people in the international community, because the Wagner Group is now followed by high-quality investigative journalists everywhere they go, so we know what they are doing and where they are. Where it matters is to Putin's domestic audience, his political base, the people who are ordinary workers and ordinary retired folks who get their news from Russian State media.

And what it allows Putin to do is engage in lots of foreign adventures without having to bear the costs at home, without having especially to bear the casualties that would be accruing to uniformed Russian troops if they were instead sent on those missions. We know that the Wagner Group has suffered casualties in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Mozambique—all part of Putin's adventures.

In my written testimony, I talk about two cases in depth, the Central African Republic and Libya, where the Wagner Group is deployed currently. But in the closing moment that I have, let me just talk about what the U.S. might do in response to the Wagner Group's and Prigozhin's activities.

Unfortunately, sanctions do not seem to have stopped very much what it is that they are doing, because they can just find places to go in the world where there is not reciprocity with the United States, where the sanctions and the indictments do not have a lot of bite.

But as we are thinking about responding to them, I would ask us to keep two things in mind.

First, we can engage in messaging, especially toward ordinary people in the Middle East and Africa. Let them know just what it is that Putin is up to, that Russian troops kill innocent civilians, that the Wagner Group carries out a lot of human-rights violations everywhere it goes, that they are often not even very effective—they do not tend to be gaining a lot of success for, Russia militarily—and that Prigozhin is a lifelong organized criminal who is taking the natural resources of these communities and using them for his own profit without sharing the benefits back to these communities.

And the second thing that our troops in the field should be aware of is that the Wagner Group may be there and may be targeting them. And we have so much evidence of Russia, in underhanded ways, trying to threaten U.S. forces in the field that it is just very important that we keep our defenses up and that we expect Russian malfeasance and Russian bad behavior and are prepared to deal with it.

So thank you very much. I will leave it there.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Marten follows:]

**The GRU, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and Russia's Wagner Group:
Malign Russian Actors and Possible U.S. Responses**

Kimberly Marten
Professor and Chair, Political Science Department
Barnard College, Columbia University

Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on Exposing and Demanding Accountability for Kremlin Crimes Abroad
Prepared for presentation on July 7, 2020

Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Kinzinger, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify, and to share my research and analysis with you concerning the Russian military intelligence agency (the Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU), Yevgeny Prigozhin, and the Wagner Group "private" military company.

This testimony first summarizes the recent malign activities of the GRU. It then explains how Russia's political system works today and the role of President Vladimir Putin's personal friends and cronies within it. Then, relying on an exhaustive review of high-quality, primarily Russian-language and local investigative journalism,¹ it explains who Prigozhin is, what the Wagner Group is, and what is known about the Wagner Group's recent activities, including how it appears to be connected to the GRU and how its actions have threatened U.S. values and interests. It concludes by explaining why U.S. sanctions so far seem to have had limited impact on Russia's malign behavior, and suggests additional options that may be available to the United States and our allies in responding to the Wagner Group and Prigozhin.

The GRU

The Main Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet Ministry of Defense was never reformed after the Soviet collapse. The same organizational structure and personnel carried over into the new Russia. In Soviet times the GRU concentrated on defense industrial espionage, foreign military operations, and preparation for war with the US and NATO. GRU special operations forces (*spetsnaz*) were trained to carry out assassinations, terrorist actions, and other sabotage and subversion, behind enemy lines on the eve of war and in wartime.²

¹ Much of this information is summarized in Kimberly Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2019): 181-204; Marten, "Into Africa: Prigozhin, Wagner, and the Russian Military," PONARS Policy Memo 561, Jan. 2019; and Marten, "Russ-Afrique? Russia, France, and the Central African Republic," PONARS Policy Memo 608, Aug. 2019.

² Victor Suvorov, *Inside Soviet Military Intelligence* (New York: Macmillan, 1984); Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Sword and Shield: Soviet Intelligence and Security Apparatus* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1986), pp. 34-6.

An unnamed NATO spokesperson told a Western journalist that the GRU appeared to become much more active starting in 2008, at about the time of Russia's war with Georgia.³ GRU unit 29155 has received particular attention. Western intelligence agencies believe that this unit is responsible for attempting to destabilize Moldova and to launch a coup in Montenegro when each were on the cusp of becoming new NATO members. It is also believed to have led the 2018 attempted assassinations of Bulgarian arms dealer Emilian Gebrev (by poisoning), and GRU defector Sergei Skripal (through the use of the Novichok chemical weapon in Salisbury, UK).⁴ That same unit is now alleged to have offered substantial cash bounties to Taliban fighters to kill US service members in Afghanistan.⁵ The U.S. Justice Department brought indictments against twelve members of two other GRU units for the 2016 theft and publication of private emails from the Democratic National Committee and the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign.⁶

Russia's Political System under Vladimir Putin

Russia's political system is dominated by complex and corrupt personal networks that are often called the "power vertical." Formal government institutions matter far less in Russia than do informal network connections between members of the elite, joined together in a loose, evolving, and internally fractious hierarchy.⁷ The system is based on patronage. Those at the top are expected to share opportunities for wealth and advancement with those further down, and those below are expected to demonstrate loyalty to those above them. Laws are made to be broken, with implicit rules understood by well-connected insiders about who can break the laws and how, for the benefit of network members.⁸ Leaders of the Russian state agencies that wield force (the *siloviki*), including intelligence officers, have prominent roles throughout business and all levels of government.⁹ There is also a great deal of evidence that the Russian political system has become interpenetrated with major organized crime networks.¹⁰

³ Mitch Prothero, "Unit 29155," *Business Insider*, Mar. 16, 2020.

⁴ Michael Schwartz, "Top Secret Russian Unit Seeks to Destabilize Europe, Security Officials Say," *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 2019.

⁵ Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt and Michael Schwartz, "Russia Secretly Offered Afghan Militants Bounties to Kill U.S. Troops, Intelligence Says," *New York Times*, June 26, 2020.

⁶ "Grand Jury Indicts 12 Russian Intelligence Officers for Hacking Offenses Related to the 2016 Election," U.S. Department of Justice, July 13, 2018.

⁷ Alena Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices that Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Vadim Kononko and Arkady Moshes, eds., *Russia as a Network State: What Works in Russia When State Institutions Do Not?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁸ Kirill Rogov, "Switch on, Switch off: How Law Sustains the Russian System," *ODR: Russia and Beyond*, Dec. 17, 2010.

⁹ Olga Kryshatanovskaya, *Anatomiia Rossiiskoi Elity* [The Anatomy of the Russian Elite] (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005); Kryshatanovskaya and Stephen White, "The Formation of Russia's Network Directorate," in *Russia As a Network State*, "op cit.", pp. 19-38; Brian Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (New York: Cambridge, 2011).

¹⁰ Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014); Mark Galeotti, *Crimintern: How the Kremlin Uses Russia's Criminal Networks in Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2017; Galeotti, *The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Also see the investigative summary of the Spanish prosecution of organized crime figures close to Putin: Sebastian Rotella (ProPublica), "Gangsters of the Mediterranean," *The Atlantic*, Nov. 10, 2017.

The system preceded Russian President Vladimir Putin, but Putin cemented and mastered it. He has given top government positions and leadership roles at state-controlled business conglomerates to his own network associates, especially those from his hometown of Leningrad/St. Petersburg and those he knew during his decades-long career as a Soviet and Russian intelligence officer.¹¹ Network loyalty is often enforced by using one or another of the Russian police and intelligence services. Individuals who violate the system's implicit rules may find themselves (or their family members) facing police raids, prosecution, and imprisonment on tax evasion or bribery charges, for example. They may also have their lives destroyed by the release of compromising material (*kompromat*), whether real or manufactured, about their personal behavior. In contrast, those who demonstrate loyalty are given a "roof" (*krysha*) by the authorities that protects them, their families, and their business interests from harm. Virtually everyone in power has violated the law at some point and has something to hide. This makes everyone vulnerable to retribution, ensuring that no one has an incentive to challenge the status quo.¹²

Russian oligarchs have emerged from and benefited from this system. As long as the oligarchs remain loyal and generous to those above them in the political hierarchy, they are allowed to continue to make money—a deal that Putin explicitly laid out in a meeting with oligarchs when he was elected president in 2000.¹³ If they misstep, however, they (and their families) risk losing everything and going to prison, as happened to Mikhail Khodorkovsky, CEO of the Yukos oil conglomerate, in 2003.¹⁴

Yevgeny Prigozhin and His Business Contracts and Activities

Prigozhin's background is very unlike that of most Russian oligarchs. As a young man in Soviet Leningrad he was imprisoned for 9 years on organized crime-related charges.¹⁵ He was released from prison three years early in 1990, which may mean that he entered some kind of deal with the authorities. He then set up a sausage wholesale business with his stepfather, and became the manager of a grocery store chain in St. Petersburg owned by a high school classmate. When that business faltered in the mid-1990s, he and another friend decided to go into the restaurant business.¹⁶

At this time Putin (who was still a reserve officer in the KGB, after returning from East Germany) was serving as an advisor, and eventually first deputy, to the mayor of Leningrad/St. Petersburg. This was probably an arrangement that was first encouraged by the KGB.¹⁷ Putin, in the words of Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, was "the main enabler...the individual who decided whether or not businesses could legally operate in the city."¹⁸ In other words,

¹¹ Kryzhanovskaya and White, "Formation of Russia's Network Directorate;" Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2013).

¹² Alena Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernize? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³ Sergei Guniev and Andrei Rachinsky, "The Role of Oligarchs in Russian Capitalism," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 131-150.

¹⁴ Marshall I. Goldman, "Putin and the Oligarchs," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 2004): 33-44.

¹⁵ Ilya Zhigulev, "Evgeny Prigozhin's Right to be Forgotten," *Meduza*, June 13, 2016.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, pp. 161-2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

Prigozhin's deals in the early 1990s could not have gone forward without Putin's knowledge and support. Prigozhin reportedly got friendly with one of Putin's bodyguards, Roman Tsepov,¹⁹ who was also involved in providing security for local organized crime organizations. Putin himself is widely reported to have had many business connections to St. Petersburg organized crime leaders at this time.²⁰

After Putin was elected president of Russia in 2000, he brought several foreign dignitaries to dine at one of Prigozhin's restaurants, including U.S. President George W. Bush at least twice.²¹ At some point during Putin's presidency Prigozhin's businesses diversified. He became the primary caterer for the Kremlin,²² for Russia's public school system, and (at least for two years, until the Defense Ministry ended it) for the Russian military.²³ He also provided cleaning services for the military, where he was accused of corruption.²⁴ In 2017 the Russian Defense Ministry started refusing to pay Prigozhin's invoices. He took the Defense Ministry to court several times, and largely won those legal disputes against the ministry,²⁵ demonstrating the power of his "roof" in the Russian court system.

Prigozhin diversified even further when he founded St. Petersburg's Internet Research Agency, the "troll farm" under U.S. indictment and sanctions for the clandestine social media influence operations it attempted during the U.S. 2016 presidential and 2018 congressional election campaigns.²⁶ While this firm has not been publicly connected to the GRU, its activities certainly complemented the GRU's simultaneous U.S. email thefts and election interference. Prigozhin's firms have also been associated with clandestine political influence operations throughout Africa,²⁷ mostly focused on election meddling, but including attempts to discredit the military and security operations there of U.S. ally France.²⁸

¹⁹ Zhegulev, "Prigozhin's Right to be Forgotten."

²⁰ Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, pp. 67-80; Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Knopf, 2015), p. 85.

²¹ Zhegulev, "Prigozhin's Right to be Forgotten," reports a 2002 dinner. A photo of a 2006 dinner hosted by Prigozhin and including Putin and Bush was taken by Sergei Zhukov for AP, and included in Greg Myre, "'Putin's Chef' Has His Fingers In Many Pies, Critics Say," NPR.org, Jan. 30, 2019.

²² Andrei Zakharov, Anastasia Napalkova, and Andrei Soshnikov, "Poterial li Prigozhin Kontrakt na Kremlevskii Banket? Ne Fakt [Did Prigozhin Lose the Kremlin Catering Contract? False]," *BBC Russian Service*, Dec. 27, 2018.

²³ Zhegulev, "Prigozhin's Right to be Forgotten."

²⁴ Denis Korotkov, "Kukhnya Chastnoi Armii [The Kitchen Intrigues of the Private Army]," *Fontanka.ru*, June 9, 2016.

²⁵ Anastasia Yakoreva and Svetlana Reiter, "'Restorator Putina' perestal byt' lyubimym podryadchikom Minoborony [Putin's Restaurateur Stopped Being the Favorite Contractor of the Defense Ministry]," *The Bell*, Mar. 2, 2018.

²⁶ *United States of America v. Internet Research Agency LLC*, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Case 1:18-cr-00032 DLF Document 1, Feb. 16, 2018; U.S. Treasury Department, "Treasury Sanctions Russian Cyber Actors for Interference with the 2016 U.S. Elections and Malicious Cyber-Attacks," Press Release, March 15, 2018; U.S. Treasury Department, "Treasury Targets Assets of Russian Financier who Attempted to Influence 2018 U.S. Elections," Press Release, Sept. 30, 2019.

²⁷ Shelby Grossman, Daniel Bush, and Renée DiResta, *Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa*, Stanford Internet Observatory, Oct. 29, 2019.

²⁸ Sergei Petrov, "The Contractors and Organizers Of Russian Journalists Murder In Central African Republic Are Named," *Federal'noe Agentstvo Novostei* [Federal News Agency], June 13, 2019; Marten, "Russ-Afrique?" op cit.

In 2016 it was revealed that Prigozhin's firms and security personnel were also connected to the Wagner Group private military company.²⁹ Everywhere that Wagner now goes, it seems that Prigozhin has some sort of related contract to provide guard services for mineral or energy businesses, in return for a cut of the profits.

Rumors appeared in Russian media and social media in October 2019 that Prigozhin had been killed in the crash of a gun-running Russian military airplane in the Democratic Republic of Congo.³⁰ No evidence was ever produced to substantiate that claim. While Prigozhin does not seem to have appeared in public since then, he has never been a very public figure. It makes sense to assume for now that he is still alive.

