

PUTIN'S WAR ON TRUTH: PROPAGANDA AND CENSORSHIP IN RUSSIA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE

U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION

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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Tuesday, March 29, 2022.

The hearing was held from 2:04 p.m. to 3:59 p.m., Room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Co-Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Commission Members Present: Senator Benjamin L. Cardin [D-MD], Chairman; Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Co-Chairman; Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Ranking Member; Senator Richard Blumenthal [D-CT]; Representative Richard Hudson [R-NC]; Representative Marc A. Veasey [D-TX]; Senator Sheldon Whitehouse [D-RI]; Representative Ruben Gallego [D-AZ].

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Members Present: Margareta Cederfelt [Sweden], President, OSCE PA; Pascal Allizard [France], Vice President, OSCE PA; Irene Charalambides [Cyprus], Vice President, OSCE PA.

Witnesses: Fatima Tlis, Journalist, Voice of America; Peter Pomerantsev, Senior Fellow, Agora Institute, Johns Hopkins University; Vladimir Kara-Murza, Russian Journalist and Author, and Former Host, Echo of Moscow Radio.

OPENING STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, CHAIRMAN, U.S. SENATE, FROM MARYLAND

Chairman CARDIN: The Helsinki Commission will come to order. Let me point out for those that are here that Representative Cohen has been delegated to chair this hearing. He is on his way over—[audio break]—that he might make—[audio break]—Russia's incursions into Ukraine.

What Mr. Putin has done, this unprovoked attack on Ukraine, we are at day 34. We have seen him targeting civilians. We have seen him use weapons that are clearly aimed at destroying property and people. We have seen no regard whatsoever to the sovereignty of Ukraine. We have seen him use every weapon in his asymmetric arsenal in order to achieve his objective to bring down a sovereign, peaceful State of Ukraine. He has done that in a manner that has crossed many acceptable lines, and he should be held accountable for his war crimes. I think all of us feel pretty passionately about that.

Mr. Putin has used an asymmetric arsenal to maintain his power and his influence. A few years ago, I authored, on behalf of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a report on Mr. Putin titled “His Asymmetric Arsenal to Interfere with Democratic States.” At that time, we observed that he used energy as a weapon, he used his soldiers, he used misinformation, he used propaganda, he weaponized energy, and the list goes on and on and on. The Helsinki Commission, there is no higher priority that we have right now than to deal with what Russia has done in violating every single principle of the Helsinki Final Act—every single principle.

This hearing will concentrate on propaganda and censorship within Russia. I do intend to hold additional hearings, including dealing with Mr. Bill Browder, who will be at our next hearing, I think, remotely. Mr. Browder was, of course, a victim of Mr. Putin in Russia. He fell out of favor, and his lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, was representing him. As we all know, Sergei Magnitsky discovered widespread corruption within Russia. That is how Mr. Putin supports his enterprises. As a result of him doing what is required of a lawyer—and that is to notify the local authorities—Mr. Magnitsky was imprisoned, tortured, and killed.

It resulted in the passage, in the United States, of the Sergei Magnitsky Accountability Act for those who were responsible for his death. I was proud to author that statute, along with my former colleague and friend Senator John McCain. We then took that legislation and made it into a Global Magnitsky, so it applied to all human rights violators, whatever country they may be in. My partner in that has been Senator Wicker, the Senate Republican chair of the Helsinki Commission.

I mention that because on the floor later today we are going to attempt one more time to get the Global Magnitsky statute broadened and made permanent. We hope to have that done by the end of this week. We will be holding future hearings to deal with the refugee crisis and the vulnerability of individuals being trafficked, children being trafficked. We will also deal with the OSCE, and how it can use its mechanisms in order to deal with the challenges created by Mr. Putin. We will look at the weaponization of energy and all those issues.

I see that our guests have arrived. Before I turn the gavel back to Mr. Cohen, let me first recognize Senator Blumenthal.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, U.S. SENATE, FROM CONNECTICUT

Senator BLUMENTHAL: Thank you so much, Senator Cardin. Thank you to Congressman Cohen, Chairman Cohen, for hosting us here in the House of Representatives, where we have rights of speech and assembly and worship, and other essential guarantees and safeguards that literally people are dying to uphold and achieve in Ukraine and elsewhere around the world. That is why the Helsinki Commission is so very important, especially now when Vladimir Putin has literally launched two wars.

Vladimir Putin launched a war against Ukraine. It is a brutal, barbaric assault on human rights and freedoms, as well as literally the lives of Ukrainians who are boldly and fiercely resisting him. It is also a war on the truth in Russia.

The topic that brings us here today is Vladimir Putin's war on speech and truth in his own country. The two are linked, irretrievably intertwined, because he could not be at war in Ukraine, with the criminal, barbaric means that he is using, and with the loss of life among his own troops, if he could not suppress the truth in his own country.

Even in a world of the internet and social media, and technology, he has the means to silence people who want to speak truth to his power. I want to salute the witnesses who will talk to us today, Fatima Tlis, Peter Pomerantsev, and we will hear remotely, I understand, from Vladimir Kara-Murza. Mr. Kara-Murza invokes Orwell and "1984" in his testimony, and it is very appropriate that he does, because Putin is trying to create, very crudely and purposefully, a world that matches the truth even less than George Orwell's "1984."

We need to fortify and buttress the efforts of truth tellers in Russia, just as we are providing the military means and tools to the brave, courageous freedom fighters. We need to do more, especially for aerial defense; the S-300's, the SA-3s, the other kinds of means for them to resist the reign of terror from the skies that Putin has launched, as well as economic sanctions that need to be tougher and humanitarian aid.

We also need to aid the truth tellers in Russia through Radio Free Europe and the BBC and all of the other means, and many more, that have been used in the past. The resources necessary to do so ought to be provided.

Part of the reason we are here is to mobilize public understanding in the United States for how threatened and undermined Putin's war on truth is succeeding in putting the truth in Russia. The people of Russia deserve better. I hope that we can provide them the truth so that they will, in turn, help stop this absolutely unnecessary war of choice that is killing so many, injuring countless people, destroying the roads and bridges and hospitals and schools and other kinds of civilian targets in Ukraine, and how they can help us stop this war.

Thank you, Senator Cardin, as well as Chairman Cohen, for this meeting.

Chairman CARDIN: Let me thank Senator Blumenthal for his leadership on this issue and so many other issues.

Before turning it over to Congressman Cohen, as you know, we have a House chairman, a Senate chairman. We rotate every two years. This is the year in which the Senate acts as the chair, but then the House acts as the head of our delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This really is a bicameral institution, very much bicameral, and bipartisan. As you know, Senator Wicker and Congressman Wilson, participate fully with all of us in regards to the work of the commission.

We are so honored to have the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly with us today. Madam President, you honor us with your presence, and two of your vice presidents. We are very pleased to have such a distinguished group, and the Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. All are present today, so we thank you for your visit.

As I explained to you a little bit earlier, you came at a very busy week because of the Ukraine crisis, but also because we have in the Senate, anticipating the confirmation process on the Supreme Court justice that we will be taking up as early as next week, so we apologize. There is a vote on the floor of the U.S. Senate. We will—the two of us are going to need to leave.

I want to compliment Congressman Cohen for arranging this hearing. The importance of propaganda, of misinformation, is one of the major tools used by Mr. Putin in his war against democratic states.

With that, let me turn it over to Chairman Cohen.

STATEMENT OF STEVE COHEN, CO-CHAIR, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TENNESSEE

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you, Senator Cardin and Senator Blumenthal. We appreciate your attendance.

The commission has come to order. We do have special guests here, the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Ms. Cederfelt of Sweden. We also have the vice president from Cyprus, Vice President Charalambides.

Ms. CHARALAMBIDES: Yes.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Yes. Thank you. The vice president, who also—Senator Pascal Allizard of France, who is an OSCE PA vice president from Normandy—thank you—where you did not have to be a member of NATO for America to come help.

We are joined in the audience by the OSCE parliamentary secretary general, the man who does the work and gets everything done, Roberto Montella.

Thank you.

Thanks to Gregory Meeks for allowing us to use this room. He is the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Today's hearing will focus on propaganda and censorship in Putin's Russia, both of which we have seen disturbing escalations since the outset of Putin's unprovoked war on Ukraine. Of course, it started—it was very easy to see his propaganda. He constantly said we are not going to go to war. This is a training exercise. We have no plans to go to war. We are not going to go to war, we are not going to go to war, absurdum, and then he went to war.

These practices, which he is engaged in, are reminiscent of the Stalin era, an aim to cut Russia off from the rest of the world and from reality itself, by not allowing the truth to be broadcast. Putin is building a new iron curtain and attempts to justify his indefensible war and continued attacks against the Ukrainian people.

Putin's Kremlin manufactured lies as a pretext for his invasion and only ramped up propaganda since. He claimed he was there to de-Nazify Ukraine. There are no Nazis there, and President Zelensky is of Jewish heritage. The idea of him being a Nazi is absurd, but he can say what he thinks. He creates the truth, and he tells the Russian people, and they accept it. This has happened even in America. Certain people have new facts, and they claim what the truth is, and they continue to say it.

Putin's narrative that the U.S. is helping Ukraine develop biological weapons on its territory is absurd. That is something he

does, and he sometimes tells you what he is going to do, but he projects. Some individuals do that.

He did the same thing in Syria before he and Assad used chemical weapons on civilian populations there. Putin claims Ukrainian forces are firing upon and bombing its own people, including women and children hiding in shelters. Of course, that is baseless as well.

His assertion that Ukrainians who are covered in blood and running for their lives are crisis actors is another lie. I mean, it is just lie after lie after lie. That, of course, is an insult to the dead and the nearly 6.5 million people displaced inside Ukraine and neighboring countries by Putin's activities.

