

RUSSIA'S SHADOW WAR ON NATO

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

Printed for the use of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

[CSCE118-10]



Available via www.csce.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 2025

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RUSSIA'S SHADOW WAR ON NATO

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Tuesday, September 24, 2024.

The hearing was held from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., Room 210, Cannon House Office Building, Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman; Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Ranking Member; Senator Tina Smith [D-MN]; Representative Emanuel Cleaver [D-MO]; Representative Marc Veasey [D-TX].

Witnesses: Erkki Tori, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Estonia; Benjamin L. Schmitt, Senior Fellow, Department of Physics and Astronomy and Kleinman Center for Energy Policy, University of Pennsylvania; Michael Weiss, Investigative Journalist and Author.

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

Chairman WILSON: [Sounds gavel.] Ladies and gentlemen, the Commission will come to order.

Good afternoon to everyone joining us today and welcome to the Helsinki Commission hearing on, "Russia's Shadow War on NATO,".

Sadly, we are in a war we did not choose a war between dictators with rule of gun invading democracies with the rule of law. War criminal Putin has unleashed the full force of his government and security services to wage a shadow war against the democratic world oppressing first, sadly, the people of Russia and imposing death and destruction on the free world.

This is not a conflict waiting to happen. It is already underway, and war criminal Putin is testing the resolve of the Western civilization. In the past year, NATO has welcomed two dynamic members with the addition of Sweden and Finland, each bringing their own expertise and defensive capabilities with them.

It is also been said that NATO has never been stronger. Sadly, the free world is only as strong as its ability to deter and respond to threats and attacks as a defensive organization. War criminal Putin seeks to undermine NATO by advancing the same false escalation narrative he has pushed for decades, all while actively engaging in acts of sabotage and aggression against NATO countries.

We must recognize that the Putin war is not limited to his genocidal invasion of Ukraine. We need to know and recognize that Russia has already threatened war on NATO soil and this is—and we have with us an exhaustive illustration of the Russian hybrid operations on NATO territory over just the last year.

Putin is clear. His goal is to exhaust support for Ukraine so that he can oppress the talented Russian people, which is not to benefit the people of Russia but to benefit the corrupt oligarchs and attempt to recreate the failed Soviet empire.

Russia already illegally occupies parts of the nation of Georgia as well as Moldova and has troops in Armenia as it threatens the NATO members of Estonia and Poland directly. As you can see, Russian hybrid warfare including cyberattacks, disinformation, and sabotage has escalated across NATO countries. From airspace violations on NATO's eastern flank to covert operations on critical infrastructure, the Kremlin's goal is clear, to destabilize and weaken the West.

Russia is deliberately testing the strength of the alliance, and we must respond, and I know that we can respond with unity and decisive force. The Russian government, permeated by intelligence agents, is operating on a war footing. It is not structured for good faith diplomatic engagement but, rather, to undermine the very institutions we support.

Today we will hear from experts who can help us better understand the nature of this conflict and how we can strengthen our defenses. We will first hear from Michael Weiss, a renowned investigative journalist and author. Additionally, we are so grateful to have with us Dr. Benjamin Schmitt, a senior fellow at the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. We are also very grateful to have Erkki Tori, the national security advisor to the prime minister of Estonia.

I have a special fondness for Estonia. I actually at one time had a University of South Carolina student who was born in Tallinn. His dad was a doctor in the Soviet navy and so—and I do not want to offend any of my Democrat colleagues here but we used to joke he switched parties from the Communist Party to the Republican Party, and so times change, thank God. [LAUGHTER.]

I am really grateful we have with us Senator Smith and we are also—hey, I am so fortunate that my co-chair Congressman Steve Cohen all the way from Tennessee and I am so grateful to be here with Emmanuel Cleaver from Missouri.

Senator Smith, if you would like to make any opening comment.

Senator SMITH: No, thank you. I will wait for my questions.

Chairman WILSON: Well, thank you so much. We cannot wait to hear from Congressman Cohen.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF STEVE COHEN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM
TENNESSEE**

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and it is good to have you back.

Chairman WILSON: Hear, hear. [APPLAUSE.] Thank you.

Representative COHEN: You scared all of us.

Chairman WILSON: It scared me.

Representative COHEN: [LAUGHTER.] Thank you for convening this hearing and being here.

In addition to waging genocidal war in Ukraine, Putin is simultaneously using asymmetric warfare and gray zone tactics against NATO, which are methods all too familiar with what the Soviet Union did during the Cold War. The same playbook that they used then—disinformation, espionage, targeted assassinations—is alive and well in Putin’s Russia. Never forget, once KGB [Committee for State Security] always KGB.

Putin was a KGB officer in the Soviet Union. In his mind, he is still the same person. He has not changed. We see attacks on dissidents, activists, and high-profile figures living abroad, which are intended to send a message that no one is outside of the range of the Kremlin.

Alexei Navalny’s former chief of staff Leonid Volkov was attacked with a hammer in Lithuania shortly after Navalny’s death and the poisoning of political opponents like Vladimir Kara-Murza on two different occasions, and we have seen other poisonings in London and other places.

Now more than ever Putin wants to weaken and destabilize the West, so we see him increasingly using his hybrid attacks. He has been orchestrating cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure. In January he did such an attack in a water facility in Texas that affected water there and also affected water flow system—supply systems in France and in Poland as well.

He is also working hard on disinformation campaigns aimed at influencing political narratives. The 2016 presidential election, Putin conducted foreign electoral interference to help his favorite candidate Donald Trump, and trying to do the same in our upcoming election, they will probably use AI, and they will use EM. For those of you who do not know what EM is, Elon Musk. [LAUGHTER.]