Private Military Companies in Russia

Private military companies (PMCs) are illegal and (by some interpretations) unconstitutional in Russia. After a lengthy series of debates in the Russian legislature (the Duma),³¹ the state definitively affirmed their illegality in March 2018.³² There are some exceptions: for example, Rosneft, the huge state-controlled oil company, and Gazprom, the huge state-controlled natural gas company, are allowed under Russian law to employ large private armed forces to guard their facilities and pipelines, and to use force to detain suspects and kill intruders.³³

Despite these legal and constitutional prohibitions, a number of Russian PMCs have flourished.³⁴ Their foreign activities range from guarding mining and energy sites where Russian companies have contracts, to delivering weapons and providing security training to foreign forces. They have also engaged in direct combat on behalf of Russia and its allies.

Keeping these groups illegal in Russia enhances plausible deniability for the Russian state, by allowing the Kremlin to distance itself from any unsavory or risky actions the groups take. Illegality also serves two other purposes, following the logic of the Russian system outlined above. First, it keeps these groups loyal to the Kremlin "power vertical" and to Putin, and forces them to share whatever wealth they accrue through their activities. Any time they show disloyalty to their patrons, they can be prosecuted and imprisoned for mercenary behavior. Second, it restricts the market and ensures that only Putin's favorites can profit from these activities, since any outsider who attempted to form such a group would face a similar fate.

There is at least one example where this happened, when the Slavonic Corps (a Wagner Group predecessor) was sent to Syria in 2013. Russia had not yet intervened directly in the Syrian civil

²⁹ Korotkov, "Kukhnya Chastnoi Armii."

³⁰ Olivia Acland and Adrian Blomfield, "Mystery as Plane Carrying Russian Arms Smugglers Crashes in Congo," *Telegraph*, Oct. 16, 2019.

³¹ Tor Bukkvoll and Åse Gilje Østensen, *Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies: The Implications for European and Norwegian Security*, Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI) Report 18/01300, 2018, pp. 28-9.

³² "Kremlin Blocks the Bill Legalizing Russian Private Military Companies," *UAWire*, Mar. 28, 2018.

³³ Cindy Hurst, "The Militarization of Gazprom," *Military Review*, Sept.-Oct. 2010, pp. 59-67.

³⁴ Bukkvoll and Østensen, *Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies*; Denis Korotkov, "Bez 'Shchita': Sluzhba i Smert' v Eshe Odnoi Chastnoi Voennoi Kompanii, Kotoroi v Rossii Ofitsial'no Net [Without a 'Shield': Service and Death in Yet Another Private Military Company Which Officially Doesn't Exist in Russia]," *Novaya Gazeta*, July 28, 2019; Candace Rondeaux, *Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare*, *New America*, Nov. 2019.

war, but Moscow was then a strong political supporter and arms supplier of Syrian ruler Bashar Assad. The Slavonic Corps personnel believed they were in Syria with the support of Russia's Federal Security Service (the FSB, a successor to the Soviet KGB), to guard Syrian petroleum sites and seize them from the Islamic State (IS) on behalf of Assad. Yet when the group returned to Russia after being attacked by the IS, its leaders were arrested by the FSB as "mercenaries" and imprisoned for three years.³⁵ There is no way to know from publicly available sources why they were prosecuted—but presumably the Slavonic Corps leaders themselves know what they did to fall afoul of Putin's system.

The Wagner Group

Largely through the work of intrepid Russian investigative journalists, the "private" Russian military company about which the most is known is the so-called Wagner Group. Beginning in 2014, probably with the takeover of Crimea and certainly with its launch of the war in eastern Ukraine, the Russian state has frequently used the Wagner Group as a security tool abroad. We know that the Wagner Group has been deployed in Syria, Libya, and throughout sub-Saharan Africa: in the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, Mozambique, and Mali, at a minimum. A number of its original members were earlier employed in other Russian private security companies, including the Slavonic Corps,³⁶ and there is evidence of continuing interchange between Wagner Group and other Russian PMC personnel.³⁷ The Wagner Group got its name from the *nom de guerre* of its original commander, Dmitry Utkin,³⁸ a GRU lieutenant colonel in the reserves who ended his official career in 2013 as the commander of a *spetsnaz* detachment.³⁹

While many refer to the Wagner Group as a private military company, it is not a typical PMC. It has a very close relationship with the Russian state. Putin himself publicly acknowledged the Wagner Group's existence at a press conference in December 2018, despite the illegality of such groups in Russia, saying in a remarkable example of double-speak, "As long as they don't violate Russian law, they have the right to work, to pursue their business interests, in any spot on the planet."⁴⁰ The Wagner Group trains across a rural highway in Molkino, Krasnodar, from a GRU *spetsnaz* training camp.⁴¹ At least some of its Russian members have received their passports from the same Moscow office that issues them to the Ministry of Defense and the

³⁵ "Komandiry 'Slavyanskogo Korpusa' v Sirii Osuzhdeny za Naemnichestvo [The Commander of the 'Slavonic Corps' in Syria Has Been Convicted of Mercenary Activity]," Fontanka.ru, Oct. 28, 2014.

³⁶ For histories of these earlier groups, see Bukkvoll and Østensen, *Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies*; Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces," and Candace Rondeaux, *Decoding the Wagner Group*, pp. 32-44.

³⁷ Rondeaux, *Decoding the Wagner Group*.

³⁸ Utkin expressed admiration for the culture of Hitler's Germany (including Hitler's favorite composer, Richard Wagner), and sometimes wore a Wehrmacht-style steel helmet in the field in the Ukraine.

³⁹ Denis Korotkov, "'Slavyanskii Korpus' Vozvrashchaetsya v Siriu [The 'Slavonic Corps' Is Returning to Syria]," Fontanka.ru, Oct. 16, 2015; Denis Korotkov, "Oni Srazhalis' za Pal'miru [They are Fighting for Palmyra]," Fontanka.ru, March 29, 2016.

⁴⁰ "Vladimir Putin's Annual News Conference," Dec. 20, 2018, Kremlin.ru.

⁴¹ Denis Korotkov, "Za Bashara Asad—Bez Glafa, bez Rodin [For Bashar Assad—Without Flag or Country]," Fontanka.ru, Oct. 22, 2015; Igor Pushkarev, "Vrut Vse, Synok, Oni Neft' Delyat! Na Krovy Rebyat Zarabatvayut [Everybody Lies, Kid. They're Dividing up the Oil! They're Making Money on the Blood of the Guys!]" *Znak*, Mar. 5, 2018. Pushkarev's web article includes a photo of the base.

GRU.⁴² Some Wagner troops killed in battle in 2015 and 2016 received the Russian military Medal for Courage in Death, normally given only to uniformed service members.⁴³ Geolocatable video shows Wagner troops at the Battle of Debaltseve in eastern Ukraine in January 2015 with new Russian BPM-97 Vystrel armored trucks, providing further evidence of their cooperation with the Russian state.⁴⁴ In December 2016 Utkin received a medal for bravery from Putin at the Kremlin.⁴⁵ In sum, Wagner is not really a “private” group, separate from the state.⁴⁶

Many call the Wagner Group “mercenary,” but its members are not true mercenaries, either. While they do fight for money on contract, the group is fiercely patriotic. It works only in situations where it believes it is acting on behalf of the Russian state—even though some of its members are merely friends of Russia who hail from Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, and Serbia, according to a confidential UN report.⁴⁷ In 2020 the Wagner Group also recruited Syrians to fight in Libya. These reportedly include former Syrian rebels who had been turned to the side of Assad, and who were promised high salaries and better treatment at home in return for their Libyan service.⁴⁸

Indeed the Wagner Group has morphed so much over time that at this point it may be just a name for a Russian state activity, rather than a distinct entity with an organizational chart. For example, no one has reported seeing Utkin publicly after he received his December 2016 medal, although in 2017 he was named the CEO of Concord Management and Consulting, one of Prigozhin’s firms.⁴⁹ There is no publicly available evidence that Utkin has any continuing relationship with the Wagner Group’s post-2016 activities, even though the group continues to bear his moniker. Especially given the opaque relationship between business, government, Putin’s personal friends, and the law in Russia, we should probably not think of the Wagner Group as being a typical private firm. A better term for it, rather than a PMC or mercenary outfit, might be an informal semi-state security group.

Why Russia Uses the Wagner Group

Use of the Wagner Group has provided at least two key benefits to the Russian state that are similar to the benefits gained by many other states who use PMCs. First, Wagner saves state budgetary resources by employing its personnel on contract, so that no long-term health or retirement benefits need to be paid.

⁴² “Wagner Mercenaries with GRU-Issued Passports: Validating SBU’s Allegation,” Bellingcat Investigation Team, Jan. 30, 2019.

⁴³ Korotkov, “Oni Srazhalis’ za Pal’miru.”

⁴⁴ Yuri Zoria, “New Footage Shows Russian PMC Wagner Involved in Crucial 2015 Debaltseve Battle in Ukraine,” Euromaidan Press, June 22, 2018.

⁴⁵ Denis Korotkov, “Wagner v Kremle [Wagner at the Kremlin],” Fonanka.ru, Dec. 12, 2016.

⁴⁶ One Russian source claims that the Russian military’s General Staff came up with the idea for the Wagner Group in a 2010 meeting with Eeben Barlow, the founder of the South African Executive Outcomes mercenary group.

However, this has never been publicly substantiated. Irina Malkova and Anton Baev, “Chastnaya Armiya Dlya Prezidenta: Istoriya Samogo Delikatnogo Porucheniya Evgeniya Prigozhina [A Private Army for the President: The History of Yevgenii Prigozhin’s Most Delicate Mission],” *The Bell*, Jan. 29, 2019.

⁴⁷ “Thousand Plus Russian Military Group Personnel in Libya—UN,” Reuters, May 7, 2020; “Russian Mercenaries Are Fighting in Libya,” AFP, May 7, 2020.

⁴⁸ “Russian Hiring of Syrians to Fight in Libya Accelerated in May,” Reuters, June 7, 2020.

⁴⁹ Georgii Peremitin and Polina Rusiaeva, “Komandir ChVK Wagner Vozglavil Restoranni Biznes Prigozhina [The Commander of the Wagner PMC Headed Prigozhin’s Restaurant Business], RBC, Nov. 15, 2017.

Many commentators (including myself, in an earlier publication) have asserted that Prigozhin is “funding” the Wagner Group, in return for a cut of the profits gained from related mining and energy deals. That might be a logical conclusion, given the role that other oligarchs have played in helping out the Russian state, especially at home, by funding local construction projects. Yet there is no hard evidence that Prigozhin is acting as anything but a broker or contractor. He does use his private planes and business property for Wagner business, but those expenses may be covered by state contracts. All of the evidence we do have about Russia’s use of the Wagner Group in Syria (post-2016),⁵⁰ Sudan,⁵¹ CAR,⁵² Mozambique,⁵³ and Libya⁵⁴ indicates that foreign states reach contract deals with Prigozhin’s companies for the Wagner Group’s services, and that one or another Russian state ministry is usually involved in helping negotiate those deals.

In fact there is little evidence that Prigozhin is making a profit on any of the foreign mining and energy production connected to Wagner Group activities. The diamond and gold mines where his firms have protection contracts in Sudan and CAR are artisanal (in other words, people sift the dirt with sieves), not the sophisticated industrial mines that are usually associated with profitability today. In Madagascar, where a Prigozhin firm received a contract to run an existing chromite mine in return for election assistance, the mine immediately shut down in a labor strike over the practices of its new Russian managers.⁵⁵ Prigozhin is instead probably benefitting the way he seems to have done in his earlier cleaning contracts with the Russian Defense Ministry: by taking a substantial cut for himself and his network members off the top of every contract signed. It would also not be surprising if he used these mining and energy businesses as a cover for smuggling, money laundering,⁵⁶ or other illegal behavior.

⁵⁰ Denis Korotkov, “Nemnogo Biznesa v Siriiskoi Voine [A Little Business in the Syrian War],” Fontanka.ru, June 26, 2017; Nataliya Vasilyeva, “Thousands of Russian private contractors fighting in Syria,” APNews.com, Dec. 12, 2017; Irina Malkova, Anastasia Stogney, and Anastasia Yakoreva, “Russian Mercenary Army Financier Made an Oil Deal with Syria just before Clash with U.S. Troops,” *The Bell*, Feb. 27, 2018.

⁵¹ Yulia Torgasheva, “Vagner” i Zoloto Sudana [“Wagner” and the Gold of Sudan],” *The Medium* Genlain blog, March 10, 2018; Charles Bousssel and Emre Sari, “Pourquoi Vladimir Poutine Avance ses Pions en Centrafrique [Why Vladimir Putin Advances His Pawns in Central Africa],” *L’Obs*, May 5, 2018; Anastasia Yakoreva, “‘Putin’s Cook’ Set Out to Mine Gold in Africa,” *The Bell*, June 5, 2018; Peter Mironenko, “Russian Journalists’ Killing May Shed Light on Kremlin’s African Ambitions via Mercenaries,” *The Bell*, Aug. 3, 2018.

⁵² Bousssel and Sari, “Pourquoi Vladimir Poutine Avance Ses Pions En Centrafrique;” Anton Baev, “Russkie Ishhut Dostup k Resursam po Vsej Strane: Chto Privelo Naemnikov iz Rossii v TsAR [Russians Search for Access to Resources Throughout the Land: What Led Mercenaries from Russia to the CAR],” *The Bell*, Aug. 2, 2018; Mironenko, “Russian Journalists’ Killing;” Tim Lister, Mary Ilyushina and Sebastian Shukla, “Murdered Chasing Mercenaries,” CNN, August 4, 2018; “Centrafrique-Russie : la Société Minière de Evgenii Khodotov Obtient un Permis de Recherche [Central Africa-Russia: The Mining Company of Yevgeny Khodotov Obtained a Prospecting Permit],” *Jeune Afrique*, Sept. 14, 2018.

⁵³ Pjotr Sauer, “In Push for Africa, Russia’s Wagner Mercenaries Are ‘Out of Their Depth’ in Mozambique,” *Moscow Times*, Nov. 19, 2019; Tim Lister and Sebastian Shukla, “Russian Mercenaries Fight Shadowy Battle in Gas-Rich Mozambique,” CNN, Nov. 29, 2019.