The fact that some Russian citizens believe that a war in Ukraine, a country on its borders, is not even happening is evidence of Putin's ability to manipulate the truth. It is a special military operation, whatever in the hell that is. It is a war. If you say it is a war, you get thrown in possibly 15 years in jail. It is absurd. There are great people like Navalny who will say it, and a couple of ladies who were on television in Russia who said it. Hopefully they will not suffer that 15-year penalty.

Those fabrications that he is used inside Russia and other countries where the Kremlin is trying to make falsehoods stick through lies and lies and lies, much like Goebbels, the propagandist of the Hitler regime, and ironically it was that Nazi type of propaganda against Jewish people that Putin is using, and yet he claims he is going to de-Nazify a country, just like he is got a siege of cities in Ukraine similar to what Hitler had in Leningrad—where his parents were. I think his oldest brother died, and his father was injured, and his mother may have been injured. They told stories, and that had a great deal in shaping his consciousness, but not his conscience, because if he had a conscience, he would not do that. He is now Hitler.

To make his propaganda machine work, Putin's Kremlin is censoring independent media and forcing all remaining outlets to peddle his message. If not, they are in big trouble. After the first week of his invasion, he blocked Russian access to Facebook and Twitter, as well as international news sites still operating there. Now, Facebook and Instagram have been permanently banned after a Russian court declared Meta platforms as extremist organizations.

Independent Russian media outlets have been removed from the air and ultimately shut down. I think the last one just closed down a couple of days ago. They could not take it anymore.

They have run off Radio Free Europe to the best they can, Radio Liberty, Voice of America, although they have been getting a lot of hits on certain sites, in spite of the fact that they have been banned. I think they tried to sue for a lot of money as well.

We have seen independent outlets leave and news people leave for fear of being arrested. Putin does not want his Russian people to see the truth about the war. It is his war, unprovoked aggression on a peaceful democratic neighbor.

We have a panel of distinguished witnesses who will help us understand Putin's propaganda machine, the rapidly shrinking information space in Russia, and what the U.S. and our allies can con-

sider as we look at ways to push back against Putin's disinformation.

Particularly we welcome our witnesses in person. We will hear from Fatima Tlis, a Russian journalist for Voice of America who is an expert on Russian disinformation; I think a former Russian citizen—is that true?—and exiled here.

Following Ms. Tlis, we will hear from Peter Pomerantsev, who is a journalist, author, and senior fellow at the Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, whom I saw on MSNBC or CNN and realized that is the guy we need. He is the pro from Dover.

Then we will hear, through the magic of the internet or cable or some kind of Zoom, from Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian journalist, author, former host at Echo of Moscow Radio, and one of the great heroes of our time, who has twice been poisoned by the Russians yet returns to Russia because that is his home. He is a Russian politician, as he tells me. That is his home. He will not leave. He will stay there to bring about change. I consider him a hero. I wish he would listen to me and stay in Virginia, but he is going to join us by video today.

With that, I want to turn it over to, I guess, my ranking member, who is pushing the button.

STATEMENT OF JOE WILSON, U.S. HOUSE, FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Representative WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chairman. I was grateful to be with the chairman, Senator Ben Cardin, just a moment ago in the hallway.

I am going to be repetitious, Madam President, and that is, I want to remind everybody that Putin unintentionally has unified Republicans and Democrats to be universally supportive of the people of Ukraine, universally supportive of democracy against autocracy, supporting the rule of law, not the rule of gun.

Then it is ironic what a historian we have with Congressman Cohen, and that is to mention the siege of Leningrad. Indeed, the reason that Vladimir Putin's family survived is because of the United States. I had the opportunity to go to St. Petersburg to place a wreath at the cemetery, the world's largest open cemetery, tragically. It was the victims of the siege of Leningrad.

While I was there, as we were placing a wreath in the shape of the United States' red, white, and blue, showing the love and affection that we have for the people of Russia, while I was there I found out that the reason that they survived is because of American Lend-Lease. The equipment that was provided to the people of Leningrad saved that city of ultimate destruction. History is now being repeated, and that is—I am grateful to be working with Congressman Cohen—we have a bill for Lend-Lease now for the people of Ukraine to receive equipment by Lend-Lease to—for the siege of Kyiv, and to stop Putin's aggression, so history keeps repeating itself.

It is sad that Mr. Putin does not recognize that the American people have such appreciation of the great culture of Russia, and we have done our part to try to save that country, and ironically, even his family. It is tragic for Ukrainians and Russians that Putin's war on truth and decency has escalated to this murderous

point. We have all seen the terrifying images coming out of Ukraine, the exhausted families leaving their entire lives behind to flee to safety in neighboring countries, children underground in metro stations to avoid bombings, and the absolute carnage at Mariupol, with 5,000 persons already murdered, where civilians are cutoff from the rest of the world and subject to the terror of arbitrary attacks from Putin forces.

For those whose only source of information is Russian State media, this violence is obscured or justified by those controlling the narrative. Many years of cultivating distrust in the independent media and creating an environment of State censorship have left ordinary Russians with limited options and the threat of imprisonment, not only if they speak out against the war, but for even calling it a war.

Putin's propaganda machine has turned the unjust and brutal war into a vehicle for rallying support behind Putin's twisted version of history, one of—where a citizen has loyalty to him alone. Anyone who refuses to toe the line is branded as a traitor in this Stalinist self-cleansing.

We know not only because the atrocities Putin has authorized in Ukraine, but by his past behavior, the murders, the physical attacks on journalists and dissidents, that Putin will do anything and sacrifice anyone in betraying the people of Russia. The fact that Russian soldiers are being killed and wounded by the thousands means nothing to him. It is his obsession for oil, money, and power, as President Biden has correctly identified.

To those Russians who cannot or refuse to see the truth that Putin is a war criminal who does not care about them or their country outside of how he can use them to further his power, we are in a long-time worldwide conflict between democracy with the rule of law versus autocracy by rule of gun. Even between friends and family members, we see the disconnect between the experiences and Putin's lies.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what Putin's sinister information war entails and the extent to which it is possible to overcome the barriers of censorship and propaganda. As a former daily newspaper reporter myself and former editor of my high-school, college, and law-school newspaper, I am particularly grateful to the brave Russians who are armed only with truth, who have spoken out at great risk to their personal safety. It is unthinkable that mass murder would be occurring in the year 2022. Thank you to our witnesses for their time and expertise.

With that, I yield back.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson, my ranking member.

I am going to proceed to the witnesses. Then, the members who have joined us, Mr. Veasey and Mr. Hudson, I will recognize you all first for questions. I do want to recognize the fact that Senator Blumenthal is still here, which, except for Mr. Cardin, has the most continuous time that a senator has spent. Just joking.

Ms. Tlis, I would like to—Ms. Tlis, I recognize you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL: We have a vote ongoing, Mr. Chairman, so I hope you will excuse me when I do have to leave.

Thank you. Thanks for your—

Co-Chairman COHEN: Tell Mr. Rubio hello.
Ms. Tlis, you are recognized.

**TESTIMONY OF FATIMA TLIS, JOURNALIST, VOICE OF
AMERICA**

Ms. TLIS: Chairman Cohen, honorable members, guests, senators, I am humbled to speak today before you alongside such distinguished witnesses. I testify in my personal capacity as a journalist whose work during the last 8 years focused on identifying, verifying, and debunking Russian disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda.

Today, we see horrific and heroic stories from Ukraine, and I am experiencing déjà vu. In fact, I have seen all of this before in the North Caucasus, which is Russia's testing ground for all types of weaponry, including propaganda. I am Circassian, one of many oppressed and dying-off ethnic minorities in Russia. My people fought against Russia longer than any other world nation. Russia won by killing and deporting more than 90 percent of the Circassians and destroying our homeland—exactly what the Kremlin is trying to do today in Ukraine.

For non-Russian citizens, the hypocrisy is obvious. The Kremlin's information justifies war against another country by accusing it of the same policies Russia has practiced for centuries. In the face of terrible violence committed in Ukraine by the Russian government and military, very few in Russian society are brave enough to protest, while the majority either support the Kremlin or remain lethargic.

We also see that the last few independent voices have been silenced, while most of the Russian media are indoctrinated to censorship, choosing to play the role of an obedient servant eager to please the political power. The Kremlin regime subjects the people of Russia to a life petrified in state-infused fear and beliefs based on falsehoods. What I have seen in fact-checking Russia is a propaganda leviathan born of the symbiosis of modern technology with the inherited techniques and strategy of the Soviet Union.

The Kremlin's disinformation operations are coordinated. They use traditional media outlets, social media platforms, and cyberattacks to bombard people inside and outside Russia with specific messages, each designed for certain audiences. In targeting domestic Russian audiences, the Kremlin deploys disinformation and propaganda designed as entertainment. Watching Russian TV commentators is like following a soap opera. It is full of intrigues, with superheroes and supervillains, labeled for whatever purposes the Kremlin wants them to serve. Russian domestic propaganda does not shy off fabrications. It tells pure lies robustly and convincingly, conscripting every single foreign voice of support for the regime with translation in manipulated contexts, then delivering it to every single household.

In targeting foreign countries, Russia employs well-sourced, smartly designed, and precisely targeted disinformation. A few years ago, we saw that the Kremlin's strategy was to promote complementary views of Russia and the regime. Not anymore. Today, the primary approach is the destruction of beliefs, ideas, and values that the regime sees as an impediment or danger to its exist-

ence. In Russian propaganda, the United States is forever the supervillain and chief target. When aiming at the American people, the Kremlin targets different sociopolitical, racial, and ethnic groups with specifically designed disinformation. The ultimate goal is to destroy the U.S. from within.