U.S. intelligence reported that Moscow is targeting U.S. swing states with more advanced disinformation such as AI tools and authentic U.S. voices—EM—to shape the outcome in favor of Donald Trump. Ukraine is asking to use our weapons for offensive purposes, and I support the request. I think they need to go forward with offensive weapons to strike Russia and bring the war home to the Russian people.

This is ludicrously to allow Russia to attack and kill Ukrainians, destroy cultural objects, and destroy cities, with reckless disregard for life. Hit schools, hit hospitals, hit senior facilities, and Ukraine is not supposed to go into Russia? That is crazy. I mean, both your arms are tied behind your back and tied behind them, unfortunately, by my government, our government, which is supporting Ukraine.

We have done a lot but we have been slow at doing it. I went to these classified briefings early on. They are quite interesting.

Some of them, the people got up who know a lot more about these weapons than I do and they said, we need to give them ATACMS. We need to give them ATACMS. We gave them to them, like, six months later.

We need to give them HIMARS. We need to give them HIMARS. Six months later. Then there were the F-16s and the Abrams tanks, and it was all a delay and a delay and a delay.

This war would have been much, much closer to ending, on Ukraine's terms but ending, if we had given them those weapons earlier because Putin responds to one thing, and that is when he is weak. He does not want to show it but when he is weak he will consider some treaty, some response, some end to the war, and that is something we were told very clearly by Professor Snyder at one of our last hearings. That is all—he has got to have weakness, and the weakness is getting those weapons.

I support allowing to use our weapons as well as British and French to go in and take the war home to Russia and let them have an even and appropriate perspective on what the war is.

Is it really a special military operation or is it a war? They will not know what war is for. War is innocents getting killed and places being bombed and losing their lives. Until Ukraine brings it to Russia, they will not see it as a war; they will see it as a "special military operation" and the second Great Patriotic War. Horseshit. [APPLAUSE.]

That concludes my remarks.

Thank you.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Co-Chair Steve Cohen.

Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, if you would like to make—okay. No further opening statements. We will immediately proceed to Mr. Michael Weiss.

Hey, I want to alert everybody. We are going to be on a five-minute rule, applying to me too, and so five minutes of presentation, five minutes of questioning by each of us, and it will be strictly maintained by the very professional staff we have.

Thank you.

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL WEISS, INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST, AND AUTHOR

Mr. WEISS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The evocative adjective that precedes the word war in the title of this hearing, I think, is slightly misplaced. There is nothing shadowy about what has been going on for nearly 20 years. It is war that Russia has been waging across NATO and EU territory and there are some notable features, I think, that we can define.

First, the soldiers that Russia uses, or better said the perpetrators, have all been promoted, received state medals, or even been assigned cushy positions in the Russian presidential administration for their grim spade work. Some, to this day, are actively serving diplomats abroad.

This war has almost always involved Ukraine, specifically Western efforts to arm Kyiv, both before, during, and after the full-scale invasion beginning actually in 2011 even before the Russian takeover of Crimea. This war has killed or injured civilians and caused the evacuations of entire communities in three different NATO

countries. It involved sleeper agents deeply embedded within Western society who have aided and embedded terrorist operations.

Now it is increasingly relying on native citizens of Western societies who are recruited remotely via social media to carry out these operations in exchange for modest sums. The most notorious example I can cite is one that I am sure everyone is familiar with, which is the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 using a radioactive isotope, highly deadly, which was later discovered all over London, Hamburg, Germany, and on commercial airliners.

That was an FSB operation and the two men responsible—one of the men responsible is currently in the Russian parliament as a reward for his efforts. No other team of Russian intelligence, though, has been more active in unleashing waves of violence across Europe in the last decade than the GRU's Unit 29155.

This is a special black ops unit of Russia's military intelligence service. It consists almost exclusively of cutthroats and saboteurs. Their first bombing, which I alluded to already, was an ammunition storage facility in Lovnidol, Bulgaria. This was in 2011 in the midst of the Obama administration's reset with Russia which was meant to stabilize relations with Moscow.

What did they blow up? Ammunition that was destined for two countries. The first was Georgia, which was then rearming itself after the 2008 war with Russia, and the second was Ukraine, still three years shy away from its Revolution of Dignity and currently under the administration of Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian saptap.

The explosives were actually planted not in Bulgaria but in another storage facility in the Czech Republic in the town of Vrbětice. The ammunition, which was laden with these explosives, traveled almost 800 miles of European territory by truck, bypassing four major population centers—Bratislava, Belgrade, Budapest, and Sofia—which meant that had they gone off—the bombs—prematurely they could have killed thousands if not tens of thousands of people. In the event three people were killed in Lovnidol, Bulgaria, 18 others were injured, and the entire town had to be evacuated because of the blast and the secondary explosions it caused.

Three years later in 2014, 29155 blew up that facility in the Czech Republic where they originally planted their bombs. This set off 50 metric tons of materiel including ammunition, again, you guessed it, destined for Ukraine but also ammunition and munitions destined for anti-Assad rebels in Syria.

The explosion was so massive, and it led to secondary blasts that were so big that rescue workers could not actually reach the site for 10 days. How did the saboteurs from 29155 gain access to that facility?

Well, they had recruited a family of illegals known as the Šapošnikovs who burrowed deep into Czech society for decades. The Šapošnikovs, by the way, even bought themselves a holiday rental retreat, a Greek villa, which 29155 used as its safe house. By the way, that property is still on booking sites if anyone in the Commission is interested in a holiday.

29155 also carried out perhaps half a dozen operations of this nature all across the Czech Republic and Bulgaria until about 2015, one that destroyed forensic evidence of their earlier crimes, before

they decided ultimately that they wanted to go to the source and eliminate the arms dealer who was selling—manufacturing and selling weapons to Ukraine and Georgia. This was Emilian Gebrev, a man I have interviewed and profiled. He is the CEO of a company called EMCO, and they poisoned him with a Novichok-like substance in 2015 along with his son and factory manager.