⁵⁴ Abdulkader Assad, “Report: Haftar Owes Russian Wagner Group \$150 Million as Rift Grows over Rookie Fighters,” *Libya Observer*, May 14, 2020.

⁵⁵ Tiana Rakotobe and Riana Raymond, “Kraoma Mining: A Joint Venture at the Centre of Attention,” *Réseau Malina*, Dec. 31, 2018.

⁵⁶ Arnaud Kalika, *Russia’s Great Return to Africa?* Notes de l’IFRI Russie.Nei.Visions 114, Apr. 2019.

Second, the Wagner Group gives the Russian state plausible deniability for state-supported actions. At an international level this has lost credibility with time, as investigative journalists and analysts are now on the lookout for the Wagner Group wherever it goes. Russia has less opportunity to surprise the rest of the world than it used to. But what might matter the most for Putin is that plausible deniability can still work at home, especially with his key political base of working class and retired Russians who get their news from state-controlled media. The Wagner Group allows the state to take military action abroad while avoiding casualties for regular Russian troops. Dozens of Wagner Group forces have been killed in battle in eastern Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and Mozambique, substituting for what might otherwise have been Russian conscripts. This has helped Putin to pursue foreign adventures, while keeping the human costs of these wars hidden from the Russian public. These actions are designed to shore up Putin's popularity and restore a sense of Russian power and glory, after the humiliation of the Soviet collapse and the enlargement of U.S. influence in the wake of the Cold War.

There is a rather unique additional benefit that the Kremlin gains from some of these operations: they are useful as relatively low-risk experiments, where new models of international influence can be tried without much cost to the Russian state if they go wrong. Three recent examples stand out.

Syria: Deir al-Zour

First was the surprising assault that Wagner forces launched in February 2018 with around 500 pro-Syrian fighters, against natural gas fields protected by U.S. special operations forces in the Kurdish region of Deir al-Zour, Syria.⁵⁷ The facilities were located across a deconfliction boundary that had been agreed between Washington and Moscow in 2015, marking the division between U.S.- and Russian-controlled zones in Syria. The attacking forces emerged from the Russian zone, speaking Russian. Local U.S. commanders used the special deconfliction hotline with their Russian counterparts to warn the Russian General Staff that they had been noticed, and that the U.S. would fight back. But throughout the crisis, the Russian commanders insisted, "They're not ours." After a battle where U.S. airstrikes probably killed dozens of Wagner Group members, the wounded survivors were eventually flown home on Russian military airplanes. Yet the Russian military apparently refused even to send its own helicopters to evacuate the wounded from the battlefield,⁵⁸ probably adding to the severity of casualties Wagner suffered that day. It remains unclear why the Russian military would allow so many Russian citizens to go to their deaths without intervening to stop them once it became clear that the U.S. would fight back—and this may reflect the fact that uniformed Russian commanders were hostile toward Prigozhin and his corruption.⁵⁹ But it is almost certain that the GRU used the Wagner Group attack as an experiment, to test the mettle of U.S. forces in the field, whether or not Moscow had planned it in advance. The attack followed a series of smaller probes of the deconfliction boundary by

⁵⁷ The definitive account is provided by Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria," *New York Times*, May 24, 2018.

⁵⁸ "Cossack Fighter Laments Russian 'Utilization' Of Mercenaries in Syria," RFE/RL, Feb. 22, 2018.

⁵⁹ Kimberly Marten, "The Puzzle of Russian Behavior in Deir al-Zour," *War on the Rocks*, July 5, 2018.

uniformed Russian troops,⁶⁰ and it was not the first time that U.S. forces had faced an “exchange of fire” with Russian forces in Syria.⁶¹

This “experiment” is disturbing because it shows that Russia may be willing to launch (or at least support) violence against the U.S. and its allies abroad, even when that violence risks upending international agreements and causing a major crisis. In that sense it mirrors what the Russian GRU is now accused of doing against U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Central African Republic

The second experiment is in CAR, where Russia may be attempting a new model of political influence by trying to make itself the crucial lynchpin for stability in the country. Russia began its actions in CAR by twisting a UN Security Council sanctions exception to its benefit, donating a large cache of AK-47s to Bangui and sending 170 trainers from the Wagner Group in with them, accompanied by 5 uniformed Russian officers.⁶² While Moscow said the trainers were there temporarily, their presence (and the number of Russian weapons in the country) instead increased with time. The Wagner Group is in fact providing military training to CAR special forces, separately from the UN-mandated EU training mission that is on the ground as part of the MINUSCA peace operation. This means that there is now a well-trained, separate cohort of local military specialists in CAR who are loyal to Moscow, and who have not received the instruction in human rights and civilian control that is standard for the EU training mission. Simultaneously CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadéra has hired Russians as personal guards for himself and his coterie, and has named a retired Russian GRU officer, Valery Zakharov, his “national security advisor.” Zakharov has been paid by Prigozhin’s company in the past and is living on property owned by Prigozhin’s firm in CAR.⁶³ This means that any time Touadéra is in CAR, he is likely being watched closely by Moscow.

80% of territory in CAR remains under rebel militia control, following a long civil war in the country. In 2019 Zakharov and Prigozhin worked together to jump-start the peace process in CAR, arranging meetings in Sudan with the rebels that were facilitated by Prigozhin, using his private plane. These talks succeeded, where earlier UN and African Union attempts had lagged, in reaching at least a temporary peace accord. But success came at a steep price for Bangui: now former rebels are being welcomed into government and military posts in CAR without adequate vetting.⁶⁴ Not coincidentally, many of the diamond and gold mines where Prigozhin has his contracts are located in rebel-held areas.

While it is not clear that CAR itself matters all that much to Russia, it is possible that this model of a peace agreement, brokered by Russia and requiring Russian support to stick, is a test case for similar models to be used in areas that Russia cares about more deeply, including Syria, Libya, and perhaps Afghanistan, where rebel warlord militias must also be brought into

⁶⁰ Brian Katz and Nicholas Harrington, “The Military Campaign,” in *Moscow’s War in Syria*, ed. Seth G. Jones (Washington: CSIS Transnational Threats Project, May 2020), pp. 37-8.

⁶¹ Special Representative for Syria Engagement Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, interview with RIA Novosti and *Kommersant*, U.S. Embassy in Russia website, Nov. 21, 2018.

⁶² A description of this case, with sources, is provided in Marten, “Russ-Afrique?”

⁶³ CNN Special Report, “Putin’s Private Army,” Aug. 2019.

⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, *Making the Central African Republic’s Latest Peace Agreement Stick*, Africa Report 277, June 18, 2019.

cooperation with the government for stability to be reached. Because CAR has relatively low global visibility, the experiment is low-cost for Russia. If it fails, and Russia goes home again, few will notice.

This “experiment” is nonetheless disturbing for the US and its allies because Russian actions undermine UN and EU efforts at genuine peacebuilding and security reform in CAR. Russia is also undercutting what had looked like the beginning of democratic reforms, when Touadéra (a French-educated technocrat) was elected in a relatively free popular vote in 2016. Russian forces on the ground have furthermore been accused of human rights violations, including the torture of individuals believed to be in the opposition.⁶⁵ In addition, the infamous July 2018 murder of three Russian journalists who came to CAR to probe Wagner Group activities was never independently investigated, and suspicions remain that the Russian state may have been involved in that crime and its cover-up.⁶⁶

Libya

The third experiment is ongoing in Libya. We do not yet know what the end result there will be. But it appears that after failing to help warlord Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) seize the capital of Tripoli from the UN-recognized government in spring 2020, Wagner Group forces are now helping Haftar shore up his separatist territory in the central and eastern part of the country. In May, according to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the Wagner Group was bolstered by the delivery of 14 “fourth-generation” MiG-29 fighter jets and a number of Su-24 attack aircraft, sent from Russia via Iran and then Syria, and repainted to hide their Russian origin.⁶⁷ By June AFRICOM had evidence that those planes were being flown by “inexperienced” flyers working on “basic flying skills” and “pilot proficiency.”⁶⁸ While other PMCs in the past have had air components, the Wagner Group has not flown fixed-wing aircraft before. If the Wagner Group now includes retired air force pilots, this marks a new step in its activities.

More worrisome for the U.S. and its allies may be the apparent ultimate aim of this Russian “experiment”: to create a stronghold for Haftar, in return for establishing a permanent Russian air or naval base on his territory. If Russia were able to gain a long-term base presence in Libya, it could harass and impede U.S., NATO, and European Union freedom of movement in the Mediterranean Sea.⁶⁹

Possible U.S. Responses

As noted above, the U.S. has imposed a number of sanctions on Prigozhin, his companies, his airplanes and yachts, and the Wagner Group. The scope of these sanctions was demonstrated in January 2020, when one of Prigozhin’s aircraft landed in Lithuania with the goal of getting repair

⁶⁵ “UN Investigates ‘Russian Soldier Torture’ Case in CAR,” AFP, Feb. 12, 2019.

⁶⁶ Tim Lister and Sebastian Shukla, “Murdered Journalists Were Tracked by Police with Shadowy Russian Links, Evidence Shows,” CNN, Jan. 10, 2019.

⁶⁷ Declan Walsh and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Accuses Russia of Sending Warplanes to Libya,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2020.

⁶⁸ Christopher Woody, “The U.S. Military Isn’t Just Worried about Russia’s Fighter Jets in Libya but Also Who’s Flying Them,” *Business Insider*, June 18, 2020.

⁶⁹ Statement of General Thomas D. Waldhauser before the Senate Armed Service Committee, 116th Cong. (February 7, 2019).

work done, but was apparently not serviced because a local contractor feared incurring penalties from the U.S. for working on the plane.⁷⁰ The U.S. also indicted Prigozhin and his companies for federal crimes committed by interfering in the 2016 elections. That indictment, though, was dismissed in March 2020, when it became clear that Prigozhin's attorneys were using the proceedings to try to gain access to U.S. classified materials, while failing to submit accurate documents and reply to subpoenas.⁷¹

It is not clear that these efforts have had any success in changing the behavior of Prigozhin or the Wagner Group. The Wagner Group's activities have continued, and in the case of Libya accelerated, after the U.S. sanctions and indictments were levied. For example, Prigozhin's companies reportedly gained three new oil and gas field deals in Syria as recently as December 2019.⁷²

Further punishment from the U.S. is unlikely to stop Prigozhin's activities because the places the Wagner Group operates are war zones, located in countries that for the most part are themselves under U.S. and UN sanctions. Everywhere that Prigozhin is known to operate, the territory is reachable by flights over countries that are friendly to Russia. This means that as long as Prigozhin is careful, no foreign extradition treaty will bring him to U.S. shores. Any profits his deals are reaping will be invested either at home in Russia, or in opaque offshore accounts that are difficult to tie to either him or the Kremlin. And because Prigozhin's profit-making activities rely completely on the good graces of Putin, he has no incentive to do anything other than continue his loyalty to the regime. Similar conclusions hold for sanctions against GRU officers: once they are identified, those individuals will likely never be used again for an operation where they could be extradited.

Before conceding defeat, however, the U.S. should keep three things in mind. First, the Wagner Group may be slowly fizzling out of its own accord. It had a major defeat in Mozambique, where it had been active since August 2019, when its forces were repeatedly ambushed by Islamist rebels. It reportedly pulled out of the country in March 2020 as a result.⁷³ While it remains active in Libya, it failed in its efforts to help Haftar seize Tripoli, and in stopping Turkish-supported Libyan government forces from capturing and destroying Russian-made Pantsir S1 air defense systems.⁷⁴ Haftar was reportedly so angry about the Wagner Group's poor performance, and especially that it was using Syrian militia members in his country, that he threatened not to pay them the money he owed on his contract.⁷⁵ And in CAR, the Russian-brokered peace deal may be fraying, with sporadic upticks in fighting between various militias and against UN forces, in spite of the February 2019 peace deal.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Jūratė Skėrytė, "Lithuanian Parliament Seeks EU Sanctions on 'Putin's Chef,'" LRT English, Feb. 19, 2020.

⁷¹ United States of America v. Concord Management and Consulting LLC and Concord Catering, Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF, Document 381, Filed 03/16/20.

⁷² Denis Korotkov, "Wagner: Pervaya Neft' [Wagner: First Oil]," *Novaia Gazeta*, Jan. 19, 2020.

⁷³ "Private Military Contractors Appear to Be Active in Mozambique," DefenceWeb (South Africa), Apr. 15, 2020.

⁷⁴ Brian Katz, "Moscow's Next Front: Russia's Expanding Military Footprint in Libya," CSIS Commentary, June 17, 2020; Altan A. Ozler, "Libya: A Catastrophe for Russia's Pantsir S1 Air Defense System," Real Clear Defense, June 19, 2020.

⁷⁵ Assad, "Report: Haftar Owes Russian Wagner Group \$150 Million."

⁷⁶ "12 FPRC Militia Fighters killed in Clashes with Central African and UN troops in Birao, Government Says," Defense Post, Feb. 18, 2020.

Second, perhaps the most effective thing the U.S. can do to stop the Wagner Group's forward movement is to publicize to local populations in the Middle East and Africa who Prigozhin is and what Wagner does. Prigozhin is a lifelong criminal who seeks to plunder the mineral and energy resources of impoverished foreign countries for his own corrupt benefit. The Wagner Group is often ineffective. It is also a loose cannon, working for a Russian regime that has demonstrated in Syria, Libya, CAR and elsewhere that it has no concern for the human rights of the local population. In addition to all of the cases mentioned above, the Wagner Group also advised President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan (before he was deposed in April 2019) in his efforts to put down peaceful democratic protestors by guile and with deadly force.⁷⁷ This message about the Wagner Group's brutality may already be getting across. The mayor of Bani Walid, Libya, a town decimated by civil war which Wagner Group forces passed through on their May retreat from Tripoli, told journalists that the City Council protested the presence of the Russians because they had killed and wounded innocent civilians.⁷⁸

Third, for the U.S. and its allies, forewarned is forearmed. Especially after the events of February 2018 in Deir al Zour—and now with the intelligence about GRU activities in Afghanistan—U.S. and allied forces abroad know exactly how untrustworthy the Wagner Group and its GRU backers in the Putin regime can be. When this knowledge is combined with what we know about Prigozhin's related political influence operations, Russia has lost the advantage of surprise that has propelled its hybrid warfare campaign against the U.S. and its allies. Where the U.S. and its allies should concentrate their effort now is in proactively defending themselves against whatever Prigozhin, the GRU, and the Wagner Group may try next.