When selecting other foreign countries, the Kremlin seeks to plant mistrust and hatred toward everything American. In too many places around the world, the Russian propaganda and disinformation keep achieving its goals. We saw it during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, and in the instigation of entire American sentiment on the African continent, the Middle East, and countries in Europe. We also witnessed the effectiveness of the Russian propaganda during the weeks leading to the full-scale invasion in Ukraine. Instead of believing facts on the ground, most of the world bought what the Kremlin wanted it to believe, that the U.S. warnings were hysterical nonsense, and Russia would never attack. Until it did.

Moscow's success comes from many factors, but the most important probably is that its propaganda is made to appeal simultaneously to the reasoning and to emotions, tapping both hearts and minds. A testimony to the power of such propaganda is the story of my great-grandmother, who was born into a noble, wealthy family. Her family, two brothers, and husband died in the concentration camp in Solovki, where they were sent as enemies of the people by the Stalin regime. She had six children. Only one, the youngest, my grandfather, survived an artificial famine, similar to Holodomor in Ukraine, while the other five died of starvation.

When Joseph Stalin died, she told me "I felt like the world was ending and some evil forces were about to attack us, and nobody was there anymore to protect us. Everybody in the village came out to the streets, and you could hear the sound of thousands of people crying in pure grief and great fear". The Kremlin has mastered the propaganda machine it inherited from the USSR. Its full force has been deployed against society for decades. It will take an intelligent strategy to free the Russian people from the Kremlin-inflicted alternate reality.

Thank you for your attention.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you very much for your testimony and your family's history. Appreciate it very much.

Next, we will hear from Peter Pomerantsev. He is a star from Johns Hopkins. Appreciate your testimony.

**TESTIMONY OF PETER POMERANTSEV, SENIOR FELLOW,
AGORA INSTITUTE, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY**

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Thank you very much. I am, indeed, at Johns Hopkins. Currently, as you probably tell, I am British, but I was born in Kyiv. Even though my parents left in the late 1970's, I still have many ties there. Over spring break, I headed down to Ukraine. I was in Lviv and then in Kyiv. Came back on Sunday. I was very moved and worried by what I saw.

I very much hope that all the words that you say, these very noble words, can be turned into action and have meaning. Because if there is an essence to Vladimir Putin's propaganda, it is to claim that big words about democracy and the rule of law and the world

order are empty. He wishes to prove that they are empty. I spent 10 years between 2001 and 2010 working as a journalist and a documentary-maker in Russia. My book about the country was called “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible,” which is an attempt to really capture the mind-bending and reality-undermining pseudo-ideology that Kremlin propaganda pushes.

I think we need to—before we get into the question that I want to answer, which is what we are going to do to penetrate the information iron curtain that Fatima and all you have described so well—we have to really understand why is public opinion important in Russia in the first place. There are no elections in Russia, yes? It is a dictatorship. However, for Vladimir Putin to continue along his destructive path in Ukraine, as he did in Syria, to remake the world order, as he openly wants to do, he needs to take the country along with him. Whether through fear or persuasion, he needs to make sure that the Russian system can keep on functioning. That involves lots and lots of people, whose motivation, loyalty, and conformity he depends on.

He depends on their feeling that, in the words of his own spin doctors, there is no alternative to Putin. That is why he is doing so much to control the information environment, emotions, and perceptions at home. That is why breaking through this new information iron curtain, which is a challenge that is as much psychological as it is technical, is so important. Now, a lot of people are trying different things. Over the last two weeks, I have spoken to Lithuanian activists who are trying to call Russians at home and tell them about the war in Ukraine. I have spoken to European foundations that are trying to keep exiled Russian independent media going. I have talked to academics who are trying to analyze the language of Russian propaganda and understand how it works on the psyche.

Such diversity is great. It is part of what makes democracy so exciting. Frankly, it is not enough. We cannot have a scattergun approach in the face of a focused, concerted, and coordinated enemy. It is simply not enough to hope that we can plant some benevolent seeds and watch them slowly grow. That is not the world that we are in. We are, like it or not, in a war with Vladimir Putin. A kinetic war in Ukraine, a political, economic, and information war with the rest of us. In order to reach Russian audiences, we are going to need a sort of version of—the information version, I suppose, of a Berlin airlift. What would it entail? I think it will entail cooperation between governments, between tech companies, between media and academia.

Let us start right at the top with the government. Back in the cold war, as many of you will remember, our leaders were very good at talking directly to the Russian people. Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan went on Soviet TV and talked directly to them. I have seen President Biden starting to address the Russian people in some of his speeches. That is a great start. It is not enough. It has to be happening all the time. That outreach has to be consistent. It is not just the president. We need a whole—you know, a whole flotilla of spokespeople that the Russian people trust who can now address them, engage with them, get into a dialog with

them, show the Russian people that the paranoia and fortress mentality that Putin is trying to push on them is false.

There is already been one good example of this. Arnold Schwarzenegger made this amazing video—I do not know who was behind it, but well done to him—reaching out to the Russian people. It was huge in Russia. Again, that is one video. It should be happening every day. Sports people, scientists, and actually Army people. Russians really respect American soldiers, in a strange way. They need to be engaging with the Russian people all the time, getting feedback, and starting a conversation with them, not just about the war but about all the things they care about. About education, about health, about technology, and about the future of Russia in the world.

Now, Mr. Schwarzenegger’s video is very popular on Telegram. That is one of the social media platforms that has not been restricted in Russia yet. Other ones, as you mentioned, have been. Both Facebook and Instagram. Currently, the Russian sort of firewall is pretty leaky. We can get through pretty easily. We know that is going to get worse day by day by day. We need the expertise, the power, and the intentionality of the great tech companies, largely American tech companies, to help break through that firewall as it gets higher and higher and higher. That means a sea change, yes, in their approach to this. They need to take a stand.

What do I mean by that? Not take a stand politically or geopolitically, but in line with the very values that the tech companies say they have, yes? They believe, they say, in human rights. They have all said they want to regulate their companies in line with human rights. They believe in universal access, yes? We need the help of Silicon Valley to make sure that Russians have access to the global internet through VPNs; through, you know, secure messaging groups; through various other types of technology that will emerge as the new challenges emerge.

That will guarantee, if we have their cooperation, that will guarantee the Russians can continue to access the media that are being turfed out of the country. Independent media—and of course, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, USAGM, who have also been expelled from Russia. Now, at the moment we are actually seeing a spike, I think you mentioned, toward those media. It shows that there are Russians who do want to know the truth. However, we have a bigger challenge. How do we reach the other Russians? Not just the 15 percent who we know are against the war. How do we reach this much bigger audience? We need to understand their motivations, the sort of information they demand.

It may not be immediately political. It may have more to do with sports. I think the great crunch moment for Putin’s propaganda will come when Russians realize Russia is not at the soccer World Cup and they cannot watch the World Cup. Now, we need to understand those audiences. We have to understand why they believe in conspiracy theories that the Kremlin spreads. What are the underlying anxieties that they feel? For that, we are going to have to enlist where I work in, media, social psychology, academia—that space of communications studies.

We really—it is not enough to simply support media that is already preaching to the converted. We need to unite the research

that, for example, my colleagues and I do at Johns Hopkins Annenberg and really apply that in engaging audiences in very innovative ways to really find the place where they start caring about the facts again. You cannot simply throw the facts at people who are resistant to it. It will take a lot of experimentation and a lot of academic thinking in order to achieve that.

Somebody's going to need to coordinate all this, this flotilla of public diplomacy, technology, media, activists, academia. We need some sort of new structure that has access to the highest levels of government, which has White House access, but which has the credibility and the knowledge to exchange with fiercely independent stakeholders like media or academia. We will not be told what to do by the government, but we are ready—because we understand a common existential threat—to work together.

We have to. We know that dictatorships have information war machines. They use troll farms. They use corrupt allies. They use completely distorted State media. We need our own democratic communications infrastructure. Where they have troll farms, we will have online town halls. Where they use disinformation to manipulate people, we will use communication to engage with them as citizens. Russia is only the start of the challenge. China is applying the same methodology as Russia does, so has Saudi Arabia and every dictatorship out there. We have to compete.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you very much. I have got quite a few questions, but I am going to save them, because I promised Mr. Hudson and Mr. Veasey they go first.

Now, through the power and the mystery of Zoom, Mr. Vladimir Kara-Murza, one of the great patriots and heroes of the 21st century, you are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA, RUSSIAN JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR, AND FORMER HOST, ECHO OF MOSCOW RADIO

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Thank you so much. Co-Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the Commission, thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you. I want to add also that I am honored by the presence at this hearing of Margareta Cederfelt, the president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and one of the world's strongest and clearest voices in support of the accountability of the rule of law, and of keeping countries to their commitments under the Helsinki principles. Thank you so much for your participation. I wish I could be with you all in person, but this week finds me for meetings at the British Parliament in London. As Co-Chairman Cohen said, thanks to the mystery of modern technology, I am able to join remotely.

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin launched two wars. One that continues to this day was his unprovoked and unlawful aggression against Ukraine. The other, which was concluded effectively and swiftly, was his blitzkrieg against what remained of independent media in Russia. I say "what remained" because, of course, Putin's drive against media freedom has been going on for decades. In fact, independent television became the first target of his regime when he came to power in the year 2000.

We have a saying in Russian—[speaks in Russian]—“those who offend us will not survive three days.” Almost in the exact keeping with this saying, on the fourth day of his inauguration as president of Russia in May 2000, Putin sent out operatives from the tax police and the prosecution service to raid the offices of Russia’s largest private media holding. Within one year, its flagship network, NTV, Russia’s most popular television channel known for its professional news coverage, honest political analysis, and hard-hitting satire—was seized by the state-run energy giant Gazprom in an early dawn raid in Moscow’s Ostankino Television Center.