That was three years before they would use actual Novichok to poison Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, a quaint English cathedral town. The two prisoners in that operation, Alexander Mishkin and Anatoly Chepiga, were in fact the guys who blew up the Czech storage facility in Vr̄bětice in 2015.

Notice a pattern. They keep returning to the scenes of their crimes. They keep recycling the same operatives to do all kinds of other operations including assassinations. One of the guys who poisoned Emilian Gebrev, by the way, led an abortive insurrection attempt in Montenegro in 2016 on the eve of that country's accession to NATO.

In 2019 an FSB assassin, someone my investigative team at the Insider believes was and is Vladimir Putin's personal hit man, a guy called Vadim Krasikov, gunned down a Chechen dissident and former military commander named Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, again in broad daylight in the middle of Berlin's Tiergarten Park.

Krasikov, you will note, was recently traded back to Russia in exchange for our own citizens and some Russian dissidents, but so badly did Putin want him, which is telling, that he was ready to give up Alexei Navalny, the now dead leader of the Russian opposition, for Krasikov.

Well, the GRU has found it difficult lately to travel to Europe owing to the fact that they have been rolled up and exposed and sanctioned and they are on the radar of every major counterintelligence organization.

What are they doing now? Well, the bad news is they are taking a leaf from the playbook of nonstate actors such as ISIS, recruiting remotely using social media platforms like Telegram, asking agents to carry out bombings, acts of provocation, and acts of subversion, all across Europe and paying them in cryptocurrency for as little as 400 euros, known acts that have been reported on, again, all across NATO territory—setting fire to a shopping center in Warsaw, an IKEA warehouse in Vilnius, a bus depot in Prague, an industrial estate in east London, and a metals factory in Berlin.

I was recently part of an investigation that anatomized the Latvian network of agents that the GRU has been recruiting, relying on court documents from Latvia and Estonia, and these are kids as young as 18 years old—riffraff amateurs with criminal backgrounds.

They were asked in one instance to travel to Kyiv in January of 2022, a month before the full-scale invasion, and firebomb a military facility. They have daubed graffiti on the wall of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn, suggesting that institution had been hacked by a well-known Russian hacking group.

They never met their handlers because, again, they are doing this remotely online and it was—it did not take much to bring

them on board to do these kinds of operations, again, against their own countries—these are native Latvian citizens.

Russian spies and operatives are still in our midst and they are still getting up to their old tricks. The Wall Street Journal reported recently that the CEO of the German arms giant Rheinmetall has been earmarked for assassination.

Now, I wonder why that is. It probably has something to do with the fact that Germany has been outsized in its security assistance to Ukraine against all of Russia's expectations and much to its chagrin.

This summer the French arrested a man called Kirill Gryaznov. He is a Cordon Bleu-trained chef who has been living in France for over a decade. He is also a social media influencer and a sometime reality dating star on Russian television.

In fact, he is an FSB illegal who boasted at a drunken dinner to a friend that he was about to carry off a kinetic operation in Paris on the eve of the Summer Olympics. They will have, "an opening ceremony like no other," he said, just before he flashed his FSB badge.

You will notice in France, by the way, other Russian operations—the graffitiing of Stars of David on walls to drum up fears of anti-Semitism, coffins draped with the French tricolor to denounce the Macron policy of possibly sending troops to Ukraine, a guy who blew himself up in a hotel room near Charles de Gaulle Airport.

These things are continuing to happen even as we speak. Nothing is new here because the [GRU] Main Intelligence Directorate has been trying to overthrow democratically elected governments since its founding in 1918. In the 1920s they fomented insurrections in Germany. They recruited Communist Party members who they then trained to do exactly these kinds of operations. They had so-called T units. The T stood for terrorism.

The tradecraft is not new. What is new is the technological capability, and I am sorry to say I think the West has been very non-vigilant in paying attention to these operations. I mean, much of what we know, we know by looking in the rearview mirror going back, again, over a decade, and we are still piecing together things that these guys have got up to.

The scary part is not what we know they have done; it is what we do not know that they have done yet—assassinations, firebombings, sabotage operations that have yet to be documented.

Thank you. [APPLAUSE.]

Chairman WILSON: Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Weiss, and that really has been eye-opening, and I want to commend the Helsinki staff. Equally eye-opening is the map that we have behind us indicating different sabotage attacks. The dots need to be connected, and continuing with connecting dots, Dr. Schmitt.

TESTIMONY OF BENJAMIN L. SCHMITT, SENIOR FELLOW, DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY AND KLEINMAN CENTER FOR ENERGY POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. SCHMITT: Thank you, Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Cohen, and distinguished Senate and House members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.

I have to say, Mr. Wilson, it is nothing short of heroic that you are here today. Thank you so much, and it shows just how important this topic is. Thank you so much. It is inspiring.

We meet exactly 943 days since the Putin regime unleashed its expanded onslaught of human misery in Ukraine. That is 943 times—943 chances—that we could have done more to stop Russia's overt kinetic strikes against Ukrainian energy systems.

Russia's campaign against Ukraine's civil energy infrastructure epitomizes the Kremlin's long-standing weaponization of energy, the hallmarks of which have included security of supply threats, monopolistic practices, disinformation, and the corruption and capture of elites.

We must urgently do everything possible to support Ukraine's air defense and long-range strike capability before this winter so that the Kremlin is unable to further expand the humanitarian nightmare that it has caused across Ukraine.

While pursuing its hot war in Ukraine another war is being waged by Putin's Kremlin, a shadow war in which it is targeting energy and critical infrastructure through sabotage on NATO soil with impacts across land, sea, and space domains.