⁷⁷ Tim Lister, Sebastian Shukla, and Nima Elbagir, "Fake News and Public Executions: Documents Show a Russian Company's Plan for Quelling Protests in Sudan," CNN, Apr. 25, 2019.

⁷⁸ "Hundreds More Russian Mercenaries Flee Western Libya," Al Jazeera, May 5, 2020.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Doctor.

And I will call on Mr. Kara-Murza for your 5 minutes of opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA, CHAIRMAN, BORIS NEMTSOV FOUNDATION FOR FREEDOM, VICE PRESIDENT, FREE RUSSIA FOUNDATION

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Chairman Keating, Congressman Wilson, members of the subcommittee, thank you so much for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you.

Two decades ago, when Vladimir Putin first came to power, many in the West were asking who this man was and where he would take Russia. I remember the day when I and many of my colleagues in the Russian democratic movement knew the answer.

On December 20, 1999, Mr. Putin, still as Prime Minister, went to the former KGB headquarters in Lubyanka Square in Moscow to officially unveil a memorial plaque to Yuri Andropov.

Now, Andropov was someone who epitomized both the domestic repression and the external aggressiveness of the Soviet system. As Ambassador in Hungary, he was among those who oversaw the 1956 invasion. As chairman of the KGB, he directed the suppression of domestic opposition, imprisoning and targeting dissidents.

Russia is a country of symbols. A symbol like a memorial plaque to Yuri Andropov is unmistakable.

Domestic repression and external aggression often go hand-in-hand for authoritarian regimes, and Mr. Putin has demonstrated this linkage most clearly.

His early years were dedicated to consolidating his rule at home, turning Russia from an imperfect democracy into a perfect dictatorship. Independent television networks were taken down. Political opponents were exiled and imprisoned. Elections were turned into meaningless rituals and parliament into a rubber stamp.

In what became the most high-profile political assassination in the modern history of Russia, in February 2015, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was gunned down in front of the Kremlin. To this day, the organizers and masterminds of his assassination remain unidentified and unindicted.

But autocrats rarely stop at their own borders. The invasion of Georgia, the military incursions into eastern Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea—this is only what was done by official means. In many other cases, the Kremlin hid behind plausible, or sometimes less than plausible, deniability. A slate of murders and attacks against opponents or perceived traitors abroad, from the United Kingdom to Germany to Austria, serves as a case in point.

The Kremlin has set up a shadow security force, a private military organization known as the Wagner Group, and overseen by close Putin confidant Yevgeny Prigozhin, to carry out military actions, suppressive operations, and disinformation campaigns abroad. And Professor Kimberly Marten just spoke in detail about this organization.

Wagner mercenaries have been fighting in eastern Ukraine; supporting the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, where they led a direct assault on U.S. troops, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman; operating in Libya against the internationally recognized govern-

ment; propping up Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela in the face of popular protests; and effectively running several countries in Africa, most prominently the Central African Republic, where three Russian journalists—Orkhan Dzhemal, Kirill Radchenko, and Alexander Rastorguyev—were murdered in July 2018 while investigating Wagner’s activities.

In the absence of an independent judicial system, a democratically elected parliament, and a viable free press in Russia, it is important to hold the Kremlin to account for its abuses using international mechanisms. And I would like to emphasize three areas in particular.

Now, first, the U.S. legislative framework provides for targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for human-rights abuses. And I am referring, of course, to the Magnitsky Act and the Global Magnitsky Act that have been used by the U.S. Government to sanction, for example, an organizer in the assassination of Boris Nemtsov and the perpetrators of the murder of Alexander Litvinenko. These laws are effective and should be used more actively.

Second, individual congressional measures are important in focusing the attention on those abusers and in countering the impunity they have gotten so used to at home. And, in this regard, I would like to highlight House Resolution 996 that would designate the activities of Yevgeny Prigozhin and the Wagner Group as a threat to U.S. national security and would urge further sanctions on them in cooperation with the European Union.

And I want to take this opportunity to thank the chairman and ranking member of the subcommittee, Representative Keating and Representative Kinzinger, for cosponsoring this resolution and to express my hope that it will be passed in the current Congress.

Third and very important, as you all know, last week Vladimir Putin signed constitutional amendments that waive Presidential term limits, allowing him to remain in power until 2036. This procedure was rubber-stamped in a plebiscite that violated the most basic democratic standards and that was widely assessed as fraudulent.

As the bipartisan leaders of the United States Helsinki Commission, Congressman Alcee Hastings of Florida and Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi have said, and I quote, “State-sponsored fraud, coercion, and obfuscation make it impossible to know the true will of the Russian people,” end of quote.

By flagrantly subverting term limits, Vladimir Putin is becoming illegitimate not only *de facto* but *de jure*, now in the same rogue league of dictators who had used this trick before him. This change—and that is very important.

This change should be reflected in policy. In particular, Western leaders—the leaders of Western democracies should not afford Mr. Putin the legitimacy and prestige he no longer has any claim to, either in the form of invitation to international summits or in the form of high-level bilateral meetings and visits.

I look forward to the day Russia can return to the G8 as a full member, but this should only happen once my country has a democratically elected government that will both respect the rights and

freedoms of its own people and behave as a responsible citizen on the global stage.

I thank you very much for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kara-Murza follows:]

“Exposing and Demanding Accountability for Kremlin Crimes Abroad”

U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment

*July 7, 2020***Opening Statement by Vladimir Kara-Murza**

Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom

Vice President, Free Russia Foundation

Chairman Keating, Representative Wilson, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you.

Two decades ago, when Vladimir Putin first came to power, many in the West were asking who this man was and where he would take Russia. I remember the day I and many of my colleagues in the Russian democracy movement knew the answer. On December 20, 1999, Mr. Putin, then still prime minister, went to the former KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Square in Moscow to officially unveil a memorial plaque to Yuri Andropov.

Andropov was someone who epitomized both the domestic repression and the external aggressiveness of the Soviet system. As ambassador in Hungary, he was among those who oversaw the 1956 invasion. As chairman of the KGB, he directed the suppression of the domestic opposition, targeting and imprisoning dissidents.

Russia is a country of symbols. A symbol like a memorial plaque to Andropov is unmistakable.

Domestic repression and external aggression often go hand in hand for authoritarian regimes. Mr. Putin has demonstrated this linkage most clearly. His early years were dedicated to consolidating his rule at home – turning Russia from an imperfect democracy into a perfect dictatorship. Independent television networks were taken down; political opponents were exiled and imprisoned; elections were turned into meaningless rituals; and parliament into a rubberstamp. In the most high-profile political assassination in modern Russia, in February 2015 opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was gunned down in front of the Kremlin. To this day, the organizers and masterminds of his murder remain unidentified and unindicted.

But autocrats rarely stop at their own borders. The invasion of Georgia; the military incursions in eastern Ukraine; the annexation of Crimea – this is only what was done by official means. In many other instances, the Kremlin hid behind plausible – or less than plausible – deniability. A slate of murders and attacks against opponents or perceived “traitors” abroad – from the United Kingdom to Germany to Austria – serves as a case in point.

The Kremlin has set up a shadow security force – a private mercenary organization known as the Wagner Group and overseen by close Putin confidant Yevgeniy Prigozhin – to carry out military action, subversive operations, and disinformation campaigns abroad. Wagner mercenaries have been fighting in eastern Ukraine; supporting the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria – where they led a direct assault on U.S. troops; operating in Libya against the internationally recognized

government; propping up Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela in the face of popular protests; and effectively running several countries in Africa, most notably the Central African Republic, where three Russian journalists – Orkhan Dzhehal, Kirill Radchenko, and Alexander Rastorguyev – were murdered in July 2018 while investigating Wagner’s activities.

In the absence of an independent judicial system, a democratically elected parliament, and a viable free press in Russia, the Kremlin must be held accountable for its abuses through international mechanisms.

I would like to emphasize three areas in particular.

The U.S. legislative framework provides for targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for human rights abuse. I am referring, of course, to the Magnitsky Act and the Global Magnitsky Act, which have been used by the U.S. government to sanction, for example, an organizer in the assassination of Boris Nemtsov and the perpetrators of the murder of Alexander Litvinenko. These laws are effective and should be used more actively.

Individual Congressional measures are important for focusing attention on these abusers and countering the impunity they have become used to at home. In this regard, I would like to highlight House Resolution 996 that designates the activities of Yevgeniy Prigozhin and the Wagner Group as a threat to U.S. national security and urges further sanctions in coordination with the European Union. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, Rep. William Keating (D-Ma.) and Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.), for co-sponsoring this resolution, and express my hope that it will be passed in the current Congress.

Third and very important. As you know, last week Vladimir Putin signed constitutional amendments that waive presidential term-limits and allow him to remain in power until 2036. This measure was rubberstamped in a plebiscite that violated the most basic democratic standards and that was widely assessed as fraudulent. As the bipartisan leaders of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) and Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), have said, “state-sponsored fraud, coercion, and obfuscation make it impossible to know the true will of the Russian people.” By flagrantly subverting term-limits, Mr. Putin is becoming illegitimate not only de facto, but also de jure – in the same league with rogue dictators who had used this trick before him. This change should be reflected in policy. In particular, the leaders of Western democracies should not afford Mr. Putin the prestige and legitimacy he no longer has a claim to – be it in the form of invitations to international summits or high-level bilateral visits.

I look forward to the day Russia returns to the G8 as a full member. But this should only happen once my country has a democratically elected government that will respect the rights of its own people and behave as a responsible citizen on the global stage.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify and look forward to your questions.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Kara-Murza.

And thank all of you for your testimony.

I will now recognize members for 5 minutes each pursuant to House rules. All time yielded is for the purposes of questioning our witnesses. Because of the virtual format of this hearing, I will recognize members by committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. If you miss your turn, please let our staff know, and we will circle back to you. If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphone and address the chair verbally.

And I will start by recognizing myself.

The most sensitive conversations I have had in my life I think surrounded conversations I had with my father and my grandmother that surrounded the circumstances and the actions surrounding my uncle being killed in action. And I think, as we have this hearing and seek answers to questions, first and foremost, we owe the family members of those who lost their lives defending our country, who might be questioning right now who is behind making any payments or having paramilitary or private military organizations responsible for that, particularly from Russia.

So the common thread I heard with all our witnesses, dating back to Putin's KGB days to the present, built in to all of his actions, very carefully and seemingly very importantly, is making sure there is deniability.

So I have this question for our witnesses. You can jump in as you see fit. You have all recognized how important it is to have accountability, but how important is it for the President of the United States to penetrate all those veils of deniability and to seek, unambiguously, accountability for the Russians and Vladimir Putin for their actions?

Mr. FRIED. Mr. Chairman, since you invited us to jump in, I will jump.

I think it is important for the President, but not just the President, to speak honestly and openly about the nature of Putinism and Russian malign behavior.

As I said in my testimony, this administration, the Trump administration, has done some things with which I agree. They have taken good steps. But President Trump's own silence and his obfuscation and his public defense of Putin undercuts this. So we need a policy to which all levels of the U.S. Government adhere.

And we also need to express that to the Russian people. Let's remember that Putinism is not necessarily the final word in Russia's political development. He likes to be. He sort of claims he is. But he is not. Not necessarily. And we need to get that word out to the Russian people, as we did using Radio Liberty in the cold war but now using new means.

So, from top to bottom, speak the truth and get the word out.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. That is the purpose of this hearing, Ambassador.

I recall Putin's—I recall comments in Hungary, where he said that, oh, the U.S. is finally admitting that Ukraine was responsible for the attack on their elections, and how he uses that.

Can we speak, too, of the importance in his own country of being unambiguous and being accountable for his actions? Does anyone want to jump in there?

Mr. McFAUL. Well, Mr. Chairman, if I could jump in, I will let Vladimir talk about inside, but I want to underscore a point that Ambassador Fried made.

No. 1, you know, in the early days of the administration, my colleagues in the Trump administration always said, "Don't listen to what the President says. Look at what we do." And I agree with Ambassador Fried; I think the new funding and troops for NATO has been a good thing. Lethal assistance to Ukraine has been a good thing. Speaking out about democracy and human rights, fantastic. Ambassador Sullivan, I think, is doing a fabulous job in Moscow right now.

But on all three of those and many more, the President undermines the policy. So is our NATO unity better today than 4 years ago? Nobody would say we are better today than 4 years ago. The U.S.-Ukraine relation, a complete mess because of the politicization of that military assistance. And when the President does not speak about democracy and human rights, it makes it very difficult for lower-level officials to do so and have any credibility.

But there is another piece that I think was very important in your question. Sometimes the U.S. Government has to declassify secret intelligence to expose and embarrass foreign government officials.

I was in the government in 2009 at the U.N. General Assembly when we made the decision, the Obama Administration made the decision, to declassify what used to be very sensitive information about the Iranian nuclear program. And I sat in the White House Situation Room while we decided to do that. Lots of people said, well, this is going to expose our intelligence resources and means for gathering this. And we decided to make that decision so that we could create a coalition that later led to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929, the most comprehensive multilateral sanctions against Iran ever.

It was the declassification of that information, done in a very public way, in New York, with all the leaders of the world there, that led to that coalition. And I think this is a moment where it would be very appropriate to use a similar tactic.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Mr. Chairman, could I quickly comment on the first point you made, because I think it is very important, when you asked about going after the Kremlin's deniability or supposed deniability.

I think the best tool, or the most effective tool, against authoritarianism is transparency. And I think it is very important for democratic nations to kind of have the truth out, whether it concerns, for example, the corruption and the illicit financial flows, as we have seen 4 years ago with the publication of the Panama Papers.