By the summer of 2003, the remaining independent networks, TV-6 and TVS, were taken down as well. Just as in Soviet times, the State established a complete monopoly on television, by far the leading source of information for Russian citizens. The fact that so many Russians have been brainwashed by the Kremlin’s propaganda is the direct result of this monopoly. Until the beginning of this month, there were still pockets of independent media in Russia that gave our citizens access to the truth.

The most prominent among them were Echo of Moscow Radio, where I had the honor of hosting a weekly program, and TV Rain, an online television network. Both were closed in the first days of Putin’s war on Ukraine. So many other news outlets, both national and regional, including the highly respected TV2 in Tomsk. At the same time, the Russian government censorship agency, Roskomnadzor, blocked access to social media networks used by millions of Russians, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. All of this happened within days.

I also want to add, as Co-Chairman Cohen referenced at the beginning of this hearing, this week Novaya Gazeta, which was the last independent print newspaper in Russia and whose editor-in-chief was a 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Dmitry Muratov, has ceased publication because of the military censorship imposed by Putin’s government. I have been involved in Russian journalism and politics for more than 20 years, but it still shocked me just how quickly this new information iron curtain has descended.

Today, most Russians live in an Orwellian parallel reality created by the Kremlin’s propaganda machine. I mean Orwellian in the literal sense. What’s being said on Russian State television might as well come out of George Orwell’s “1984.” War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength. Most Russians, as mindboggling as it sounds, are not even aware of the horrendous war crimes committed to Putin in Ukraine.

Those who speak out against this war are now liable for criminal prosecution, so are those who simply call it a war. Up to 15 years in prison, according to a new law hurriedly passed by a so-called parliament, and just as hurriedly signed by Putin, all in 1 day. These new penalties target not only journalists or opposition activists. A Russian Orthodox priest in Kostroma, Father Ioann Burdin, was charged, convicted, and fined for speaking out against war in his Sunday sermon. This is the reality of Russia under Putin.

Needless to say, only Russians can and should change the political situation in our country. That change is coming, and I think faster than many thought before February 24. The world’s democracies have an important role to play, not only in standing in soli-

parity with Ukraine—which goes without saying—but also in helping to provide truth to the Russian people, helping to open the eyes of Russian society to the unspeakable crimes being committed supposedly on its behalf.

This has been done before. In communist times, broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and Deutsche Welle beamed radio signals, literally, across the Iron Curtain to reach millions of people in their own languages inside the Soviet bloc.

In the USSR itself, according to expert estimates, these radio broadcasts were listened to by some 30 million people, 15 percent of the adult population. Nothing beats totalitarian propaganda better than the truth, and when the Soviet system collapsed, it was, in my view, primarily because it had been discredited and delegitimized in the eyes of its own people, who were able to see its true nature. If this were done with the technologies of the 1970's, it can certainly be done today. It is only a question of having the will and of dedicating the right resources.

I want to thank you, once again, for holding this hearing and for showing your commitment to doing both, and I stand ready to answer any questions that you might have.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you. I hope you can stay with us for the questioning because I am sure people have questions.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Absolutely.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you, sir.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Absolutely.

Co-Chairman COHEN: First, I would like to recognize Mr. Hudson, who is—you tell him who you are. He is my friend and he is a good guy.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD HUDSON, U.S. HOUSE, FROM NORTH CAROLINA

Representative HUDSON: Richard Hudson, a Congressman from North Carolina. I am chair of the First Committee of the OSCE PA, and it is really an honor to be with you today. I appreciate the testimony from all of our witnesses.

I also appreciate the—our special guests who are here from OSCE PA, Madam Cederfelt and the others. This is a really important hearing that we are having today, and I really appreciate the examples you brought to us.

I guess my question kind of builds on—you know, you talked about the fact that Putin calls anyone who opposes him a traitor or a foreign agent, you know, all to indicate, in my opinion, that personal loyalty, not true patriotism, is what counts in Russia. It is up to Russians to decide who governs them.

As Mr. Kara-Murza just said, you know, we have got to be—Putin's got to be delegitimized in the eyes of his own people. The playing field for doing that seems to be nonexistent, based on your testimony.

How do we support those Russians who want to see political change in their country? How does the fact that many opposition leaders have now fled Russia change the calculus for this? I would ask each witness if you could share with me, sort of, what is the best thing we can do to support dissidents who want to speak out?

Ms. TLIS: Thank you for your question. There are several ways. First of all, I think the West—and I mean Europe and the United States—should be unified in their very strict message that this government is criminal. There is no—[speaks in a foreign language]—

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Conditional tense?

Ms. TLIS: There is no conditional tense. You cannot say something and then back it up or say half of the truth. That is what the Russians are doing. That is what Putin is doing. Most of their disinformation is half-truth, maybe 60 percent truth, and then 40 percent, the most important, is a lie, and that is how they make people believe them. First of all, a very clear message, and this is not going to pass. Enough is enough.

Second, I think there is one element missing in all the policies regarding Russian propaganda, which is young voices. We need to ask young people in Europe at the universities, here in the United States, what they think, and how they think they can connect with the young Russian population.

There is TikTok. Everybody is—communicates through—you know, is communicating through TikTok, and the message does not have to be as long as Schwarzenegger's, which went on for 10 minutes, I believe. It has to be very short, and it should address young people.

Third, what Putin is afraid of most of all, and I have seen this—I am saying this because I have seen it, I have witnessed it when I was working in Russia—is satire and humor. Create special programs, short ones. There was a program called Puppets—Kukly—on NTV. That was the very first program to fall after Putin came to power. It was closed down nearly immediately after he came to power.

He is afraid of being laughed at because, you know, the great czar cannot be laughed at. He loses his power. People are not afraid of him anymore if they can laugh at him.

The—a fourth measure and, I think, for the more, like, universal approaches—Peter is going to talk—but I am just, you know, a practitioner, so I am talking about practice. There are a lot of stars, former Russian stars—actors, singers—who—even, you know, TV hosts who the Russian people, you know, saw for years on their TV screens and they got to trust them and love them.

Those people, a lot of them are now abroad. Let them talk to the people. Every single Russian has a cell phone. Sending a message to a cell phone is not a problem with this technology today. As Peter said, the technological—you know, the—Silicon Valley needs to be here, too.

Thank you.

Representative HUDSON: Mr. Pomerantsev or Kara-Murza wants to answer this at all?

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Peter's fine, but I will pass to Volodya, who is, literally, the Russian opposition politician who can tell you how to help him.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Thank you so much, Congressman Hudson.

First of all, I just want to make a small remark. You mentioned that Putin is describing all of us, all of those Russians who are against his regime, as traitors. I want to just sort of add to this that the latest term that Mr. Putin is using, which he used just

last week in his televised address from the Kremlin, was national traitors. It is not—that is just not any other term. That is a term lifted directly from Adolf Hitler’s book “Mein Kampf,” “nationaler verräter” in German.

You know, the Soviet term for this will be “vrag naroda,” “enemy of the people,” meaning the same in substance. I think it is quite remarkable that the Putin regime and Putin himself are actually for this one choosing to use the term from Nazi Germany rather than Stalin’s Soviet Union. This, I think, goes to what Co-Chairman Cohen was saying about just the sheer hypocrisy of everything that the Putin regime is doing, now in relation to Ukraine, but also in relation to Russian civil society.

On your question, I think some of the practical things might include—actually, it is very important what Fatima Tlis just mentioned, and that is, of course, the support for independent journalists in Russia, independent journalists who work in the Russian language.

There are dozens, perhaps hundreds now, of professional, high-quality, honest, independent Russian journalists with reputation, with authority, with name recognition, people who used to work for TV Rain, people who used to work for Echo of Moscow Radio and many others who are out of work, in many cases, out of the country. I think it is very important that the world’s democracies find a way of supporting their work because nobody better than them can produce that journalistic content and deliver that truth to the people of Russia.

The second part of this, the other side of this coin, is to help provide the tools to deliver that message, because as we have all been referencing since the start of Putin’s attack on Ukraine, the Russian government and its censorship agency, Roskomnadzor, have blocked all the main social media, blocked hundreds of news websites. In fact, the latest figure I just checked was that since February 24, Roskomnadzor blocked more than 800 news and information online outlets for access to the Russian people.

One of the problems here is that there are, of course, many technologies that exist to go around these internet blockades, and VPN is, of course, the most prominent among them. You know, one morning in early March when I woke up at my apartment in Moscow and I had no Twitter, no Facebook—again, this was shocking how sudden and how quick this all was—and I managed to—I am not very competent technologically but I asked friends who are—it took me a few minutes to install a good VPN app, which allow us to bypass all of these blockages. The problem was that, you know, I was still able to download and pay for that VPN app and the best VPN services, and the ones that government censors cannot block are usually paid services.

The price is not the question. The one I downloaded cost something like \$50 a year, so the price is not prohibitive. The problem is that the day after I was able to do that, the banking sanctions came in, and Russian-backed cards became worthless pieces of plastic. You cannot use them anymore because these are MasterCard and SWIFT and all of that has been switched off.

I think one of the most important public services, frankly, that tech companies, including and, actually, primarily American tech

companies, could engage in would be to provide free of charge high-quality VPN services for Russian territory. I am sure that is possible technologically. If, you know, the technologies of the 1960's and 1970's and 1980's were possible to get that truth to the people inside the Soviet Union I am sure there are ways to go around these blockades today, and making these VPN services free on the territory of the Russian Federation, I think, is paramount among this, because if that does not happen this would essentially mean that Western companies are going along and helping along Putin's censorship.