The unprecedented scale and scope of this ongoing sabotage spree by Russian-attributed and Russia-suspected actors is being undertaken to create panic and undermine support for Ukrainian victory across the West every day. Congress needs to use today's hearing as a starting point to support actions that make it clear to the Kremlin that its sabotage campaign to intimidate democracy ends here.

My name is Dr. Benjamin L. Schmitt, and I have previously served as European energy security advisor at the U.S. Department of State. I am now a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania with appointments in both the Department of Physics and Astronomy and the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy where I conduct physics and energy security research and teach graduate coursework on energy geopolitics and national security.

For the past 18 months, I have led a Penn research project focused on analyzing how the Russian Federation now brazenly conducts clandestine physical sabotage attacks against energy and critical infrastructure across the NATO alliance. This work includes studying policies, technologies, and open-source intelligence methods including maritime automatic identification system data and commercial geospatial imagery data that can be developed and used to counter Kremlin hybrid warfare tactics.

I have also conducted a field research expedition that is continental in scope, meeting with experts and officials and visiting critical infrastructure facilities across Europe including those that have experienced physical sabotage incidents and those that want to prevent it from happening in the future.

Four such stops have become central case studies to my research. They provide key examples of the multispectral challenges that exist with infrastructure monitoring, protection, and attribution.

For example, these stops have included, number one, I traveled to the Norwegian island of Svalbard just 400 miles from the North Pole where, on January 7, 2022, a Russian fishing trawler was likely responsible for severing a vital subsea fiber-optic cable transmitting commercial satellite data from the SvalSat ground station to the European mainland. That commercial data would prove vital in Ukraine's defense just weeks later. This incident also highlights the growing Kremlin maritime doctrine to utilize so-called commercial or research vessels for espionage and sabotage in the European offshore.

Number two, I crisscrossed the Gulf of Finland and visited sites on both ends of the Baltic connector natural gas pipeline that links Finland and Estonia. There in early October 2023, a Chinese-flagged vessel with Russian ownership escorted by a Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker dragged an anchor for hundreds of kilometers, severing telecommunications cables and destroying the Baltic connector pipeline itself.

Number three, just a few weeks ago earlier this month I chartered a vessel from Denmark's island of Bornholm for an expedition to gather seabed sonar data directly at the site of the September 2022 subsea destruction of the Kremlin-backed Nord Stream 2 pipeline, perhaps the highest profile energy sabotage incident to date.

Attribution of that blast remains a subject of heated debate and early findings from this study call into question some of the current narratives.

Fourth and finally, I visited the Brünsbittel LNG terminal in Germany. Construction of that terminal was meant to reduce Germany's energy dependence on Russia, but in late 2023 an onshore pipeline meant to connect the terminal to the German grid was found drilled through and just last month, just a few weeks ago, Russia military-grade intelligence drones were spotted flying over the terminal.

These examples join dozens of others that have taken place in recent months. From an explosives cache with detonators found deliberately buried next to the NATO pipeline network just south of Heidelberg, Germany, to incidents in Poland, the Czech Republic, France, and the United Kingdom, where attribution has been made against Russian actors as well as non-Russian nationals that have been hired online on social media on Telegram by Russia's military intelligence, or the GRU.

Commissioners, it is time that NATO leaders turn the table on the Putin regime in terms of its hybrid warfare campaign and move from Russia's summer of sabotage to NATO's autumn of action.

To this end, I leave you with these recommendations. Number one, Congress should support the invocation of NATO Article 4 consultative mechanisms from concerned NATO member states to respond to sabotage incidents officially attributed to the Kremlin or Kremlin-backed entities.

Number two, Congress must extend existing sanctions on the Kremlin-backed Nord Stream 2 pipeline that will otherwise sunset this year and reverse the 2021 Biden administration decision to avoid sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 construction vessel the Blue Ship and its then-owner, "Stiftung Klima und Umweltschutz MV."

Number three, Congress should pass urgent legislation to end finally the ability of former U.S. officials to leave office to work for the U.S. adversaries like the Russian Federation ever again.

Fourth and finally, Congress must pressure the Biden administration to allow the Ukrainian military to conduct necessary long-distance strikes against Russian military launch facilities who will otherwise continue to terror bomb Ukrainian energy infrastructure.

Through these actions we can both deter further Kremlin sabotage and support Ukrainian victory and make it clear to those that would propose otherwise there can never again be a return to business as usual of Putin's Kremlin, ever.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions. [APPLAUSE.]

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Dr. Schmitt.

Again, we are so grateful and honored to have the national security advisor Tori here today and just appreciate your service on behalf of the people of Estonia.

**TESTIMONY OF ERKKI TORI, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR
TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF ESTONIA**

Mr. TORI: Mr. Chairman, distinguished commissioners, and members of Congress, I would like to thank for the opportunity to testify today on Russia's shadow war.

As this is my first time before this esteemed institution, I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to you and the American people for your steadfast support for Estonia, from not recognizing the Soviet occupation after the Second World War to standing with us in our fight for freedom in 1991 to supporting our accession to NATO in 2004. We would not be such a vibrant tech-savvy democracy without your support. It is this shared history and experience that drives our unwavering support for Ukraine and our firm advocacy of Ukraine's membership in NATO.

Bringing Ukraine into NATO is not an escalation. Vice versa. Leaving Ukraine in a gray zone only plays into Russia's hand.

Ladies and gentlemen, moving on to today's topic, Russia's goals vis-à-vis the West have been clear for a number of years. Their aim is the rollback of the Pax Americana through dismantling and re-writing the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

To achieve this goal Russia has been using various elements of the shadow war which in the past year has intensified. Russia's activities include sabotage and acts of violence in European territory, creating migration problems at our borders, cyber and electronic interference, disinformation campaigns, and other subversive actions.