You know, everybody knows in Russia that those \$2 billion in that offshore jurisdiction belonged to Vladimir Putin, but ostensibly it was hidden in the name of his longtime friend from his days in Leningrad, you know, a man by the name of Sergei Roldugin, a cellist. I remember a lot of people said in Moscow at the time, you know, we all thought that Paul McCartney was the richest musician in the world. Apparently, it is some guy who nobody has ever heard of, because he is hiding Putin's money.

It is things like this. It is also things like the activities of the Wagner Group and making it absolutely clear, as Professor Marten said a few minutes ago, that everything the Wagner Group is doing, that, in fact, is the Kremlin regime and Vladimir Putin just hiding behind this facade.

And, you know, I have read again through the draft resolution that you cosponsored, H. Res. 996, before the start of this hearing, and I want to thank you again for cosponsoring. And I hope that it will be passed and have official force soon, because it is very important in exposing the truth and in undermining that plausible deniability of the Kremlin.

On your question about domestic accountability for Vladimir Putin, as I mentioned in the opening statement and as you all know very well, Vladimir Putin has used his years in power to destroy all mechanisms of domestic accountability. You know, our parliament is a voiceless rubber stamp with no genuine opposition; our elections are meaningless rituals with prearranged results; all of our national television networks are directly controlled by the State; and so on and so forth.

The only effective way for Russian citizens, for Russian society to protest against the system and to protest against this regime is to go out into the streets, as we have seen many times in the last few years, beginning with the big pro-democracy protests in 2011–2012 and with the anti-corruption protests around the country in 2017 and 2018 and, most recently, last year, with the mass protests in Moscow against the removal of opposition candidates from municipal elections.

And, 1 day, this is how change will come to Russia. In the system that Vladimir Putin has created, change can only come through the streets, not through the ballot box.

And, you know, I have yet to actually meet anybody in Russia who seriously believes that Vladimir Putin will be able to stay in power until 2036. Given the clear trends in Russian public opinion, which are turning against this regime, I think it is very implausible that he will be able to stay in power for that long.

But it is very important that, while the regime remains in power and for however long it remains in power, it is important to use the international mechanisms of oversight and accountability to hold the Kremlin to account.

And those mechanisms exist. Russia, as you know well, is a member of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as is the United States of America. Russia is a member of the Council of Europe and has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights. All of these instruments contain very strong international levers of oversight and accountability.

And I want to use—

Mr. KEATING. Be quick.

Mr. KARA-MURZA [continuing]. Just two specific examples in this regard. One concerns the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, which I mentioned in my opening statement, the most high-profile political assassination in the modern history of Russia.

A few months ago, just before this quarantine began, my colleagues and I were in Vienna at the winter session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, where, in the presence of the U.S. delega-

tion—and Congressman Wilson was present there—the OSCE rapporteur, Margareta Cederfelt from Sweden, presented a comprehensive and detailed report, oversight report, on the Nemtsov case, making the I think very obvious conclusion that the reason for the impunity of the organizers of the assassination is not because Russian law enforcement lack the ability but because the Russian Government will not allow them because there is no political will. And things like this are very important.

And, second and finally, I think it is this plebiscite that all of us refer to. I think it is very important that those strong statements that we have been hearing in the last few days about the fraudulent nature of this plebiscite be actually reflected in policy and that there is a clear move toward a policy of nonrecognition, of Vladimir Putin as an illegitimate dictator that he now is, certainly after the end of his current mandate in 2024.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you very much.

The clock in my head made it clear that we were over the 5 minutes, and I did not know if you were seeing in your screen the timer. I am not seeing it in mine. But if the staff could help the witnesses and our members keep track of the time, that would be helpful, if that can be done.

I will now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Wilson, for his questions.

And thank you all.

Mr. WILSON. Chairman Keating, thank you very much. And I was so much appreciative of the persons testifying, I wasn't about to point out 5 minutes was up. But you can point it out for me.

And so, again, I am just really grateful. As a student of Russian history, I appreciate the comments and, gosh, the expertise of everyone who is here today. And I still am so hopeful, 1 day, indeed, that the extraordinary people of Russia can be free.

Mr. Kara-Murza, last week's nationwide vote—and you have correctly questioned its legitimacy—paved the way for Putin to remain in power until 2036. But signs indicate the Russian people aren't buying the rigged vote nor the regime's attempt to provide legitimacy on what was in reality a power grab.

I am concerned that, as you cited the waning public support, could this lead to a more aggressive Russia?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much, Congressman Wilson, for your question.

And you are absolutely right that the trends in Russian public opinion make it absolutely clear that Vladimir Putin could not have won an honest referendum, an honest vote on the continuation, on the prolongation of his mandate.

There are always important caveats about measuring public opinion in an authoritarian system, where a lot of people do not have access to information and also where a lot of people are hesitant to State their opinion for the reason of, you know, obvious potential consequences. Imagine you are sitting in your house somewhere in Russia and get a knock on your door, and somebody you have never seen before asks you, you know, "What do you think of Vladimir Putin?" What are you going to say? This is not very meaningful.

But even with all of those caveats, the trends in Russian public opinion have been absolutely clear. A few weeks ago, the Levada Center, which is the last more or less reliable independent pollster in our country, revealed, for example, that the level of public confidence in Vladimir Putin, in an open-ended poll, has plummeted to 25 percent, down from about 60 percent 3 years ago.

And I think a much more telling poll, even, that came out over the spring showed that a clear majority of Russian citizens, 58 percent, want to age-limit the Presidency at 70 years of age. And Vladimir Putin, as everybody knows, will turn 72 in 2024. So I think it is kind of a safe, euphemistic way for opposing Putin's rule without pronouncing his name.

And so it is clear to everyone, including the Kremlin, that they could not have won an honest vote about this. And this is why they organized this sham with no independent or international observers, with no oversight control over the ballots that were stored for 1 week while the voting was going on. For 1 whole week, every night, they were stored in electoral commissions with no opportunity to prevent, you know, tampering. When all the public-sector employees were coerced all over the country to go and participate in this sham. We know that, while all the government resources were mobilized to ensure a "yes" outcome, the "no" campaign had their website blocked and their rallies prohibited, of course under the pretext of concern for public health during the pandemic. And so on and so on forth.

So I think it is absolutely clear, and we are seeing this in these statements that have been coming out in the last few weeks from the leaders of Western democracies, including in the United States, that nobody is accepting this sham and nobody is accepting this spectacle that Putin has organized.

And I think it is very important that these statements do not just stop at the analysis but actually move into the realm of policy and that the leaders of the democratic nations of the world, backed by the United States of America, make it abundantly clear that they will no longer afford Vladimir Putin the legitimacy or the prestige that he so desperately craves but he has no longer any right to.

Mr. WILSON. And I want to thank you for the specifics of no international observers and the storage of the ballots. So, how absurd.

Dr. Marten, I am really concerned for the Ukraine if the Nord Stream II pipeline proceeds. What actions can the United States take to protect Ukraine and other allies from Russian energy weaponization?

Dr. MARTEN. Well, I am less of an expert on Ukrainian energy matters than I am on the Wagner Group, but I will try as best I can to answer your question, Ranking Member Wilson.

My sense is that we have to keep in mind when we are thinking about pipelines that pipelines go in two directions. And that means that Russia is as dependent on the recipients of its natural gas as those recipients are on Russia.

And I am not sure that there is much that the United States can do to stop those pipelines from going ahead, but what we might do instead is work with our allies in Europe to try to find alternatives

for Ukraine so that Ukraine is not dependent on Russian energy supplies, as it has been in the past, that it develops its own resources, that it diversifies its energy supply, and to think perhaps less about focusing our energies on punishing Russia, since that does not always seem to stop Russian behavior, but instead positive actions that we can take with our allies to provide alternatives to what is really Russian bad behavior.

Mr. WILSON. Well, hey, for somebody who is not familiar with the issue, you certainly answered it well. Thank you very much.

And I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

For those of you that want to keep track of your own time, I have been informed, if you hit in the upper right-hand part of the screen, there is a grid of everyone, and there will be a timer present.

If people want, I will gently tap when you hit 5 minutes. I do not want to hold people's feet to the fire that closely, but just to give you an idea.

With that, I will recognize the vice chair of the committee, the gentlelady from Virginia, Ms. Spanberger.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to our witnesses today for participating. I appreciated your opening comments as well as your lengthier statements for the record. Thank you so very much for your participation.

I would like to begin by following up on the discussion related to the allegations that the Russian Government, specifically the GRU, has put bounties on the heads of U.S. servicemembers.

We know that Russia is known for using proxy actors to carry out violence while maintaining its level of deniability, having done so in Ukraine and Syria. And, of course, as some of the witnesses mentioned, the GRU certainly has attempted assassinations across Europe.

So I would like to begin with you, Ambassador McFaul. In your experiences in Moscow, what are the limitations that we face in dealing with the Kremlin when it comes to these types of threats, especially when the Kremlin does deny a relationship to entities or knowledge of these actions?

And, relatedly, what tools could potentially strengthen the hand of our diplomats as they are dealing with or attempting to deal with the Kremlin?

Mr. McFAUL. Well, thank you for those very hard questions, because they are difficult. Vladimir Putin is a very smart operative when it comes to intelligence matters. I probably do not need to tell you that. And he has been at the job for 20 years; let's remember that. That gives him experience. And this notion of deniability, as we saw in all of those instances, is always there.

For me, there are two very clear things, though. Just because he is denying it does not mean we should ignore it.

And what really disturbs me about this current situation and these current allegations, as somebody who used to work at the White House—I want to remind everybody, I worked 3 years at the White House before going to Moscow. And I had the privilege of having the most incredible intelligence in the world. I think the Russians always underestimate how good we are at this. They most

certainly underestimated the information that was declassified for the Mueller investigation. And I think that gives us a tool that we do not use enough.

So, one, I think declassification, when it is appropriate, is a way to expose it so that it cannot be denied so easily for Vladimir Putin.

But, No. 2, it also means that the President of the United States has to take intelligence seriously. We can talk until we are blue in the face about all the things the White House should do, but if the President won't listen to his own intelligence—and here I also want to say that the Trump administration—I worked at the White House. I got the PDB every day. I worked for the National Security Advisors, two of them. They got the PDB every day. It is their job to inform the President about intelligence like this. I am sorry, it is not an excuse to say, “Well, he does not read, so he does not see it.” If it is important, he needs to be aware of it.

And I do not need to tell you, we do not verify intelligence, right? We do the best we can with what we have. And you are not doing your job if you are not telling the President about this possible damning intelligence, especially when he is calling Vladimir Putin six times, especially when he is inviting him to the G7, especially when he is making the decision to withdraw troops from Germany. Those are policy decisions, and you need the intelligence community to be part of informing policy decisions.

And that is what disturbs me about—it is not just the President ignoring the intelligence. I feel like the national security decision-making process has broken down.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you very much.

And, with the limited time left, because, Mr. Chairman, I now see the clock, I would like to ask Ambassador Fried very briefly when we are talking about the opaque actors, such as the Wagner Group, the Wagner Group that we have discussed already, how in your estimation—and perhaps, Dr. Marten, if you would like to comment on this as well—does Russia's reliance on private and opaque actors affect the tools that the United States can and should use to respond?

Mr. FRIED. Dealing with the Wagner Group is difficult because there are issues of deniability, but to deal with it, we need to call it out for what it is. We need to expose Russian maligned behavior. I agree with Professor Marten right down the line, expose it, and also expose it to the Russian people.

The Russians are sensitive to their people dying in Putin's foreign wars. We know this because Putin has gone to such great lengths to criminalize publicizing information about those soldiers dying, which suggests an opportunity. Publicize it, reach out to the Russian people, and do not assume that they are idiots or patsies or sheep following Putin because they are not.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you very much.

And I think your comment goes well with Ambassador McFaul's that just because he is denying it does not mean we should ignore it.

And, Mr. Chairman, on that, I will yield back. Thank you so much to our witnesses.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

The Chair will now recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Wright.

Mr. Wright, I think your mute is still on.

Mr. WRIGHT. How about now?

Mr. KEATING. Yes.

Mr. WRIGHT. We are good.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Kara-Murza, you mentioned that the future of Russia would be determined in the streets not at the ballot box. And my question to you is, if there is enough of a groundswell protest against Putin by the Russian people, what do you anticipate the Russian military would do?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much, Congressman, for this question.

Well, I think we know the answer to this question from the previous instance where an authoritarian regime in our country was toppled through street protests, and that, of course, was in August 1991, the 3 days that ended the Soviet regime, when there were half a million people on the streets in Moscow protesting against this attempted coup d'etat led by the top leadership of the KGB and the Communist Party, and there was an order given to the military to shoot peaceful protestors and to storm the Moscow White House where Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President, was based. And we know that the Russian military refused to do this.

And I think, of course, you know, every situation is different, but I think that this is what is likely to happen the next time there are large street protests. I do not believe that Russian soldiers will be willing to shoot at unarmed Russian demonstrators on the streets of Russian cities, and I think the Kremlin knows this, too. And this is why every time you see larger position protests in Moscow, as happened, for example, in 2011 and 2012, over that winter of protest, you see that the Kremlin regime is bringing in the operatives from the Chechen regiment that is controlled by Ramzan Kadyrov, who is one of the most egregious human rights abusers, even by the standards of Putin's system, the Kremlin-backed and Kremlin-appointed leader in Chechnya. He has this kind of, you know, Praetorian Guard that is fiercely loyal to him and that would be prepared to do essentially anything. And we know, for a fact, that during those protests, during those large opposition rallies in 2011 and 2012 in Moscow, there were operatives and armed officers of these Chechen battalions loyal to Kadyrov that were brought to Moscow and stationed around the city in hotels in the event of the use of force against demonstrators.

And this, I think, is the most dangerous factor that we need to consider, and it is very important that there are finally measures of accountability being taken also with regard to Ramzan Kadyrov, who is one of the most egregious enforcers of everything that Vladimir Putin has been doing. We know from established facts that Ramzan Kadyrov's people have been involved front and center in the assassination of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov in 2015. We know that Ramzan Kadyrov's security forces were involved front and center in the military incursions in eastern Ukraine in Donetsk and Luhansk that began back in 2014.