Actually, just before we began this hearing, literally, in the last few hours, there was very important news that came on, you know, Russian—what remains of Russian language media space and that is that three leading VPN providers have actually announced exactly what I have just been describing, that they are making their services free for the territory of Russia.

There are many more specific things that could be done. I just want to say one general but most important thing, and that is, of course—and again, just to reiterate because, of course, the Kremlin propaganda loves to sort of allege that those of us who are in opposition to Putin are somehow advocating for regime change from abroad. Of course, that has nothing to do with reality. Only Russians in Russia can change the political situation in our country.

We do hope that the free world, that Western democracies, will stand on principle and will finally end the enabling and the appeasement of Vladimir Putin's regime, which has been going on for years, for decades, and which has brought us a large-scale war in the middle of Europe.

We hope that Western democracies finally start practicing what they preach and that those principles to which they rightly adhere to domestically, such notions as the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights, will also be applied to their international relations, that the world's democracies do not cave in, do not compromise on questions of principle.

Stop enabling and appeasing Vladimir Putin's regime and, finally, hold that line that we have seen them hold for the past four weeks.

Representative HUDSON: Very well said. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Hudson. Thank you for your questions.

Mr. Veasey, 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MARC A. VEASEY, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TEXAS

Representative VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and thank you to the witnesses for being here, and I would like to welcome our friends who are also a part of the Commission from Europe. Good to see everybody.

One of the things that I am really worried about is that with so much attention, and rightfully so, being placed on airplanes, tanks, and the destruction that is happening in the Ukraine that we are not talking enough about the fact that Putin is trying to build this great firewall.

He is always called the internet a CIA project and he, you know, seeks to subjugate the IT sector so he can build this digital sovereign State, and I believe he wants to use it as a model for other strongmen and other autocratic governments so they can sort of form a confederation and be dependent on one another and be able to isolate or insulate themselves from things like sanctions and other things that would check their bad behavior.

I wanted to ask you, with this invasion—and this might be a good question for Mr. Kara-Murza, but anybody can jump in and ask—with the invasion that is happening right now we know that Putin does not have all the capabilities needed in order to build this stack or this digital sovereign State. How has this unlawful invasion slowed him down?

You know, one of the reasons why people in the IT sector say he has not been able to build this sovereign State is because he just has not put the resources needed in order to be able to get to that level.

Mr. Kara-Murza, if you could just kind of touch on that. Do you think that this has slowed him down from being able to build a digital State, or do you think that he is still actively working on it and has not been slowed down one bit?

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

Thank you, Congressman.

Well, Putin's regime has been working on sort of internet censorship and internet blockages for quite a while and sort of the first major attempt that they engaged in for this was back in 2018 when they tried to block Telegram that Peter Pomerantsev referenced, the sort of the messenger but also now, increasingly, the space for free media because that is, basically, the last real conduit where independent media can still exist in Russia.

When the Russian government did that 4 years ago, they became a complete laughingstock because they showed an astonishing incompetence in this. You know, when this government agency that I referred to several times, Roskomnadzor, the main censorship agency in the Russian government, when it announced that Telegram will be blocked and they started blocking sort of various websites and portals—which is, I suppose, they thought were associated with Telegram—they ended up blocking parts of Google. They ended up blocking parts of Amazon. They ended up blocking sites that had nothing to do with any of this, and they actually ended that week—and this is not a joke; this is a statement of where we are—they ended up that week by blocking the site of the censorship agency itself, Roskomnadzor. Telegram continued working fine, and this was a source of many jokes and much laughter about the sheer incompetence of Putin's censors.

Unfortunately, since then in those ensuing 4 years, the Putin regime really benefited from the expertise—forgive the expression—if we can use that term, from the communist dictatorship in China and those, you know, representatives of Beijing who have long mastered this art of digital censorship—the Great Firewall. They have really been helping the Kremlin with the technologies, with the know-how, with the expertise, and so on, and we are seeing, unfortunately, in these last few weeks that this expertise has not come

in vain. It is being used, and the Russian government censors are functioning much more effectively.

I would say that this sort of digital blockade has actually proven more successful than many people had imagined it could be, based on this laughable experience of Telegram in 2018. I think what it should mean, above all, is that the friends of democracy, the friends of freedom, the democratic nations of this world, should sort of counteract this totalitarian international, if you will, and just as effectively as Putin and the communist leaders in China are cooperating on installing this censorship, installing this new information Iron Curtain, I think so the democracies of the world with the same effectiveness should learn to cooperate with each other to try to breach it.

Ms. TLIS: Yes. I just want to add that there have been systematic steps Putin and his government have been taking toward this direction. In 2001, 2002, and 2003, the Russian tech systems invented SORM. That is a special system that is required for every internet provider and communication provider in Russia to be installed.

The SORM, first, was under the authority of the FSB, Russian Federal Security Service. Then, Putin took it to his administration. Right now, there is this FAPSI. It was—used to be called FAPSI. It is the Federal Communication Services. They totally control this SORM. What SORM does is it allows remote control and monitoring of every internet access in Russia, also the mobile phones.

That was the—you know, one first major step. In 2011, I believe, ICANN, the international domain and internet certification company, granted Russia a license to create a Cyrillic-based internet segment. That has been forgotten, but that was the second step.

Right now, Russia has an ability to, you know, operate separately on its own Cyrillic-based Russianet, I guess, because if you type Kremlin.ru in Latin you are probably going to get error because there are a lot of hacktivists right now hacking, you know, independently or coordinated on the Russian websites. If you go for Cyrillic and type it in the, you know, HTTP address in Cyrillic, you are going to see that it is still operational.

What I am saying is that there have been major steps taken toward creating an autonomous Russian internet, and I think it was yesterday or last—on Friday, Putin signed a special executive order giving certain benefits to the IT specialists. It was specifically aimed at the IT specialists. It gives them immunity from being drafted into the army. It gives them tax relief and it gives them—promises, at least, a salary, which is much, much higher than the average Russian salary.

This, to me, is a signal that Putin is not stopping in his, you know, cyber efforts. There is something going on. I think it should be analyzed and taken into account.

Thank you.

Representative VEASEY: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Veasey.

Let me ask a question, I guess, of Mr. Kara-Murza. He might have the best knowledge of this. I do not know. Is there a person in Russia who is like Goebbels was to Hitler, who is to Putin, that

comes up with the propaganda in Russia, or is it a collection of different independent minds?

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Thank you so much, Co-Chairman Cohen.

That is an important question because let us not forget that these crimes that are being committed, they are not just faceless crimes. They have very specific perpetrators, and we also know from history—and you mentioned Goebbels, sort of the allusion to Nazi Germany—let us not forget that leading Nazi propagandists, including Julius Streicher, were tried. He was tried at Nuremberg after the war. He did not kill anybody with his own hands. You can also kill with words, and you can also kill with incitement, and this is exactly what these Putin propaganda masterminds are doing.

It is not a single individual. There is a sort of group of people who have been in charge of his propaganda. There are not that many of them, and those leading perpetrators of this campaign of hatred and incitement that has been going on Russian State television for years have very specific names.

One such name—this person is not alive anymore. He actually died in Washington, DC. You might have heard the story from a few years ago. His name was Mikhail Lesin. He was the press minister in Putin's government. He was really the mastermind of the closure of all the independent television channels in the early years of Putin's rule in the early 2000's—you know, NTV, TV6, and TVS.

As I mentioned earlier, all of these channels were closed very much with Mr. Lesin's personal involvement. You know, as I mentioned, he has not been around for a few years, but—and even before then, he was sort of sidelined from the regime leadership.

The people who are today both the masters and the faces of the Kremlin propaganda would be people such as Konstantin Ernst, the director general of Channel One, the main State television channel in Russia, Oleg Dobrodeev, the director general of VGTRK, the Russian State Television and Radio Corporation. Of course, the faces of this Kremlin propaganda would be people like Dmitry Kiselyov, Vladimir Solovyov, Yevgeny Popov, Olga Skabeeva, and all these other merchants of hate, as I would call them, because these are the people—very talented, very intelligent, very creative—who have mastered this horrible diabolic art of propaganda to which Russian citizens have been subjected for such a long time now—

Co-Chairman COHEN: Do you know, by chance—

Mr. KARA-MURZA:—and many of them have also ended up on the sanctions list these past four weeks, and rightly so.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Do you know, by chance, if any of these individuals are on the sanction list? They should be.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Yes. I was just about to—leading into this, in the past 4 weeks, many of them have been placed on sanctions lists. Just as with so many other things that characterize Western policies toward Putin, this is happening unbelievably late. I can give you a specific example.

Back in 2015, after Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was murdered in plain sight of the Kremlin—we recently marked the seventh anniversary of his assassination, the most brazen, the most high-profile political assassination in the long history of Russia, and I would add, because OSCE PA President Margareta

Cederfelt is with us at this hearing, she authored and published in 2020 a landmark international oversight report under the auspices of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly into the assassination of Boris Nemtsov and the subsequent so-called investigation by the Russian authorities, and this remains to this day the most definitive international legal document of the Nemtsov case, and for this I want to just, once again, to express my gratitude.

After Boris Nemtsov was murdered, I, along with former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, came to Washington to meet with Members of Congress to suggest the specific names of the employees of Putin's State propaganda who have been engaging in incitement—that is the only word I can use—against Boris Nemtsov, you know, calling him a traitor, calling him an American agent, calling him all these things on State television day after day, week after week, month after month, and those people helped create the atmosphere in which it became possible for Putin to assassinate his main political opponent in front of the Kremlin.

We proposed back then—this was 7 years ago—that these State propagandists were put on sanctions lists. Unfortunately, back then it did not happen. It took a war in the middle of Europe—it took war crimes being committed in the middle of Europe—for the Western democracies to actually move in that direction.