Various proxies are used to mask Russia's involvement. These proxies are usually low-level and expendable, and if they are important and not expendable then hostages may be used to exchange them like happened in Estonia with the security officer in 2014.

We estimate that the volume of these activities will continue and may become more brutal. Estonia is a target of the Russian shadow war. To bring a concrete example, in 2023 Russian intelligence

services carried out a coordinated operation to undermine Estonia's security through physical attacks on property including that of an Estonian government minister.

Some of these attacks were prevented while others were carried out. The aim of the operation was to create tensions within the Estonian society and erode trust in government institutions. As of today, those responsible for the attacks have been prosecuted. Estonia's approach is to stay calm and confident but vigilant.

Russia's activities are not limited to NATO border countries like Estonia. Similar methods are used more broadly across Europe and beyond.

My message is clear. These acts should not be dismissed as minor or one-time acts of hooliganism. These are intentional actions demonstrating that Russia considers itself in a war with the West.

Recognizing and responding to Russia's hybrid activities is crucial as doing nothing encourages Russia to continue and escalate its actions. Therefore, I urge to form a common strategy. Our responses can be national, regional, or collective within NATO and the EU and do not need to mirror Russia's actions. They can be asymmetric if needed.

In Estonia, we see countering Russia's shadow war, first and foremost, as a national responsibility. Our response focuses on strengthening resilience through both military and nonmilitary efforts including the resilience of our energy infrastructure. Our deterrence posture has been strengthened through our own defense enhancements with defense expenditure to remain around 3.5 percent of GDP for the foreseeable future.

Internationally we see that we are on the right path. Discussions on Russian hybrid activities have gained momentum within NATO, the EU, and among key allies. Our focus must be on three as: Acknowledgment, assessment, and attribution.

We must also have countermeasures in place to hold Russia accountable. Acknowledgment and public attribution of Russian offenses are key. Though not always easy they raise public awareness and demonstrate to Russia that such actions will not be unpunished.

These measures should be tailored and backed by a clear communication strategy to send a clear message that Russia should not test our limits.

Estonia has urged countries to develop and adopt countermeasures. For example, in the EU we support the swift implementation of the hybrid sanctions regime and Czechia has a proposal to limit Russian diplomatic accreditations.

Following the decisions made at the NATO summit in Washington, we look forward to implementing additional actions to address the Russian shadow war against NATO and the allies.

I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you. [APPLAUSE.]

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much.

Thank you, National Security Advisor Tori and, indeed, it is a dream come true. I am so grateful that the United States never recognized the Soviet occupation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

We always, from 1940, recognized that the Baltic republics were independent countries.

Even better, I have visited, and, gosh, you have fulfilled our hopes and dreams for the people of Estonia of dynamic economies, opportunities for young people. I have actually been to the border at Narva and on the Narva River. Gosh, to see—what a dynamic country. It is just so exciting.

As we begin, it is very appropriate the first person who got here, and so we will proceed to Senator Tina Smith of Minnesota.

STATEMENT OF TINA SMITH, U.S. SENATE, FROM MINNESOTA

Senator SMITH: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am chronically prompt so I very much appreciate your courtesy. Thanks also to my fellow commissioners on the Helsinki Commission and thanks to you, our testifiers today, for being here. We appreciate this very much.

Russia has extensively used disinformation and election interference as tools of hybrid war to destabilize NATO allies and to undermine democratic processes. Could you comment on how Russian disinformation campaigns have targeted public opinion in democratic societies, particularly regarding support for Ukraine, and what measures should we be looking at to strengthen resilience to these narratives?

You could also maybe comment on what democratic governments can proactively do to protect their electoral processes from these kinds of interference.

Mr. Weiss, I will start with you.

Mr. WEISS: Sure.

Well, I think disinformation goes hand in hand with human intelligence operations. All of the acts of sabotage and state terrorism—we should call it what it is—that I have alluded to are designed in a kind of heads I win, tails you lose scheme.

Heads I win. They managed to blow up weapons manufacturing plants, ammunition depots, and anything that is involved in security assistance to Ukraine. That is a net positive for the Russians.

Tails you lose. Even if they fail, we are sat here talking about acts of state terrorism on European soil. It is scary stuff. It makes populations nervous. It makes them paranoid, and this is designed—it is sort of baked into the cake, if you like—to lower and weaken Western support for Ukraine.

In fact, I can tell you a lot of European countries are very reluctant to come forward with the full scale and scope of these operations that have been unmasked because of that fact. They are worried that their population simply will say it is time to give up on Kyiv. Enough is enough.

In terms of election interference, look, I think the Department of Justice did, and the Department of State actually in the last few weeks, have made very admirable efforts in disclosing these influence operations which not only have gone after Russian intelligence officers embedded in their state media apparatus RT but, have also kind of implicitly acknowledged that Americans have been recruited to purvey these influence operations in exchange for exorbitant sums of money.

I mean, I have been a podcaster in the past and I wish somebody would give me \$400,000 per episode or YouTube video or whatever.

Look, I think my esteemed fellow testifier from Estonia—the Estonians have done a superb job not just at counterintelligence but at pushing back on Russian influence operations, and one thing they do, and it is a little bit controversial, is every year their internal security service puts out an annual review.

Every year, by the way, they catch at least one or two Russian spies. Other countries in Europe catch zero per year. Either the Russians are spying only in Estonia or other counterintelligence agencies are not doing a very good job.

They also name and shame people that they know are coming to Estonia to peddle these lines, to push a pro-Kremlin narrative exactly designed to weaken democratic resolve, weaken support for Ukraine, et cetera, et cetera.

I think our government could be doing a lot better simply in terms of acting as a clearinghouse from an intelligence point of view of what we know the Russians are up to that are not necessarily criminal acts in the United States.