Ambassador McFaul mentioned these murders, recent murders in Berlin and Vienna. Well, these are all opponents of Ramzan Kadyrov, and I do not think anybody doubts that he had a hand in these events.

And I think it is very important that the international community is finally beginning to pay attention. There were two very important resolutions that were passed in Congress last year, S. Res. 81 in the Senate, and I think the number for the House was—let me just get it correct for the record—H. Res. 156. These were two resolutions on the case of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, and one of the provisions in those resolutions was a call on the U.S. Government to investigate Ramzan Kadyrov's financial dealings in Middle Eastern countries, especially in the United Arab Emirates, with a view to potentially imposing secondary sanctions on him if that were found to be in violation of U.S. law.

And there was a very important request that was sent a few months ago, a bipartisan request, signed by Congressman Joe Wilson, who is with us here today, and Congressman Tom Malinowski, Democrat of New Jersey, requesting that the administration investigate those financial ties and financial links of Ramzan Kadyrov in the Middle East, particularly in the UAE. And there was actually a very strong response from the State Department that came, I believe, in the beginning of March in which the leadership of the State Department promised to pay attention to those issues.

So I think the Kadyrov factor is a very important one, and it is time that it gets more international attention.

Mr. WRIGHT. Great. Thank you.

And I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Nevada, Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you for these wonderful presentations. It has been very educational.

I am used to seeing the Ambassador on TV, so I thought I would get to see you in person, but now we are still on TV. So thank you.

You know, we tend to focus mostly on Putin's foreign policy without as much attention to what is going on within the country. Some of you have mentioned that things may be changing or you may see some uprising. We tend to be optimistic. We were in China. We were in Iran. Maybe in Russia, we think the people are going to take back the system and overthrow the regime. That seldom really happens.

But I wonder if all of you could address the fact that now that Putin is more secure in his own position, having changed the Constitution and potentially be around until the 2030's, will his behavior improve internationally, or do you think now that he is more secure, it will get worse internationally?

Mr. FRIED. Let me jump in and try.

I do not think Putin is more secure, and I do not think he thinks he is more secure. He went to elaborate lengths to push through a dodging plebiscite, ignoring even Russia's procedures for elections. That is not secure. That is insecure. The economy is getting worse. COVID-19 has hit them hard. So I think Putin is operating from a position of significant weakness, and, therefore, I think he

is going to lash out where he can. I think he will be unremittingly hostile to us and to democracy, which does not mean we have to be hostile to him, but it means we have to be clear-eyed and resist his aggression, as well as invest in a possible better future with a possible better Russia.

Ms. TITUS. If this election goes in a way that we have a new President, what can that new President do to change course, or are things too established or is he too—oh, too set in his ways in what he needs to do that it really won't make much difference?

Mr. FRIED. I would not be over creative and reach out to Putin. Look, I was part of the Bush outreach to Putin, just like Michael McFaul was part of the Obama reset. I mean, they both tried, and they failed because neither Bush nor Obama would accept Putin's position for good relations, which was ignore it if I beat up on people at home and let me crush democracy in the countries I think belong to me, like Georgia and Ukraine. Neither President would do it, to their credit. I wouldn't—if I were advising a possible President Biden, I would say: Don't be in such a hurry with Putin, to reach out to Putin.

Ms. TITUS. Ambassador McFaul.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Ambassador, if I could jump in for 1 second?

Ms. TITUS. Please.

Mr. McFAUL. Vladimir, go ahead. I will go third.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Very quickly. I just want to support what Ambassador Fried said a few minutes ago. You know, a secure and popular leader would not need to rig and falsify a vote. He is not secure. He is not popular, and he knows it. And as we know from history—and I am a historian by education—so speaking more with this hat on than as a political activist, we know that history has amended the best laid plans of dictators on more than one occasion, including in Russia, including something that happened in my own lifetime in August 1991, when the Soviet regime, you know, one of the most oppressive regimes in the history of humanity, collapsed in 3 days.

This is what can happen in our part of Europe, in our part of the world. So let's not forget about that possibility as well.

Dr. MARTEN. Can I jump in here? I think the fear that Putin has is not so much a popular uprising because I think the intelligence agencies do a really good job of keeping people down. What they have been doing recently is not doing massive amounts of violence but choosing at random people to put in prison, to send an example to everybody else. So I would not expect a massive popular uprising to happen in Russia.

What Putin is afraid of is that his own intelligence agencies will turn against him, and I think that is why he put in place a referendum. He wants that legal safeguard, not against his people, but against the other people in the hierarchy who support him. And one of the things that we could do that would be most important is to reveal the illegality and to make public, as much as possible, the corruption and the terrible human rights violations, including by supporting civil society, which has done a great job in recent times of uncovering everything that is happening in Russia.

Mr. McFAUL. And if I could add, I have two things I would like to say.

First of all, on Putin, he is very weak. He wouldn't have to do this plebiscite if he was a strong leader. And what I got to know over the years, he is an extremely paranoid leader. Why did he poison our colleague here, Mr. Kara-Murza, twice? Why has he banned me from Russia, a Stanford professor, for goodness' sake? You do not do that if you are a strong leader that fears nothing. You do that if you are afraid of society, if you are afraid of criticism. And we could talk about whether that leads to his demise or not, that is a different thing. That is a harder thing to predict, but I do not see him as a strong leader.

With respect to policy, I, in my written testimony, tried to outline what I hope could be a bipartisan transatlantic strategy for dealing with Putin over the long haul. If he is going to be around for a long time, we have to have the ability to have a sustained policy, and I think it is a big dose of containment, a little dose of isolation—I think we spend way too much time chasing people like Putin around thinking we need him to do this, that, and the other. We most of the time do not need him—and a small dose of engagement when it is in America's national security interest.

My biggest criticism of President Trump, President Trump mixes up means and ends. He always says, I want a good relationship with Russia, I want a good relationship with Putin. I do not care about that. I do not even care about good relations with France, by the way. I care about what is good for the American people, what is in our national security interest and economic interests. And sometimes you engage to pursue that and sometimes you contain to pursue that.

The difference between President Bush, President Obama and President Trump, I would argue, is that, in very limited moments, those previous presidents engaged with the Kremlin to advance our national interests. It was in our national interests to negotiate the START Treaty and to ratify it. It was in our interest—I want to remind people, in 2009, we expanded the Northern Distribution Network to supply our troops in Afghanistan with Russia's cooperation. Putin has now reversed that. It was in our national interest to have a United Nations' Security Council resolution against Iran in 2010 that Russia supported.

So, when it is concrete, we should engage, but we should never engage with Putin as an end, in and of itself. And here I just want to underscore, one of my good friends and mentors here at Stanford is George Shultz. You may remember he was the Secretary of State for Ronald Reagan, and he always talks about this. You can engage with an interlocutor without checking your values at the door. And they did that in the Soviet times. They did that in the cold war era before Gorbachev. I believe there are some important lessons for us moving forward together for a new policy toward Russia.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Burchett.

Mr. BURCHETT. Every time you say "gentleman," I look around to make sure you are not talking to somebody else, but thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate you all. And I appreciate the ranking member, my buddy, Joe Wilson. And I appreciate the panelists.

It seems to me that all of these Russian political assassinations, they have increased recently, and over the weekend it seemed like there was another one, another political assassination. This time it happened in Austria.

Do you all feel like there is anything we can do to deter these kind of assassinations in the future. And, if so, what? And is that economic? Is that putting people on the border, or what?

Mr. FRIED. I remember the U.S.-European combined response in reaction to the attempted Russian assassination of the Skripals, the two—the former intelligence officer in the U.K.

Mr. BURCHETT. Right.

Mr. FRIED. That was an interesting example of swift and effective action, where the U.S. and the Europeans talked, threw out a bunch of Russian diplomats simultaneously in a coordinated effort. That was pretty good. That was a strong—that was Trump administration, by the way. Later I heard the President thought he had been tricked and he had gotten too far, but let's put that aside. That was a solid piece of work.

So, to answer your question, yes, we can do things, and we should do things with our European colleagues, not against them. We shouldn't be wasting our political capital in pointless fights. We ought to be working with the European Union and individual member States to push back against Russian aggression, particularly assassinations. I think that there is a willingness on the part of the Europeans to do so. Look, even the Germans, Chancellor Merkel's government has asked the European Union to sanction Russians over a hack against the German Parliament a couple of years ago.

So there is an audience out there for exactly the kind of leadership that I think you are talking about, and I think we ought to go in that direction.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Could I jump in for a minute?

Mr. BURCHETT. Sure.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you so much for the question, Congressman.

First of all, I would say we know what the lack of reaction does. We remember when, in 2006, Alexander Litvinenko, a British citizen, was murdered on British soil using a radioactive substance.

Mr. BURCHETT. Right.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. And there was almost no reaction from the British authorities, and it took Marina Litvinenko, Alexander's widow, years and the necessity to go through the entire British judicial system to force the British Government—Teresa May at the time, who was the Home Secretary, later became Prime Minister—to even have an inquiry in this case, and remember the outcome of the inquiry, when a retired British judge concluded that Vladimir Putin was likely personally behind this operation.

Well, there was basically no reaction, and we know the results of that. We know the impunity continued, and we know the Skripal case happened in the same country, and it was a very different reaction than as Ambassador Fried just outlined.

And in response to your question, on a practical side, I think it is very important to create actionable consequences for these peo-

ple. You referred to the murder in Vienna a few days ago. Again, this was somebody who has crossed the paths of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-backed strongman in Chechnya. And, you know, Ramzan Kadyrov a few years ago, under this administration, by the way, was included in the sanctions in the open sanctions list of the Magnitsky Act, and that was very important symbolically and very powerful as a message, practically less so because Kadyrov most probably does not have any assets in the United States. He has a lot of assets in the Middle East, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, even what is publicly known, he is receiving millions of dollars in personal profits from horse racing there, and the UAE is investing tens of millions of dollars in Chechnya, and everything in Chechnya is basically—you know, it is the same as Kadyrov's personal pocket.

So it was very important when a few weeks ago there was—first of all, when last year there was an almost unanimous passage, I think it was 416 votes to 1, that the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 156 relating to the assassination of Boris Nemtsov that contained this provision of inquiring as to the introduction of secondary sanctions against Kadyrov's interests in the UAE. And when a few weeks ago there was this congressional request from Congressman Malinowski and Congressman Wilson to the State Department to actually act on that resolution, that time Kadyrov did not laugh as he did when, you know, he kind of bragged about being included in the U.S. Magnitsky list. He said, look for my U.S. bank accounts, look for my U.S. homes. He is probably, you know, one of the rare people in Putin's establishment that does not have assets in the United States. He has a lot of stuff in the UAE. And that congressional request that I referred to basically said that, you know, how is it possible that the UAE is a country that claims to be a close ally of the United States and yet it is doing large-scale business with somebody who has been designated by the U.S. Government as a gross human rights abuser.

So I think that secondary sanctions area, which is provided for by U.S. legislation, is a very important way to create actionable practical consequences for somebody like Kadyrov who is clearly involved in all of these Kremlin-sponsored murders outside of Russia.

Mr. McFAUL. Could I add just one footnote to that, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. KEATING. Yes.

Mr. McFAUL. In addition to all of those great ideas, I would just like to mention one other mechanism, and that is indictments.

What was very striking to me in talking to Russians was when Mueller indicted—those GRU intelligence officers, that had a very tangible effect on what they can do and cannot do, particularly with respect to travel abroad and the use of INTERPOL to try to arrest people in third countries. And I think it was a big mistake not to follow through on the prosecution of those criminals.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Pennsylvania, Ms. Wild.

Mr. BURCHETT. Is my time up, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. KEATING. It is. Did you have anything more to say? Mr. Burchett?

Mr. BURCHETT. No. You can go ahead. I am sorry.
Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Ms. WILD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here on this what I think is a really important issue.

My first question that I would like to ask of Ambassador McFaul is this. We know that reports have recently come to light that Russian officials may have offered Taliban-linked militants bounties in exchange for killing American and NATO coalition forces, and, obviously, this is truly disturbing news. But even more disturbing in some ways is that President Trump has not acted on these reports, despite the White House being aware of this scheme for months. And if true, these reports show an enormous escalation by an already aggressive adversary.

So I guess my first question to you is, if these intelligence reports are accurate, what do you think President Putin would be seeking to gain by encouraging Taliban forces to attack American troops?

And my second question is, what would be an appropriate response by the U.S. in view of these reports?

Mr. McFAUL. Two great questions, and I do not want to pretend I have a great answer to the first one.

I follow what Mr. Putin does, but I do not have direct contact with him anymore. But to me, if I were to give a theory for what he is doing: Remember Putin sees us as the enemy. He wants to weaken the United States. He wants to form a disarray in the international system. He wants to see the collapse of NATO and even the liberal international order. He has said this on the record.

Anything that weakens us is good for him, and he sees the world in zero sum terms. If it is plus 2 for Russia, it is minus 2 for the United States, and vice versa. I think he wants us to be bogged down in Afghanistan. I think he wants us to be fighting there. That has been good for him.

And remember this is just the latest escalation. In other reporting we had—and I think you will be talking to General Nicholson later in the week—of their escalatory engagement of the Taliban. So, this is not a one-off thing. So that would be my interpretation there. He just wants us to be bogged down.

With respect to response, again, if you are not willing to recognize the crime, then it is hard to talk about the punishment, right? My plea would just be for the Trump administration to recognize what happened. And if it is not true, do not just put out a tweet that it is a hoax, but say that, for instance, it has been reported that this information was in the PDB on February 27. That is an easily verifiable fact or not. It has been reported that there was a transfer of funds from a GRU bank account to a Taliban-controlled bank account. Is that true or not? That is an easily verifiable fact. And if it is true, then we should declassify the information and make sure that the world, all of the American people, as well as all of the Russian people, know that this is going on. Because if that is true—I want to underscore, sometimes we get too rational in our discussions of Putin. I want to say this with some emotion.