Yes, Mr. Co-Chairman, in the past 4 weeks, more now, since the start of Putin's attack on Ukraine, most if not all of these propagandists that work for Vladimir Putin have been placed on the Western sanctions list, and I hope that they remain there for good.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you. That is good to hear.

Mr. Pomerantsev, you mentioned that the athletes, like, were popular in Russia. I guess the irony is probably—Klitschko is probably one of the most popular athletes. Do you know if Klitschko has tried to get some type of messages? It seems like they would listen to him and his brother—I mean, Vitali, Wladimir, whatever, they were, too, great. I used to think of them as—almost Russian. I mean, they were over there, and that is where they fought their fights.

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Sure. Not only them. There is the sort of various sort of—you know, I am not a huge expert; I believe cage fighters is the term—who are—who are Ukrainian, and some of them have taken up arms, who are huge in Russia. Yes. I mean, that is one way in.

I mean, they are—you know, because they are Ukrainian in some ways that that might be harder. It is been hard for Ukrainian influencers, not just sports people but television presenters. They have all tried to reach out to their Russian audiences. They all talk about how hard it is, you know. They have a very sort of strong personal—you know, they are very personally affected by what is happening.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Well, could not the American tech companies—and I think it was an excellent recommendation. I hope that your recommendation and your thoughts are not simply yours and that others have them or you have communicated them to certain authorities here because it seems like something we should be doing.

The tech companies could take Mayor Klitschko's statements and find a way to get them into Russia. I think they would listen to—and if he said, my city is being destroyed, people are dying, et cetera, they are shooting bombs at me, I think that would be most effective.

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Well, there are two elements here. One of them is, you know, we need to bring the tech companies into this conversation. My sense is from the initial sort of, you know, sensing of what they are doing, is that they will have a problem with seeding actual information.

Mykhailo Fedorov, the digital minister of Ukraine, a very tech-savvy young man, actually said, look, Google, Apple, people in Russia use your phones. You could right now download evidence of war crimes so every Russian knows about it. I fear that the tech companies will be hard to push to seed content.

However, access—making sure that every Russian has access to the internet through the delivery of VPNs through many, many other technologies, I think that is more likely. We have to bring them into the conversation. Most importantly, they have to take a stance. Again, I am saying not a stance geopolitically but a stance around humanitarian norms, human rights, the sort of thing that the Helsinki Committee is all about.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you. I am going to hold my questions for a few minutes.

Senator Whitehouse only has 7 minutes left that he can be with us, and he is on the power of Zoom. I recognize one of the great senators from Newport, Rhode Island, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse.

**STATEMENT OF SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, U.S. SENATE, FROM
RHODE ISLAND**

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Thank you, Chairman. Great to be with you. This is a great panel, and I appreciate it.

For those of you who have been studying propaganda techniques for a while, one of the things that the Putin regime seems to utilize is the propaganda technique of accusing your adversary—in this case, Ukraine—of doing the exact thing that you yourself are actually doing.

Putin accuses the United States of making Ukraine a pawn in a great power showdown. Putin accuses Ukraine of numerous war crimes committed daily. Moscow has said that Western powers are goading it into attacking Ukraine.

Is that a technique of propaganda that has a particular name that is—I do not know if there is, like, an expertise in propaganda where things are given a name, a taxonomy, of propaganda and, if so, what is this accusing somebody else of doing what you yourself are doing technique?

Co-Chairman COHEN: I think you need to find a psychiatrist to answer that, but I will let Mr. Pomerantsev try.

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Well, there is a—you are quite right. You are referring to projection there, and there might be some of that, but no, it is also a strategy. I have heard it referred to as mirroring. Essentially, the aim is very cynical.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Mirroring—[inaudible].

Mr. POMERANTSEV: The aim is to take something that you know people are hearing about. You know, people in Russia are hearing about war crimes committed by the Russian army. You sort of give the absolute opposite reality to push people into a kind of—into a feeling of doubt.

You know, I would be very careful with the polls that we are seeing in Russia. Be very careful about polling in dictatorships. From conversations I have with sociologists and people in Russia, that is a very, very common sense, you know, that people go, like, well, we just do not know who is telling the truth. I mean, our government, obviously, does not always tell the truth, but the other side might be doing it as well. I just do not know.

We have to really understand why people look for that sort of excuse. People also run away from the truth. Simply providing the truth is not enough. It is unpleasant to think that your own country is murderous. It is unpleasant to think that you might have to do something about it. It is dangerous.

You are really giving people all these kinds of motivations to doubt in the way that actually they want to doubt. Now, what I am trying to get to is that, look, we have talked a little bit about technological firewalls that are blocking Russians from accessing the truth.

Even in China, which is much more effective, people can still get to information if they want it. The problem is they do not always want it. We really need to understand far more about why people seek information and how we can help foster their desire to find out the truth in the first place. You know, in academia we are actually in a very, very early stage of understanding these things.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: If any of the three witnesses have any vectors of communication into Russia that you think we should be using more effectively—I have heard of everything from, you know, Airbnb, all sorts of unusual channels being used—if you have any ideas for ways that you think the West could increase the flow of actual information into the Russian people. You do not have to answer me right now. It may be better if we just do that in writing. I would be glad to know what your thoughts are on that.

I will close with Mr. Kara-Murza, and I know you worked very closely with Minister Nemtsov and I noted that Bellingcat has shown that the same individual who has been involved in other attacks on people who have objected to Putin's rule appeared to be stalking Boris Nemtsov in the time leading up to his assassination.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Yes. Thank you so much for the question, Senator.

Just yesterday there was this new investigation published by the Bellingcat Media Group in cooperation with the Insider and the BBC that revealed evidence—concrete specific evidence—that for several months leading up to his assassination in February 2015 Boris Nemtsov had been shadowed, tailed all around the country, by a member of the FSB assassination squad. This is a man named Valery Sukharev. He was also involved in two poisoning attacks against me. He was also involved in a poisoning attack against Alexei Navalny. We all—we know all these names of these FSB murderers because of this brilliant investigative journalism by Bellingcat, which sort of really goes into the central point of our

conversation today about how important the truth and how important independent journalism really is.

I had absolutely no doubt from the very beginning that there was only one man who could—in this system, in his dictatorial vertical system of power that Putin has created there is only one man who could order the assassination of such a top opposition leader as Boris Nemtsov and that man's name is Vladimir Putin.

If anybody had any doubts, all these doubts should have disappeared when this investigation came out because, of course, we know that Boris Nemtsov was murdered by subordinates of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-appointed head of the Chechen Republic, and it seems now we know from this investigation that two parallel tracks were preparing for this murder.

One was the FSB track, and they usually use poison, as they did with Navalny and myself and Dmitry Bykov and others, and the other track was the Kadyrov track, the Chechen track, and they use bullets, and this is what was used. One of the main revelations from that investigation yesterday was that on February 17, so exactly 10 days before Boris Nemtsov was assassinated by a Kadyrov subordinate on that bridge, the FSB assassination squad stopped following him, which can only mean one thing.

There is only one man who can order both the FSB and the Kadyrovites. Again, that man's name is Vladimir Putin. It seemed that in that time, in the middle of February, the final—

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Thank you.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: —choice was made in favor of the Kadyrovites. By the way, something that's really relevant to what we are talking about today, one of the key organizers of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, another senior Kadyrovite officer by the name of Ruslan Geremeev who was, by the way, sanctioned by the U.S. Government in 2019 under the Magnitsky Act for his role in taking part in the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, he is this week commanding—is among the commanders of Putin's assault on the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. This, really, is a regime both led and staffed by murderers. I cannot put it any other way.

To your previous question, Senator, I would just say—there are many things that we are discussing as part of this hearing but I would just say it is very important, and especially I can tell you how important that is from inside Russia, that Western leaders—not just political leaders but also sort of public figures—are very careful about messaging.

Too often, we hear people in the West confuse Putin's regime and Russia. Put that sign of—you know, the equal sign between the Putin regime and Russia, sort of mixing together a country, a nation, and an unelected autocratic regime that is misruling that nation. Needless to say, I do not need to tell you those are different things, and I think it would be very important just from a messaging standpoint, as Peter Pomerantsev was referencing this video by Arnold Schwarzenegger, it was astonishingly effective because one of the things that Mr. Schwarzenegger did was he addressed directly the people of Russia and he made sure that he makes a difference, makes a distinction, between the dictator in the Kremlin and the Russian people and Russian society.

We need more of this from Western leaders because the Kremlin propaganda is very skillful about portraying the West not as anti-Putin but as anti-Russian, and sometimes Western leaders are too careless with the language to make that distinction. When you are speaking—this may seem like a really trivial point but it is a very important one—when you speak about the crimes and the abuses and the aggression perpetrated by Vladimir Putin and his regime, please make it clear that you are talking about Vladimir Putin and his regime and that you are able to communicate directly with the people of Russia in preparation for that day when there is a Russia without Putin, when there is a Russia after Putin, hopefully, a democratic Russia which can build new bridges with the democratic world, including the United States.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Thank you, Chairman Cohen, and thank you to the witnesses.

Co-Chairman COHEN: You are welcome, Senator Whitehouse. Any time for the Duke of the Corner Café.

Mr. Wilson, you are recognized.

Representative WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chairman. Indeed, it is wonderful to hear from Senator Whitehouse, and the perception, I believe, is correct that Putin is doing what he accuses others and I am really hoping that this hearing as we are conducting is an inspiration to the people of Ukraine, that they can see the unity of Republicans and Democrats, and also I hope it is an inspiration to people of Russia that they should really learn and find out what is going on and, particularly, Ms. Tlis, I am going to ask you a question about that.