Senator SMITH: Mr. Tori, would you also please comment on this and what you have seen in your country and what more we should be doing to build resilience against these disinformation/misinformation campaigns?

Mr. TORI: Thank you very much.

Actually, my co-testimony giver Mr. Weiss already mentioned many important things. It may seem a bit naïve, but we have found the best weapon against disinformation to be open and straightforward communication, to really talk about—the issues that divide the public opinion but do it in an open and transparent way, and public attribution to those that are trying to peddle the stories and lies that diminish the public trust to government institutions. Open and straightforward communication.

Senator SMITH: Thank you very much. Shining light on the disinformation, pointing it out, is a key strategy I am hearing you say.

Mr. Schmitt, I just have a couple of seconds left but if you would—I would welcome anything you would like to add.

Mr. SCHMITT: Yes. I will just say that when we think about disinformation, and we talk about sabotage and all of these sorts of different elements of Russia's hybrid war this is all one thing for the Kremlin.

They use a multidisciplinary multispectral approach where they connect the sabotage with disinformation, and I think on the Baltic connector sabotage front where we saw the Chinese-flagged vessel Newnew Polar Bear with Russian ownership escorted by the Russian nuclear-powered Arctic-class container ship Sevmorput basically break all of these cables and pipelines. The Finns and the Estonians were amazing at their strategic communications to get ahead of Kremlin narratives that would have stoked fear and gone outside of what we have seen in open source intelligence, commercial satellite data, and AIS tracking and they released this early and often.

We did not see that in the Nord Stream case and we have certainly not seen this in the case of many of these other sabotage incidents over the summer.

Senator SMITH: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you, Senator, so much and we appreciate your involvement on the Commission very much, too.

Thank you.

As we proceed—[APPLAUSE]—as I begin with my five minutes, I want to appreciate so many people being so thoughtful and it has been bipartisan support. They now have a bionic chairman and so even some Democrats were nice.

The bottom line, again, I am really grateful, and then this is bipartisan. Now, we may disagree—I cannot believe it with Congressman Cohen about that courageous American hero Elon Musk—but we do agree on long-range ATACMS, and international law is very clear and that is that launch sites are targetable wherever they are. If they are in-country, as I have told my friends from Turkiye, they have a right to defend themselves from launch sites that may be in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

Whatever the case is that over and over again the ability of countries to protect themselves and so it should—it has been very bipartisan, and I know that the ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee—I am grateful that working together we have over and over again. Adam Smith with the Armed Services Committee, over and over again people have expressed support for the long-range capability of defense.

With that in mind, another situation—I want to commend the Helsinki staff. It is remarkable the level of sabotage attacks that have been revealed because it really does not get attention. I think maps and diagrams are very, very helpful, and sadly, it really came to the fore with the Houthi attacks on South Korea and Japanese, Indian, trade routes and was missed over a hundred and fifty attacks. If you get a map, you can actually see it.

Then also I appreciate AEI [American Enterprise Institute] did a study of connecting the dots of the dictators working together. Over and over again things can come together but a concern I have is that sometimes it seems very esoteric and so each of you I would like, as you all have been so eloquent in describing the sabotage attacks, the—as we talk about infrastructure, again, that sounds esoteric. It sounds like it does not relate to real people.

I want you to think, each one of you, of an attack that could relate to a family, whether it be a family in the United States or a family in Estonia, wherever, and any of our NATO allies.

I will begin with Mr. Weiss and shall proceed, but a specific attack that could relate to—infrastructure that could affect the average American family.

Mr. WEISS: Well, in my first testimony I mentioned several shopping malls and bus depots. Soft civilian targets all across Europe have been attacked by GRU remote-controlled saboteurs coming soon to a theater near you.

I mean, when I talk to American law enforcement and counterintelligence officers, they say that they are surprised we have not seen cases like this on the American homeland. You can imagine,

sir, that, you know, all the GRU would have to do is find some willing accomplices to blow up a shopping center.

I live in New York, a lot of soft targets there—Times Square, transportation hubs—and what the Russians would do is they would immediately blame this on us—it is a false flag attack designed to drum up Russophobia—or they would blame it on ISIS or al-Qaida or a nonstate actor, a terrorist organization, and we would be so caught up in the paranoia and fear that this would engender that it would be very difficult to get to the bottom of it and to have consensus, more importantly, because our country is so divided about what is fact and what is disinformation.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you for making it real world.

Dr. Schmitt?

Mr. SCHMITT: Thank you, Congressman. This is a great question, and I will say what is happening in Europe now is coming soon to the United States or may already be here.

I have an example that affected me personally. I was at a conference speaking about European energy security and in particular countering Russian sabotage on energy and critical infrastructure in Europe in Bonn, Germany, in January of this year.

I needed to fly home to the United States for another conference and the train that I was going to use from the Siegburg/Bonn station to the Frankfurt airport I logged on to get my ticket and everything on that line was canceled because there was sabotage, sabotage, sabotage. The power cables were cut.

This can impact people. It is frightening what is going on in the energy space. It can create energy poverty. At the same time, you know, we can have direct impacts on the population and the disinformation and the ability of Russia to undermine our democracy are absolutely at stake.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you. National Security Advisor Tori?

Mr. TORI: I would just like to add two concrete points. First of all, in Estonia and our part of the world we have seen electronic warfare interference in GPS signaling, which directly affects air traffic as well as marine traffic. That is a very dangerous game.

The second point that I would like to highlight is lawfare. Russia has placed the previous Estonian prime minister, Ms. Kaja Kallas, the future EU foreign policy chief, on a wanted list that leaves open a possibility for an international arrest warrant in the future.

Targeting specific people is something that they do.

Thank you.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much.

Indeed, the American people, really Western civilization, need to know that there is a potential that can affect every family.