If it is true, that means that the gentleman that our President just invited to come back to the G7 is putting bounties on the

heads of U.S. soldiers that signed up to defend and protect the United States of America. That is outrageous. And if it is not true, we need to learn that it isn't. But if it is true, we need to call it out for what it is, outrage, and we need to be outraged about it, and the President himself needs to make that statement. It is simply not enough for somebody else within the administration to say it because that is exactly what Vladimir Putin is looking for. He has said it many, many times. There is the deep State, right? People like me, like Ambassador Fried and others, we are the ones controlling what President Trump wants to do. The President of the United States, if this is true, needs to say that it is true. And then the consequences we can talk about later, but the first thing—he has to just admit the facts if they are true.

Ms. WILD. And do you believe that if that were admitted by this or some hypothetical administration that further consequences would be warranted?

Mr. McFAUL. Absolutely, yes, of course, sanctions, as have been discussed before. Again, I want us to see—I want us to have a grand strategy for containing Putin's Russia. I think we sometimes get too reactive and tactical. That is what we did during the cold war. By the way, the cold war lasted a long, long time. For 40 years, we had to maintain that strategy. It wasn't inevitable that we were going to win.

So I want to see us develop, in a bipartisan manner and with our allies—you have got to have both of those things together, that is what we had during the cold war—where we have multiple things we are doing simultaneously across the board, supporting NATO, supporting Ukraine—I am quite worried about what is happening in Ukraine, by the way; That is not getting enough attention from the Trump Administration—keeping sanctions in place, only reducing them if Putin changes his behavior; you know, across the board, diversification of energy, reengaging in multilateral institutions like the OSCE, like the Law of the Sea Treaty Convention. That would help us in terms of containing Russia in the Arctic. In other words, we have got to have a multi-pronged grand strategy, not just a one-off response here and there to be successful over the long haul.

Ms. WILD. And so, as I understand your answer, it requires that we have strong cooperative relations with our allies so that it is not just sanctions being imposed by the United States, correct?

Mr. McFAUL. Without question. We have no chance if we are not united with our allies in Europe and, I would say, the liberal world, the liberal democratic world, as Ambassador Fried said in his remarks. We have got to reengage to be the leader of the free world.

Ms. WILD. Well, you will get no argument from me on that at all, Ambassador.

I have one last question for you. And that is whether you have concerns about whether these reports, assuming them to be true, of bounties being offered to the Taliban show—does it show an increasing level of Russian aggression toward the United States and a growing reliance—maybe this is a second part of the question—a growing reliance by Russian on proxy wars to spread its power?

Mr. McFAUL. Yes, I think there is an escalation here, and the only way we will push Putin back is if we have a concentrated grand strategy to push back.

But I also want to say another thing it shows. I want to be clear: I do not support the release of classified information to the press. I find that that is not in America's national interest, and the level of detail that has been leaked suggests that the President is losing his own intelligence community. Think about what you must have to do—you go to jail to put that information in *The New York Times*, and that suggests a real discontinuity and a breakdown of our national security decisionmaking apparatus in the U.S. Government. That also troubles me.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Ambassador. I believe I am out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your grace in allowing me to finish that. I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. Mr. Keating, I want to apologize. I have to run to another meeting, but I have been grateful to be with you and my colleagues and the witnesses. Thank you, everybody, for your participation here today.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you to the ranking member. Thank you for your participation as well and your work in this area.

The chair will now recognize the gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Trone.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

I want to thank Ambassador McFaul for his comments to Congresswoman Wild's questions. They were really well thought out, and I could not agree more.

This question goes to Dr. Marten, and if Ambassador McFaul wants to jump in, that would be great. The long-term presence of a Russian base in Libya could harass, impede freedom of movement in the Mediterranean Sea by us, NATO, the EU, et cetera. What is your assessment of whether Russia will be successful in this area in Libya and what more can the U.S. do to prevent this from happening?

Dr. MARTEN. Thank you for that question, Representative. I think you just hit the mark.

There is no question that the reason that Russia is using the Wagner Group right now in Libya on behalf of the warlord Khalifa Haftar is to try and split the country in two and to have the central and eastern part of the country be Russia's preserve where they could both have significant control over the oil and gas deposits that Haftar controls and also establish a permanent air or naval base on the Mediterranean that could harass NATO and EU and U.S. activities.

And I think the most important thing that we should keep in mind is that when we withdraw our attention from various places in the world, that tends to be where Russia moves in. I think that perhaps the United States could be doing more to support the U.N.-recognized governments in Libya, again reengaging with our allies—this has been emphasized by so many people at this hearing—and taking the stance that says that the U.N.-recognized government in Tripoli is the one that deserves international support,

deserves its entire territory returned to it, and to call out Russia for what it is, in fact, doing.

And the other thing to keep in mind is that, in Libya, just as has been the case in Syria, Russia is carrying out terrible human rights violations for people on the ground by attacking civilians because the Wagner Group is not following the rules they are supposed to follow under the Geneva Conventions and is just very much a loose cannon.

So I think the strongest thing that we can do is to reengage globally, to reengage with our allies globally, and to call out Russian behavior for what it is and recognize that some of the best work that has been done on discovering what Russia is doing is being carried out by private actors. It is not just States that are releasing that information, but investigators that are having a great deal of information released and analyzing it that can be useful for States as well. And so, again, it is reengaging with civil society as well.

So thank you for a terrific question.

Mr. TRONE. Ambassador McFaul, anything you want to add to that?

Mr. McFAUL. I think that was a terrific answer about Libya. I just want to underscore the broader point that my colleague made. When we withdraw from leadership from multilateral institutions, from bilateral diplomacy, and we say we are going to go it alone, we are going to pull up and look inside, that has direct consequences for our long-term national security interests.

Pulling out of the Paris climate accords affects how we deal with Putin, and I would say the same thing about China, by the way. We just have to understand that when we withdraw, we limit our ability to deal with Putin with our allies and in multilateral institutions that advances American national interests. I think sometimes that gets confused. We are supporting our interests, and we are always better off if we are doing it with our allies as opposed to going it alone.

Mr. TRONE. That is good. I agree.

Mr. Kara-Murza, what does the average Russian actually know about the Wagner Group and other private military organizations about their connections to the Russian government, and how important is it, the public perception of Putin's government, that this information be more widely dispersed?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you so much, Congressman. That's the fundamental question, and I think the best answer to it is, unfortunately, provided by the fate of three Russian investigative journalists whom I referred to in my opening statement, Orkhan Dzhemal, Kirill Radchenko, and Aleksandr Rastorguev, who were working on exactly what you are asking about, uncovering the shadowy activities of the Wagner Group. And in the summer of 2018, they flew to the Central African Republic, which is a country essentially fully controlled by the Wagner Group and, hence, by the Kremlin.

Just to give you one fact, the National Security Advisor to the President of the Central African Republic, President Touadera, is a Russian National by name of Valery Zakharov. I am not aware of any other precedent in the world where one country's National Security Advisor is himself a citizen of another country. But that is what is happening in the Central African Republic, just gives

you an idea of how overwhelming the control of the Kremlin via the Wagner Group is of the Central African Republic.

And 2 days after they arrived in the country, the three journalists were murdered in a clearly prearranged ambush. There were valuables in their cars, such as cans of gas, a very valuable commodity in the CAR, that were not taken. It is absolutely clear that the reason for the murder was not, you know, quote/unquote,—“robbery”— as the Russian Foreign Ministry was very quick to announce before even any kind of investigation took place. And we are now almost 2 years after that fact—they were killed on July 30 of 2018; we are now in July 2020—no meaningful investigation has been happening either in the Russian Federation or in the Central African Republic, as you would not be surprised to hear.

And I think it is very important to go back to something Ambassador McFaul said a few minutes ago about the importance of the U.S. engaging in multilateral institutions. I think this is an area where the multilateral system should step in and do what the Kremlin regime and its proxies in the Central African Republic are refusing to do and conduct an international inquiry into what has happened. And there were two very strong bipartisan letters from the U.S. Congress last year that were led by Senator Marco Rubio and Senator Christopher Coons addressed to the U.N. Secretary General on exactly this question, on the need for an international inquiry into this case.

And if you look at some of the facts that have been uncovered, for example, by the Dossier Center, which is a United Kingdom-based NGO that has conducted a thorough private investigation of what has happened, there is absolutely no doubt that, you know, Russian intelligence officers and their Wagner proxies were front and center involved in the murder of these journalists in the Central African Republic.

So this is the answer to your question. Apart from all of the other characteristics of the Wagner Group that we have been discussing with our colleagues during this hearing, another one is secrecy. They are obsessed with secrecy. One of the things or perhaps the thing they are most afraid of is transparency and shining the truth on their actions.

So I think this is precisely why it is so important to uncover the abuses and the crimes that this organization has been involved in and also to try to push for an international independent inquiry into what happened to those three Russian investigative journalists who tried to uncover that truth about the Wagner Group.

Mr. TRONE. And the Russian public knows zero about the Wagner Group?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. So, you know, the one big difference between the authoritarian regime in our country and the totalitarian, I guess, regime in China is that, unlike the Communist China, we still have internet, and we still have social media. There are some attempts by the Putin regime to block online access and websites, but they are miniscule compared to what was happening in other regimes.

So, when it comes to national television, that is fully controlled by the State. In fact, that was the first thing Mr. Putin ensured

after he came to power, to either shut down or take over privately held independent television networks. There was NTV, TV6, then TVS. So all of the national television channels are directly controlled by the government, so for about—this is according to public opinion surveys—about 70 to 80 percent of the Russian population use television as a primary source of information, and that is fully controlled by the State. So, of course, people who gather information from State TV know nothing about this or almost nothing.

That part of the Russian population, we are mostly talking about younger educated people in large cities, so the urban middle classes, who do have access to the internet, who do use, you know, Facebook and You Tube and Twitter and all of those same instruments that you use in the U.S. as well, they know, of course, much more because there have been some private investigations conducted by, for example, the Dossier Center and other organizations, including international media organizations, into the Wagner Group and its operations. And so those people who do have access to online reporting do know just how dangerous, just how entrenched, and just how influential this particular proxy arm of the Putin regime is.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you very much. That was very enlightening.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back, and thank you for having this hearing.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

And talking about the importance of transatlantic allies, the chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Costa.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think is a very good subcommittee hearing that we are holding with these experts who I think we all have a great deal of respect for.

As the chair of the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, you and I have worked together, along with many of our other colleagues, to foster that institution as part of the glue to maintain our multilateral relationship. But I agree with you, Ambassador McFaul, when you say that, when we advocate our role in these institutions, whether it be the Paris climate accord or whether it be today the World Health Organization, we create a vacuum in which our adversaries quickly take that space.

I have got several questions. One, the situation where Russia has put itself in with Syria and the complexity of agendas between themselves and Iran and Israel and our abdication there, more or less, does that have the potential for Russia to be the same quagmire that Afghanistan was for the Soviet Union?

Who would like to take that?

Dr. MARTEN. Sir, on that, what Russia is attempting in Syria is something that is actually modelled on their actions in the Central African Republic, which is to become the linchpin in between militias that are in the outlying areas and the central government, and trying to use its efforts at what it calls reconciliation to bring these groups together and create stability.

One of the problems that it is facing in Syria is that this goes against the interests of Iran in Syria, because Iran really wants to be politically dominant in Syria in order to have a Shia presence that would extend beyond Syrian territory. So I think that is one of the areas where the United States could do the most to try to

put a brake on what Russia is doing, by emphasizing those conflicts that are happening between Russia and Iran and by trying to pull them apart in ways that demonstrate that neither of them are going to be capable of controlling that situation as strongly as they would like to.

Thank you.

Mr. COSTA. In partnership with Israel?

Dr. MARTEN. I think Israel's primary goal is to have stability in Syria, and for that reason, we have seen actually a very high degree of cooperation between Israel and Russia in Syria, because Israel believes that Russia is the more stable actor in comparison to Iran. It is very afraid of what Iran might be doing with Hezbollah and other Shia militias in Syria, whereas it sees Russia as having a desire to have a success case.

Mr. COSTA. No, that is my sense, and I find that troubling.

Ambassador Fried, you talked about our partnership with NATO and, Ambassador McFaul, you talked about a strategy much as we did during the cold war, where it was multifaceted, that we need to reinstitute. As the chair with the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, I find that a lot of our NATO allies these days, Members of Parliament that I interact with, have great concern as to whether or not we are going to be able to maintain that commitment that we have had in the past, and I have tried to suggest to them that this is a passing moment, but I am wondering if either of you would care to comment, and then I have one other quick question.

Mr. FRIED. I share some of your concern, and I have had similar conversations with European officials and Parliamentarians. But the other sense I get from them is that they want us back. They are somewhere between apprehensive and terrified of the thought that the United States has pulled itself out of world leadership for the foreseeable future.

Mr. COSTA. I get that same sense.

Mr. FRIED. But they want us back, and they are not partisan about it. It is not a Republican or Democrat thing. It is American leadership, and they are hungry to have us back. I think the opportunity is there if people take it.

Mr. COSTA. Well, and over the years—and I have been involved with these folks for a number of years—they have always been very appreciative of the fact that our policy has always been bipartisan, that we have always come to Europe together with a bipartisan effort.

One quick question. When we talk about a quick strategy—and I have talked about the interaction with a reference to their personal holdings—we know a lot about the personal holdings of not only Putin, but I mean, I refer to Russia sometimes as the Russian version of the Sopranos because, clearly, their personal wealth and its investment in Europe and other financial institutions I think is a vulnerability, and I do not think we have ever tried to use it as such.

Do either of you care to comment? And, Mr. Kara-Murza, I would think a lot of the Russian people would be very concerned if they found out how much wealth of Russia is no longer in Russia but in Europe and elsewhere.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. They are, and I think—thank you so much for this question because I think nothing has been as effective as a tool of policy on the part of Western democracies, with regard to the Putin regime in the last several years, as the Magnitsky Act, and the U.S., of course, was the first country to pass this law. Boris Nemtsov, the late Russian opposition leader, described the Magnitsky Act as the most pro-Russian law ever passed in a foreign country because it targets those people who want to steal in Russia but spend in the West. That is the motto of those people who have seized power in our country. If you look at those people, you will see that they spend their vacations in the West. They send their children to schooling in the West. They send their wives and mistresses on shopping tours in the West. This goes both for Western Europe and for North America.