It is an indication of, indeed, the unity of democracies worldwide. How incredible to be here with Margareta Cederfelt, president of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, and then to have our vice presidents. Of course, the president is from Sweden, but our vice president is from Cyprus, beautiful Cyprus, and then my home heritage country, France, and then—and how wonderful to have the secretary general here from the remarkable country of Italy.

Over and over, you can see there is such unity on behalf of the people who want freedom and democracy in Ukraine, and we want freedom and democracy. I thought it was going to happen in Russia. My visits across Russia over the years, I just misread the incredible people I met, the incredible culture that I saw, and it should be known that much of us in America have adopted the music, the literature, and the architecture of Russia. We are not against them at all. That is a great part of American civilization now.

With that in mind, indeed, with democracies, what can we do to reach the people of Russia? Ms. Tlis, I was really intrigued, the universal availability of cell phones in Russia. Goodness gracious, some of us remember the Soviet Union. There was not any contact at all except by radio. What an opportunity we have, and are there any other means of being able—for the democracies to contact people in the Russian Federation to let them know that we are not against them? We want them to succeed, too.

Ms. TLIS: Thank you. As Peter mentioned, there is still Telegram, which is still working. Telegram could be used to deliver

messages. It is a very effective tool, and there are a lot of Russians on Telegram. There is—the Russians never closed the Odnoklassniki and contacted those two social media platforms, somewhat similar to Facebook.

They are under the control of Russian security forces. It could still be used to deliver specific messages and also, of course, TikTok. As I said, TikTok is very popular in Russia and a lot of people there—young people, not too young people—use TikTok. That could be another vehicle to deliver the message.

Those are—and as I said, the—of course, the cell phones. That is if you want to reach really, you know, every Russian citizen. Of course, we have seen a lot of hacking recently, and the messages that appeared on Russian TV channels were not really strategically or tactically designed to reach, as I said in my testimony, the hearts and minds of all the Russian people.

When something like that happens, maybe it would be a good idea to have a template, something that, you know, could be shown on Russian TV. Also, if you address the Russians, especially the part of the population that is actually pro-Putin, pro-regime, or maybe afraid to speak up or just, you know, in a State of denial, maybe, to reach those people. You really cannot, you know, offer them good-faith messages from American senators or the American president. They would not believe it. They would not listen to it.

They need voices that are familiar with them. They need somebody who speaks their own language and whom they, you know, already know and trust. Peter mentioned the sport. I mean, MMA is extremely popular in Russia—martial arts—and the MMA fighters, Russians, there are a lot of them here in the United States, and they oppose this—you know, Putin. They oppose this war. Let them speak.

Representative WILSON: That is encouraging, and Mr. Pomerantsev—

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Peter is fine.

Representative WILSON: —and also Kara-Murza, each of you, hacktivists—have they been successful as individuals around the world?

Mr. POMERANTSEV: I think that is a very important point that Fatima made, which relates to what you are asking. Messaging about what? There is two ways of looking at the sort of, I do not know, opinion dynamic in Russia. One of the ways is to frame it around the question of you are for or against the war. Yes. There, the numbers are not very good for us. You know, we should be skeptical of polling, but let us say it is just, you know, the usual, you know, pro-liberal bloc in Russia is 15 [percent], 20 percent, if you are being very optimistic, is against the war, most people are for it because they are patriotic and feel Russia is under attack, and then others are just scared.

That is not a very good, you know, dynamic for us to really be that hopeful around. If you listen to Vladimir Putin's speeches, however, he is actually going for something else. It is not about the war.

He is saying that the new ideological divide in Russia is between isolationism, yes—Russia alone—which, if you decode it means Russia alone and subservient to China, and we do not need this

idea of Russia integrated with the West. Yes. The people who want to be integrated with the West, he has called having a slavish mentality.

That is the polarization he is betting on. He is betting wrong. There are way more Russians who want to be integrated with the West than the ones who are passionate about the war. That is why maybe the message from Klitschko is going to be hard because Klitschko will be, there is a war on. That will appeal to the 15 percent, maybe the others who feel that way but are scared to talk.

We need to think much broader. We need to be—to do messaging—or, I do not like this term “messaging”—communication/engagement around this idea about the future of Russia. Do you really want to be this isolated island of bad luck, which is subservient to China? Or do you want to be part of the West and the world? Because for most Russians, the West is the world. There, I think you will find that the figures do not look good for Mr. Putin at all. That is what we need to be stressing. I am not saying we should forget about the war. Of course, we should communicate information about the war. That is critical. We need to think much bigger than that.

Representative WILSON: Thank you.

Mr. KARA-MURZA: Thank you so much. Thank you, Ranking Member Wilson, for the very important question. First, I think it is important to mention that it is absolutely true what Peter was just saying. You know, the 20-plus years of Putin’s propaganda have not gone in vain. There is a significant part of the Russian population that has been, well, for lack of a better word, brain-washed, because that is what it is, by the propaganda. Let us not also discount the fact that there are many people in Russia who want to know the truth about what is happening.

I think one of the—one of the sort of most illustrative episodes in that was that earlier this month, as I was mentioning earlier, Echo of Moscow Radio, which was until a few weeks ago the largest independent media outlet in Russia, was closed and I was there at the last meeting of the journalists. Very emotional, very sad affair, as you could imagine. Just a few days after this happened, just a few days after Echo of Moscow was officially liquidated, the ratings agencies published the figures for the audience, for the listenership in Russia’s two largest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, for the month of February of this year, 2022.

For the first time ever Echo of Moscow Radio was in the number-one spot for the number of listeners, both in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Not just among the talk radio stations or news radio stations, among all radio stations. Which is remarkable, I think not just for Russia, but probably for the United States and many other countries, because, of course, most people, when they listen to the radio, usually in their car, sitting in traffic, they listen to music rather than news. Yet, for the month of February—so when Putin’s war in Ukraine had already begun—Echo of Moscow was the number-one top spot in two of Russia’s largest cities.

This just goes to show again why the Putin regime is so afraid of the truth, why they are so afraid of the people in Russia learning about the reality—the horrendous, criminal reality that is now happening in Ukraine. I think it was a very important message that

Peter Pomerantsev just articulated about—and this sort of goes to our whole conversation—about communicating, about maintaining those direct people-to-people contacts between Western countries and Russia. That is the centrality of the message about the prospect for a future post-Putin, democratic Russia as part of Europe, as part of what we call the civilized world, as part of the global north, if you will.

Because Russia is a European country. There are centuries of culture, tradition, and mentality behind this. Nothing that Mr. Putin does will be able to overturn that. I think it is very important to maintain that message, that all of these restrictions, of all these sanctions, all of these policies that we have seen come about in the last four weeks, all these boycotts by companies and so on, that is all directed against the criminal and murderous regime of Vladimir Putin. Not against the people of Russia, and that there will be a rightful and dignified place for a post-Putin democratic Russia in the global democratic community. I think that is a very important message to be articulating to the Russian people today, in order to be able to counter those false narratives by the Russian propaganda.

Representative WILSON: As I conclude, indeed, I want to back you up. That when I was asked by the media what I want for the people of Russia at home, I said, it is easy. I want them to do well economically, to buy more McDonald's, to buy more Kentucky Fried Chicken, to buy more Starbucks. We want the people of Russia to integrate with the rest of the world and not become, as you indicated, the little brother or servant, or whatever you want to call it, to the Chinese Communist Party.

I yield back.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you.

A thought came to me during that discussion. Both Peter and Vladimir remind me of my good friend, the late Christopher Hitchens. The first time I met Hitch we were in Miami Beach, and he told me that the Iron Curtain would come down in a major way because of rock and roll music. That all Russians, and in the Middle East the folks that wanted to put together a caliphate, which Hitch was much against, liked American jeans and they liked American music. Maybe Mick Jagger is the right guy to make the message.

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Without a doubt. Paul McCartney's still huge there. Weirdly, like now I used to work in Russian media, Dr. House—you know, Dr. House? Hugh Laurie? Huge in Russia.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Dr. House?

Mr. POMERANTSEV: It is about—it is an American TV show about a doctor. He is kind of, like—

Co-Chairman COHEN: It sounds like an X-rated show. I—

Mr. POMERANTSEV: No, the opposite. It is about a doctor, he is kind of—like, he drinks too much, and he is sort of cynical, but deep down he is a good guy. That is the archetypal Russian hero. Like, that is the way a lot of Russians want to perceive themselves, as good guys in a tough world. We really have to understand these deep cultural tropes and where they come from historically, if we want to engage.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thanks. I would like to recognize Representative Gallego, and then I want to recognize Madam President Cederfelt.

Representative GALLEGO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

STATEMENT OF RUBEN GALLEGO, U.S. HOUSE, FROM ARIZONA

Ms. TLIS, thank you for being here today and for sharing your perspective on this important topic. You mentioned in your written testimony that Russia used the North Caucasus as a testing ground for propaganda. What lessons do you see Russia applying from that experience to spread disinformation today? Has Russia made changes to its propaganda playbook as a result?

Ms. TLIS: I am sorry—[LAUGHS]—I am probably going to ask you to repeat the question a little bit slower.

Representative GALLEGO: Sure. That is not a problem. When you—in your written testimony you said that Russia used the northern Caucasus in terms—to test out their propaganda, their misinformation, and their disinformation. What did we learn from that? Has Russia—what did Russia learn from that? Has Russia adjusted since their experiences in the northern Caucasus from what we are seeing today?

Ms. TLIS: When Putin came to power in the early 2000's, his methods on propaganda and especially censorship were not this advanced as they are right now. They were more physical, I would say, because many of my friends got killed. I myself was arrested and detained many times—tortured, kidnapped, everything. That is only because I was working for Associated Press. That was, you know, an American media that Russia did not want to be present in the north Caucasus.