With that in mind, I am going to show you all how bipartisan we can be. I am going to recognize Congressman Co-Chair Steve Cohen.

Representative COHEN: I appreciate that. I am going to yield to Mr. Cleaver now and I will take my time because he did not take his opening statement.

Chairman WILSON: See what a generous individual he is.

Congressman Emanuel Cleaver all the way from Missouri.

**STATEMENT OF EMANUEL CLEAVER, II, U.S. HOUSE, FROM
MISSOURI**

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Cohen, and thank you for being here to enlighten us.

I have a number of questions, but I think I would really like to start with Mr. Weiss, just to be helpful. Can you distinguish between or provide me with an understanding of the difference between the GRU and the KGB?

Mr. WEISS: The GRU is the Russian military intelligence. It has been around since 1918 when it was the Soviet military intelligence founded on the orders of Vladimir Lenin. Historically, been a little bit rivalrous and competitive with the former KGB, which is now two different intelligence services, both civilian. One is the FSB, which I am sure everyone here has heard of, and the other is the SVR, which is their foreign intelligence service.

We have found evidence both in the past and more recently of cooperation and collaboration between and among these services. The GRU was founded essentially for one reason and that was to prepare for war with the West. They were sort of at the vanguard of fomenting insurrections in the 1920s all across Europe.

Most of them failed but they did in their wake create these cadres of operatives that could be relied upon to do deep strikes behind enemy lines, partisan warfare. It is an instrument of the Russian military and as such it should be treated as a military organization.

Representative CLEAVER: That is intriguing. At another time I would just be interested in Putin's appreciation of the two and there is no question he is the leader of both.

Dr. Schmitt—and this is an argument that is taking place on this Hill and probably around the country—if the U.S. does in fact provide Ukraine with weapons that would reach targets deep inside Russia why would Russian leaders not then authorize the use of weapons that could wreak havoc all over Europe because it would very likely, you know, draw NATO in?

What—I hear the call and I am sympathetic to what you said and to others, but I am also listening to some Americans, and some are in government, some want to be in government, who are saying be careful.

Mr. SCHMITT: Well, Congressman, I absolutely agree we should be careful and thoughtful about this.

Let us step back and look at the fact that since day one—and your colleague Mr. Cohen has pointed out this outlook, I am a physicist by training so I do this in math. This is an X minus one equation where X is what we should have been doing at any given moment and X minus one is our one step behind.

We have always been one step behind where we need to do and support Ukraine. That has resulted in 80 percent of the thermal power stations in Ukraine being destroyed, 50 percent of electricity capacity. It has created energy poverty and humanitarian crisis, the likes of which we have not seen since the Second World War in a country and, frankly, by allowing the Ukrainians to strike not only the missiles that are incoming but the facilities that are launching these attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure it is absolutely part of the energy security and humanitarian crisis

management that we need to be doing, and at the same time we really are seeing that we are still just not doing enough and it is going to cost us a lot more as the transatlantic community to rebuild the entire Ukrainian energy grid than it will be to protect it now.

We better do as much as we can as fast as we can to ensure Ukraine's energy security and help it towards victory.

Representative CLEAVER: What would discourage—[APPLAUSE]—what would discourage Russia from authorizing the use of some bombs that could create mass destruction, not necessarily even a nuclear?

Mr. SCHMITT: Yes. No, I think that is an absolute part of this equation and what we have to remember is that the Ukrainians have, "gone through the red lines" of the Russian Federation many times.

Every one of the weapon systems that were mentioned earlier were red lines, supposedly, of Vladimir Putin and he has not struck back in a way that is—it is—that is massive because he cannot, right?

The Ukrainians have gone into Kursk and actually seized part of the Russian Federation's territory. There is a war going on. It is this shadow war and these sabotage operations continue to happen from the North Pole to the Baltic Sea to the Barents Sea to the North Sea and everywhere on shore in Europe and, you know, we need to just remember that the best thing that we can do to push back on this is ensure that Ukraine wins and Russia loses its war against democracy.

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Cleaver. We appreciate your service so much.

We now proceed to Congressman—Co-Chair Steve Cohen.

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will follow up with Mr. Schmitt. I am presuming that Congressman Cleaver was referring to the op-ed by the two—Kennedy, Jr., and Trump, Jr., and they suggested in their op-ed—did you read it by chance, Mr. Schmitt?

You did not miss a lot. It was pretty sophomoric and not junior, and they said something that started with a fact. They said there never should have been a war—this war should not have been allowed to start.

Well, they should have told that to Izvestia, not to Politico. You know, there is nothing that Ukraine could do but defend itself and then Russia came in, lying to the last day that they were not going to invade. You are not concerned—I mean, he is threatened nuclear response. A person like Putin who is, like, one of the only people that really has a large nuclear arsenal would know the results of a nuclear war would come back on them, correct?

Mr. SCHMITT: That is right. The immediate loss of that war in Ukraine was a nuclear weapon to be used by the Russian Federation.

Representative COHEN: Would there be a response by—

Mr. SCHMITT: NATO, the U.S., the entire Western alliance.

Representative COHEN: Right. Nuclear attacks against Russia?

Mr. SCHMITT: Possibly.

Representative COHEN: They might even get his ballerina girlfriend? He—

Mr. SCHMITT: I do not want to comment on the ballerina girlfriend or the comments of RFK, Jr., or the former president's son, so I will keep it at that.

Representative COHEN: All right. You feel secure he would not respond with a nuclear attack?

Mr. SCHMITT: I think that is very unlikely at this point.

Representative COHEN: They have engaged. They are basically at war with us anyway—

Mr. SCHMITT: Absolutely.

Representative COHEN: —but they do not want to get into a full-scale war with NATO and that is clear, but Mr. Weiss has clearly shown, and you have too, things they have done, him mostly in personal attacks and you in physical attacks.