And I think it is very important that the democratic world do something about it and stop this hypocrisy for those people who abuse the most basic norms of democratic society in our country, in Russia, and then come to your countries in the West and enjoy the fruits and benefits that democratic society offers. This should be stopped, and that is why it is so important to raise this issue.

Mr. COSTA. Well, I have seen pictures of their yachts in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, and they are quite luxurious.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. There was a very important development this week, yesterday in fact, when the United Kingdom finally began implementing its own Magnitsky Act that has been on the books for 2 years but has sat inactive, and now they have announced yesterday some of the first names on the sanctions list, again those individual sanctions, not targeting a country but targeting those individual crooks and human rights abusers who want to steal in Russia and abuse in Russia but spend their stolen money in the West, and that hypocrisy should be stopped.

Mr. COSTA. Could we prevent their access to those bank accounts?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. That is exactly the point of such legislation, and I, you know, as the only Russian citizen on this panel, I do not and cannot advocate sanctions against my country. But I certainly advocate and support individual targeted measures against those corrupt official crooks and human rights abusers in Vladimir Putin's regime who abuse the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens and steal the money of Russian taxpayers at home and then bring that stolen money to the West.

This is why measures such as the Magnitsky Act are not anti-Russian but pro-Russian, and as of today, there are only six countries that have these laws on the books. The OSCE has 57—member States. Forty-eight of them are functioning democracies, yet only six have this law on the books. So I hope there are more countries that follow your example and pass this legislation, and I hope that this law and other similar laws and targeted individual sanctions are used more actively in a more widespread fashion and more effectively in the United States as well.

Mr. COSTA. Ambassador McFaul.

Mr. McFAUL. Well, I agree with my colleagues. I think I am a little more worried about transatlantic relations maybe because the battle we are having with Putin is not just between states. It is an

ideological battle, and I think Americans do not appreciate that he has an ideological agenda, populous, nationalist, anti-multilateralist, orthodox, antigay rights. It is a set of ideas. Two decades ago, he was focused just on propagating those ideas within Russia. Now, he is exporting those ideas, and he is spending a lot of money to export and propagate those ideas. And he is picking up some wins. Viktor Orban, Matteo Salvini, even a lot of Americans these days, they are sympathetic to those ideas. I think we have got a lot of work to do, small D democrats, small L liberals, not Democrats and Republicans; but if you believe in liberal democratic values, there is a fight not just between the East and the West, like the cold war, but it is within Italy; it is within Hungary; it is within Germany; it is within Serbia; it is within the United States of America.

And I think we have to understand that Putin is seeking alliances within those countries, and we have got to have a better strategy to push back on it. Some of it is transparency, like we are talking now. But as I said in my opening remarks, I think it is really sad what is happening at RFE/RL right now, that we need to regain the independence of that organization. We need a firewall between that organization and political-motivated organizations.

And I would just remind my Republican friends, you know, you are not going to be in power all the time. So, do not you want a firewall between what that organization does and what the next President wants? And I think the separation between the President of the United States and the U.S. Government should have its outlets to speak about our policy. I 100% support that. But RFE/RL is not that. RFE/RL is independent reporting, by and large people from the regions, by the way. It is mostly people from the regions. I really think we have got to get back in this ideological game. We have kind of lost our focus on it, and I feel we are losing right now. I really do feel we are losing.

Mr. COSTA. Well, my time has expired, but I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, and let's talk some more offline. Karl Eikenberry says hello. And I look forward to seeing you sometime here soon. Fresno is not that far from Stanford.

Mr. McFAUL. Great.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

We are up against our prescribed time pretty closely, but we do have a few minutes for some quick second round questions if someone would have them. And, if not, I will proceed to closing remarks.

Mr. FRIED. Mr. Chairman, I wanted to jump in just to say that I usually agree with Mike McFaul, and I do in this case as well. And as I said in my testimony, the way to push back against Putin's world view is to challenge it, not agree with it, and get back to that bipartisan spirit of supporting the values in institutions of the free world and then updating them and fixing them so that they work better.

Mr. KEATING. Great. Thank you.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Mr. Chairman, just for a few seconds. I think it is very important to make this point again. It has only been a few days. So maybe the importance hasn't sunk in yet. But what happened with this fake plebiscite last week in Russia was actually a fundamental difference. It is no secret to anyone that Vladimir

Putin has lacked real democratic legitimacy for a long time, that he has been illegitimate de facto for a long time. But until now, he has—you know, even while he violated the spirit of the rule of law, he was careful to maintain the appearances by sort of pretending to stick to the letter of the law. So, for example, to avoid the initial term limit, he put in a placeholder puppet president by the name of Dmitry Medvedev. I do not know if anybody still remembers him, but so he kind of stuck to the limits initially.

Then we all remember how he won, quote/unquote, the Presidential—“election”—in 2018 when his main opponents were simply removed from the ballot, like Alexei Navalny, for instance. But, again, on paper there was a, quote/unquote,—“election.”—

This time, by actually just simply subverting, tearing up and throwing away the term limits, Vladimir Putin is doing the same thing as Blaise Compaore did in Burkina Faso, as Alberto Fujimori did in Peru, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, and I can continue this list of illegitimate rogue dictators who had used this trick before him.

And it is very important that the attitude of the democratic nations of this world, beginning with the United States, reflect this new reality and that he is denied the recognition and the legitimacy and the prestige he so desperately craves but he has no longer any right to.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Dr. MARTEN. Could I just add that, because of Russia's patronage system, there has really not been the level of popular discontent about corruption that we might find in the United States, for example, if the same things were revealed to the American public about what our leaders were doing. But now as Russia is entering a recession and as things, as many of the speakers have said, are going so badly for Putin, it may be a time when informing people in more depth about exactly what wealth is out there and what the wealth is doing in foreign countries may have more of an impact on Putin's popularity than it has in the past.

Mr. KEATING. If I could follow on that quickly. We bear some responsibility here in the United States when it comes to some of the things that you have just spoken about. Money is being laundered in the United States with real estate and art, and that much we know, and that is how so many of the oligarchs and people like Prigozhin are using our country to benefit themselves. What can we do? This is something I do not think we have concentrated on fully. But this idea of money laundering in the U.S. for real estate, that is pretty well documented, and art.

What can we do to expose this? Do you have any suggestions?

Mr. FRIED. Actually, sir, that is an area where we have considerable potential. After 9/11, the U.S. Government increased its capacity to detect financial flows by terrorists, and we did a pretty good job.

We now need to expand that and work at uncovering the corrupt financial flows, including but not limited to Russia, and we need to do it with the U.K. and with Europe because the Russians do the same thing in all of our countries. They buy up real estate through hidden deals. They do weird LLC arrangements through Delaware. They buy art. They go through fancy law firms.

We have the capacity and Congress has the capacity to tighten this up, and there are a lot of people in the U.S. Government and Treasury, even in this administration with its inconsistency about Russia, who want to do the right thing. This is an area of considerable upside potential for us, and it means drawing up those flows of corrupt funds and exposing them. And the U.S. Government can do some of that, and some of the exposure of corrupt Russian money could be done by investigative journalists. A lot of it is being done. The discovery—I think Mike McFaul mentioned in the Panama Papers of Putin's corrupt Russian funds being channeled through his cellist. You know, we can do this, and we need to do it with our allies or else it will just be a shell game.

Mr. KEATING. Well, we have legislation sponsored dealing with hypocrisies and trying to focus on this and put us in a better position internationally, but we can also do a better job here at home. The fact that we are complicit in this Putin enabling is troubling.

I want to thank a very gifted group.

I see Representative Costa has a quick question, or maybe he is signing off.

I just wanted as closing remarks, this is reinforced by all of you, a panel whose knowledge is decades long and very in depth. You have just been an important way to start this week where we are going to concentrate as a Congress on these issues. It is just a beginning. You have really has shown the widespread approach that we have to take. It is a dynamic issue. It is not singular to one event. As outrageous and shocking as the reports on the bounties are, we have to approach this at all levels and get answers and hold people accountable.

But it is very clear that, right now, this administration and our country, and it is a challenge we are taking in Congress and on this committee and on the full committee, is to have a Russian policy. We do not have a comprehensive Russian policy and strategy in place to deal with this. And it is clear from today's testimony that the situation is only escalating, and it will continue to escalate until we act. And in the absence of action by the administration in this regard, it is incumbent on Congress to do so.

So we are going to ask you for your continued help going forward. We will act in Congress. We will act in the House. We have no alternative. We owe it to the family members who go to bed at night and wake up in the morning with questions of how their son or daughter might have died serving their country. We owe it to our allies. We owe it to democracies in the world because we cannot fail to take the leadership role, something I am afraid that our closest allies are concerned we are taking a backseat to.

So thank you for what you are doing. We will continue. We will be having, as I mentioned, hearings this week, full committee on Thursday. We will be back on Friday with more hearings. Please—and for those people listening, I took the time, as I think members did, to read your full written testimony. I would suggest strongly that people that are viewing this take the time when that becomes available to read all of your written testimony, as well as the expertise and knowledge you shared with us today.

Thank you so much. And this will be a continuing effort until we get it right.

So with that, I will adjourn the hearing.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:01 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment

William R. Keating (D-MA), Chairman

July 7, 2020

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment via Cisco Webex (and available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

DATE: Tuesday, July 7, 2020

TIME: 2:00 p.m., EDT

SUBJECT: Exposing and Demanding Accountability for Kremlin Crimes Abroad

WITNESSES: The Honorable Daniel Fried
Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow
Atlantic Council
(Former State Department Coordinator for Sanctions Policy, Former Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and Former United States Ambassador to Poland)

The Honorable Michael McFaul
Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies
Ken Olivier and Angela Nomellini Professor of International Studies, Department of Political Science
Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution
Stanford University
(Former United States Ambassador to Russia, and Former Senior Director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs at the National Security Council)

Kimberly Marten, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Political Science
Barnard College, Columbia University

Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza
Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom
Vice President, Free Russia Foundation

By Direction of the Chairman

To fill out this form online, either use the tab key to travel through each field or mouse click each line or within blue box. Type in information.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment HEARING

Day Tuesday Date 7/7/2020 Room Cisco Webex

Starting Time 2:06 Ending Time 4:01

Recesses (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

William R. Keating

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

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To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

Exposing and Demanding Accountability for Kremlin Crimes Abroad

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

Ambassador Daniel Fried's Testimony

Ambassador Michael McFaul's Testimony

Dr. Kimberly Marten's Testimony

Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza's Testimony


Representative David Trone's QFR for Dr. Kimberly Marten

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or
TIME ADJOURNED 4:01

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.


Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
EUROPE, EURASIA, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Europe, Eurasia, Energy and Environment (E4) Subcommittee
Question for the Record from Congressman Trone for Dr. Marten
July 7, 2020**

1. Until recently, the Kremlin has denied any links to Russian private military companies. Why do you think Putin has recently publicly acknowledged the Wagner Group?

Kimberly Marten: Thank you for your interesting question, Congressman Trone. To my knowledge, the only time that Putin publicly acknowledged the Wagner Group by name was during his annual press conference in December 2018, when he said that as long as the Wagner Group obeyed Russian law at home, it was free to make money anywhere in the world it liked.¹

2018 was a key year for the Wagner Group. That February, when the Wagner Group attacked a Kurdish base beyond the deconfliction line in Deir al-Zour, Syria, and suffered devastating U.S. airstrikes in response, the news was widely covered in mainstream Russian print and online media, and was openly discussed in the Russian Duma (the lower house of parliament).² In March, following these events and in response to a years-long public Duma debate over legalizing private military companies (PMCs), the executive authorities in the Russian government definitively ruled that PMCs must remain illegal.³ (Analysts of Russian politics believe that such Duma discussions are stand-ins or trial balloons for policy debates that are actually happening inside the Kremlin or among state ministries in Russia.⁴) In July 2018 three Russian journalists were infamously murdered in the Central African Republic when they attempted to film the Wagner Group and investigate its activities there, and while those events did not appear in mainstream Russian media, they were covered extensively by Russian-language online opposition sources. Then that September Putin signed a decree that classified as secret all information about those who “cooperate with the foreign intelligence [services] of the Russian Federation who are not employees,” making anyone who revealed such information guilty of treason.⁵ This was widely interpreted as implicitly referencing the Wagner Group and its cooperation with the GRU (the Russian military intelligence agency), and in November 2018 a Russian defense analyst who wrote about PMCs, Vladimir Neelov, was arrested for treason.⁶

My answer to your question is a guess, but my best guess is this: In December 2018 Putin was just launching his extensive use of the Wagner Group throughout Africa. He probably wanted to make clear that in spite of the legal proscription against PMCs in Russia, and in spite of all the negative publicity the Wagner Group had recently garnered, he supported their foreign activities—discussion closed. It was also an implicit warning to the Wagner Group not to try anything at home, and to remember that they served at his pleasure.

¹ “Vladimir Putin’s Annual News Conference,” Dec. 20, 2018, Kremlin.ru.

² “V Gosdume zagovorili o neobkhodimosti zakona o ChVK posle informatsii o gibeli v Sirii soten rossiiskikh naemnikov ‘ChVK Wagner’ [The Duma had a long discussion about the need for a law on PMCs after information about the death of tens of Russian Wagner PMC mercenaries in Syria],” NewsRU.com, Feb. 14, 2018.

³ “Kremlin Blocks the Bill Legalizing Russian Private Military Companies,” UAWire, Mar. 28, 2018.

⁴ Ben Noble and Ekaterina Schulmann, “Not Just a Rubber Stamp: Parliament and Lawmaking,” in *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin’s Russia*, ed. Daniel Treisman (Washington: Brookings, 2018), pp. 49-82.

⁵ Aleksei Nikol’skii and Svetlana Bocharova, “Prezident zasekretit svedeniia o nekadrovyykh razvedchikakh [The President has classified as secret information about non-employee intelligence agents],” *Vedomosti*, Sept. 24, 2018.

⁶ “Sud arestoval voennogo eksperta Vladimir Neelova po podozreniiu v gosizmene [The court has arrested military expert Vladimir Neelov on suspicion of state treason],” TASS Russian News Agency, Nov. 2, 2018.