In terms of propaganda, what Russia learned in the North Caucasus, I think, and then it is applying now all over the country, is the methodology of indoctrination. In the Caucasus, I actually started in a school in my home village in the town. Our student books were very different from those that, you know, the rest of Russia was learning from. The history books we used were different, the literature books were different. Now everything that they used to apply to the Caucasus, beginning from kindergarten, they now apply in the schools.

It was similar in the Stalin times. I remember that actually Secretary Albright compared, you know, Putin methodology and propaganda with Stalin's. I agree completely with that comparison. Yes, that is what Putin learned. Right now it is a smarter propaganda. It begins from the kindergarten. It goes all the way to the top. I think that is the main lesson they learned.

Representative GALLEGO: Thank you. I yield back.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you. Thank you for your attendance.

Now I would like to recognize the president of the OSCE PA, President Margareta Cederfelt.

**TESTIMONY OF MARGARETA CEDERFELT [SWEDEN],
PRESIDENT, OSCE PA**

Ms. CEDERFELT: Thank you very much, Congressman Steve Cohen, as well as the head of the OSCE, the U.S. delegation to the

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. It is a pleasure for me and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to be invited here to this debate, discussion, hearing today, held by the Helsinki Commission on the Russian disinformation and “Putin’s War on the Truth: Propaganda and Censorship in Russia,” and to listen to the witnesses, to your reports and also to your thoughts on what to do to defend Ukraine, but also to defend the truth and the open society. Because I see that all goes together, democracy, the fundamental freedoms, rule of law. The recent important issue for us who lives in a democracy, it is to defend the media, to defend journalism, but also the civil society.

If I should say a few words about the OSCE, I believe that the OSCE, with the Helsinki Final Act as a base document, is a very useful organization for peace, for freedom, for democracy. Let me mention that there is inside the OSCE a special representative on media—on freedom of the media. Now for this period, it is Ms. Teresa Ribeiro from Portugal. It is not inside PA. It is from OSCE, the government outside. I think she do a fantastic job, because what the special representative on media freedom do, it is document and report and make public when there is violence against the media. If we should have the truth, if we should really want to have the truth, we need to have the freedom of the media.

I am also a strong believer of the truth. I am sure it will always be there. I think about all those dictators or people who try to get the power too long. They do always try to stop the freedom of the media, the freedom of speech. They might succeed for a short while, but the truth will be there. It is always recognized at the end. There are a lot of examples of it. It is important also to collect the information. This is what is done in Ukraine today, because there is war crimes going on. I think to collect this information, it will also make a possibility to make Putin responsible for what he does.

When it comes to Russia, yes, it is a very sad situation. It is a difficult situation. Memorial, the civil society organization who was collecting information about history and what had happened during the Communist time, is closed down by Putin, but he cannot get—be free from history. Let me also mention in Berlin the Checkpoint Charlie, which is the museum over where the West collected information. It is there. There is information about what has happened during this—during the war, the Second World War, what has happened during the Communist time. I think this is the proof that we need to have.

It is not that we, from the West, are against the Russian people. We have not been it before and we are not it today. We are in favor of the Russian people. We support them, and we support that they also should have the same fundamental freedoms as we have. Then I would like to say one short thing. It is easy to say, for us who live in the free world, to speak about freedom and say that we defend it. There also are the real heroes, those who pay with their lives, who sacrifice, who take huge risks to support the fundamental freedoms—like you have done. I think that is what we should recognize as well. Because if there is not such brave people, there would be no documentation, and that is needed.

Thank you very much, again, Congressman Steve Cohen, for inviting us. It has been a true honor to be here today.

Thank you.

Co-Chairman COHEN: You are very welcome. We are fortunate to have you.

I would now like to recognize one of the vice presidents of the OSCE PA, Mr. Allizard. He will be translated, his French to English.

**TESTIMONY OF PASCAL ALLIZARD [FRANCE], VICE
PRESIDENT, OSCE PA**

Mr. ALLIZARD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to have allowed us to assist to this very interesting hearing.

Lie or de-lie, believe or not believe the lying, I think it is an eternal question, but even so a weapon—a very dangerous weapon. I have just one question. What in your opinion would be the most urgent, the most important step to take to counter the Russian propaganda narrative? Just a question.

Thank you.

Co-Chairman COHEN: The question is posed, I guess, to Mr. Pomerantsev. I thought he was going to speak—he has been speaking in French the whole day, and he shocked me there. [LAUGHS.]

Mr. POMERANTSEV: That was good. The Russian propaganda narrative. That is such a great question. I would like to connect it with what the president was saying. Putin's war in Ukraine follows the methodology of war that the Soviet Union followed in Ukraine and that it has been using in Syria. Its aim is to wipe out memory. Its aim is to say it has command of reality. Its aim is to say that it can murder with impunity. It is not just challenging fundamental rights like freedom of expression, the rights of people and children to safety. It is challenging the right to exist and our rights to a share in reality.

How do we counteract that? Simply documenting when something happens to the ICC, that is not enough. We have to think very, very deeply. I think it means answering with hard power that backs up humanitarian norms and lofty words. I think it means ensuring that memory—for example, the memory of the life of Mariupol, which has now been destroyed, continues to exist. I think we have to ask ourselves a lot of very, very fundamental questions. Putin attacks the right to exist. How do we answer that?

Co-Chairman COHEN: Madam President.

Ms. CEDERFELT: Thank you. Yes, I agree. It is, of course, not enough to collect information and documentation. There is the unity, and I think this is the strength. The word is “united.” Look at United Nations, look inside OSCE where it is Russia and Belarus are standing alone. We have had our meetings, and we stand collected and unified. Look at the European Union. I am from Europe, from Sweden, And the EU is united. We are sending, just like the U.S., like others do, we are sending weapons, ammunition, humanitarian aid, just to support Ukraine and Ukraine's right to exist.

I think we need to work on a very, very—on all levels. From OSCE side, from the parliamentary side, we are also ready for the time when it is possible to have a dialog, to rebuild and sta-

bilize the situation. When the war is ended, we need to have the parliamentary diplomacy to really secure that it will be a stable peace, that the people's right in Ukraine will be recognized for a long time forward. Right now, the important issue is to stop the war, to get an end to it. I just want to be very, very clear on this. I really appreciate what is done here from United States, because I think that U.S. activities is important, but just as well as all the other—the unity we have today in support of Ukraine.

Thank you.

Co-Chairman COHEN: I want to thank all of—yes, please, Mr. Pomerantsev.

Mr. POMERANTSEV: I just want to finish on a quote from a great Ukrainian contemporary writer, which I just remembered as you were talking, Oksana Zabuzhko, in her 1996 masterpiece. She said: The Ukrainian choice is between a non-existence or an existence that kills you. I very much hope that we can move beyond that paradox.

Co-Chairman COHEN: I believe our parliamentarian from Cyprus, Ms.—

Ms. CHARALAMBIDES: Charalambides.

Co-Chairman COHEN: —and I should know that perfectly—is recognized.

**TESTIMONY OF IRENE CHARALAMBIDES [CYPRUS], VICE
PRESIDENT, OSCE PA**

Ms. CHARALAMBIDES: Thank you. Thank you.

Allow me first to say that I am a journalist myself, and after that I was a—I am a parliamentarian now. My thought is always with the journalists that lost their lives in Kyiv, Americans and others, in their effort to speak the truth, to let us know what really is happening there. We have to remember them. I had a question. Tech companies have, in some cases, flagged misinformation as being state-sponsored or potentially false rather than removing it. Or they have banned individual accounts rather than enacting more sweeping measures against misinformation and disinformation. YouTube has done too little for that. For example, it took action on Friday against state-sponsored disinformation following weeks of pressure from human rights advocates, but not before that. They conduct was widely shared. What do you have to say about that? We all know that these media are based mostly in the USA.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Who wants to take a shot at that? London, are you listening? Johns Hopkins is on.

Mr. POMERANTSEV: Yes, look, this is something that my colleagues and I have been working on a huge amount, really, over the last 6 years. Of course, we cannot have the tech companies marking their own homework. That is the most important thing. We are dependent on their word for what they are doing. I do think there are steps taken in the DSA, in the various other new proposals for EU regulations are actually the right ones. They would give more oversight of tech companies, so we can actually see what they are doing. Without that kind of access, it is very hard for us to judge whether any of these steps are effective and whether they are policing their platforms in line just with what they promised to do. That is really the fundamental issue. It can be one tactic, an-

other tactic. Until we have that oversight, we just do not know whether that is a good tactic.

There is actually—you know, actually, tech companies have been quite strong about demonetizing some Kremlin propaganda. We actually need a lot more granularity in how this is being approached. There is sort of negative side effects. Good Russian media, independent Russian media is struggling to monetize its content in various platforms. We need kind of cut-outs for good media, which do exist—of course, they exist, largely abroad now—that allow them to keep on operating on YouTube, especially, which is really important. We have got to be a bit cleverer about some of these sanctions.

Also, I do not know, there is research coming in from, I do not know, the Middle East, for example, and from South Asia, where there is much less monitoring of state-sponsored disinformation, there is much less monitoring of how various sort of online advertising is continuing to support it. That is another issue. We are very fixated on Europe, on America. Actually, a lot of the Russian campaign is now focused on the Middle East, on Latin America, and on South Asia, where they seem to be having a lot of success.

Co-Chairman COHEN: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of our panelists, our international and our bipartisan, bicameral panelists, and particularly our guests. You all have been wonderful. I suspect it is beyond bedtime in London. If Vladimir is not here with us, sleep well, and to each of you all, fabulous. This meeting is adjourned. [Sounds gavel.]

[Whereupon, at 3:59 p.m., the hearing ended.]





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