Have all those attacks that you mentioned with the cutting the cords there and on the bottom of the ocean floor have they been recognized as Russian attacks?

Mr. SCHMITT: That is a massive question and many of them have. Many of them have a significant amount of evidence that points towards Russia and many have been unattributed, I will point out that certain countries along NATO's eastern flank have been quicker to attribute and release data.

I think Estonia has been part of this effort but certainly Poland, the Czech Republic, and, of course, we have seen the United Kingdom do this, and that is why we really need to see Article 4 used. I have heard that there is pressure within NATO to not allow certain countries to use Article 4 and that is, again, not a military response but a consultative mechanism to raise the public cost and understanding of the Putin regime so that we know what is going on. We know these sabotage operations are coming from you, and we will do something to push back.

To any of those in Washington, in Berlin, and elsewhere that are the escalation managers that we have heard so much about that want to stop Article 4 from happening it needs to happen. It is something that we can use. It is a tool and it can be collectively used by NATO member states that have seen these attacks take place.

I will say open-source intelligence is so important to quicken that response because commercial satellite data in this new commercial space renaissance that we have is something that we can release instantly. It is online and we can look at the data and the evidence of these attacks and get that out way faster than declassifying military intelligence and other data that we have.

Representative COHEN: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Weiss, have you looked into anything about the death of Navalny? Any research there?

Mr. WEISS: My team at the Insider, the head of the investigation's unit is Christo Grozev, the man who identified Navalny's FSB poisoners and was in an Academy Award-winning documentary about that, we are currently investigating his demise. We do not agree with the U.S. intelligence assessment that it was accidental.

Representative COHEN: Did anybody get a chance to see his body after it was taken from the mortuary?

Mr. WEISS: I believe his body was returned to his family but, I mean, the chain of custody from his death in the gulag to that point is the real question. I do not know. I do not have details on sort of what might have happened forensically to it.

Representative COHEN: Yes. They have never really who was responsible for killing Nemtsov although they think it was the Chechens, I guess.

Mr. WEISS: Well, there is some evidence that the Chechens but within league with the FSB. Travel patterns are essential in understanding Russian intelligence operations including those that have a violent or kinetic nature to them.

Representative COHEN: I do not think—I guess my time is up, but on this map, they do not show—they show Madrid, but they do not show—I think there was a Russian soldier who was killed, like, on the coast in Spain.

Mr. WEISS: I just got back. I was in Alicante this summer doing an investigation into the murder of that Russian captain, and yes, Spain is a deeply penetrated country.

I mentioned Alexander Litvinenko. Well, one of the things he was doing before he was poisoned with polonium 210 was helping the Spanish counterterrorism authorities and counter organized crime anatomize the extent of the Russian mafia in Spain, and the Russian mafia in Spain does not lift a finger without the help of Russian government officials and Russian intelligence organs.

Representative COHEN: Well, thank you for your work, Dr. Schmitt as well. It is good to—I have been to your country. I have met your leadership. They are fantastic.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you, Co-Chair, and, indeed, Co-Chair Cohen has proven his capabilities of actually adding to the map. I am very, very impressed and—but, hey, as we conclude, again, it is a dream come true to me. Being an election observer on June 10, 1990, in Bulgaria to see the most slavish Soviet satellite now become a very modern country with opportunities for young people.

That is not what I saw when I got there. It was like stepping back to the 1930s and then flashing forward to visit Tbilisi and Georgia—the nation of Georgia—and how exciting to see what a dynamic country Georgia is, and then to meet the Georgian military that has served with American military forces, how exciting and how dynamic the people are of the nation of Georgia. Even visiting Gori to see where—at Stalin's birthplace, sadly, where the Russian Federation and war criminal Putin have intruded into their country. Over and over again, indeed, NATO is going to be stronger.

At this time as we conclude I would like to invite our witnesses to please come forward and we will get a picture together with the members of the Commission who are here. I am still hoping, hey, I want to—hey, trying to—scheduling things here is really difficult.

Previously we had Congressman Marc Veasey from the Republic of Texas. He was here and I know he intended to come back and, indeed, we so appreciate all of you being here and just in every way what you are doing, and the people here who are encouraging freedom and democracy and peace through strength in the world.

Representative COHEN: Would you yield for a question?

Chairman WILSON: Of course.

Representative COHEN: Mr. Weiss mentioned some spot—was it in Romania? Where there is a kind of an Airbnb that has been kept?

Mr. WEISS: No. In Greece, actually.

Representative COHEN: In Greece. Did not you stay there with Rohrabacher?

Chairman WILSON: Yes, no, no, no. [LAUGHTER.] Hey, I cannot believe the—

Mr. WEISS: By the way, it is listed as kid-friendly on the website, so—[LAUGHTER]—for children.

Chairman WILSON: Disinformation. Aside from that—[LAUGHTER]—and we can—we do get along, okay? Bottom line, thank all of you for being here, and I want to thank the Commission staff, poor things. Tomorrow afternoon around 5:00 you will notice weeping here on Capitol Hill as the members of Congress depart back to the promised land of Missouri, Tennessee and South Carolina.

We appreciate their great work and what a great year it has been. One of the highlights for me I appreciate is that we had a field hearing at Nuremberg, the courthouse in Germany, in courtroom 600, the very courtroom where the Nazi war criminals were tried, and this Commission had a morning session.

We were very grateful to Bundestag members and others for being there to have a presentation on the kidnapping of Ukrainian children by war criminal Putin to Russia, and then general war crimes in the afternoon. I just want to thank the Commission staff as we proceed for the next couple of weeks and then—with the elections and then reorganization.

At this time we are adjourned. [Sounds gavel, applause.]

[Whereupon, at 3:30 p.m., the hearing ended.]





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