

FEBRUARY 09, 2017

## CARDIN OPENING REMARKS AT RUSSIA HEARING

WASHINGTON - ***U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee***, released the following statement Wednesday at a hearing on, *"The United States, the Russian Federation and the Challenges Ahead:"*

"Thank you Mr. Chairman, I welcome both of our witnesses today. We are indeed very fortunate to have you participate in this discussion and you are two people who are very knowledgeable in U.S.-Russian relations.

"And Mr. Chairman, I want to begin first by thanking you. There is no person in the United States Senate that is more protective of the role of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee than our Chairman, Mr. Corker, and I very much appreciate that and I think it's one of the reasons people want to serve on this committee, because they recognize that our Chairman will preserve the importance of this committee in the Senate and in this country.

"The Chairman is absolutely correct. In the attack on our country by Russia and our election system, there was a strong desire to hold hearings. Senator Shaheen was one of the first to suggest that there needs to be a greater Congressional involvement and awareness of what Russia was trying to do to the United States. We were caught in transition. We had an administration that was leaving and an administration that was starting up and it was not possible to hold meaningful meetings of our committee in an effort to carry out our

responsibility. So I very much appreciate this hearing as we start our hearing on how the United States needs to deal with Russia and with the point of view of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, what we can do with the use of our diplomacy.

"We are the committee that authorizes the use of force. We have a lot at stake on whether we can protect our country from the actions that Russia has taken and how we can also try to change the equation. How can we change the equation from Russia's point of view as they show aggression? It's not just the attack on our country, we know that from the free election, but we are also worried about what they might do in the future, not only in the United States but in Western Europe. It's also what they continue to do in Ukraine.

"The Chairman pointed out that they violated the Budapest Memorandum, the Minsk agreements. They have invaded Ukraine, occupy Crimea today and they are still interfering in the eastern part of Ukraine. And then we see what they are doing in Syria. We just got a report from Amnesty International: about 13,000 people were executed in a prison north of Damascus. These are war crimes. War crimes. They are assisted and carried out because of the support of Russia to the Assad regime in Syria. All of those issues beg for us to be engaged as to how we can change Russia's calculations, because we know there's a void and they're going to fill it in a way that is contrary to the interest of our national security and so we need to remain strong.

"Mr. Chairman and I agree that this committee needs to be engaged. I have filed for an independent commission like the 9/11 commission. I think that should be done also, because that is an independent, full time commission that can look at what happened at our country and help us prepare and I strongly support the efforts that we're doing here.

"I just want to say one word that concerned me about President Trump trying to drive a moral equivalency between the murderous conduct of Mr. Putin and the activities of our own country. There is no equivalency whatsoever, and I think that did a disservice to the service

men and women who have really defended our country and our democratic values, and I needed to say something.

"I was pleased to see Ambassador Haley's comments that were supported by the White House that the sanctions in Russia will remain, but they need to remain, in my view, until Russia complies with the Helsinki commitments and withdraws from Crimea and their interference with Ukraine and they uphold all the terms in the Minsk agreements. So I was pleased to see that.

"Yesterday, Senator Graham and I along with other members filed the Russian Sanction Review Act. It is patterned after the bill, Mr. Chairman, that you and I and Senator Menendez and others, Senator Kaine, worked on to have a review of the Iran nuclear agreement. It is patterned very similar to that, so that before the President would consider changing the sanction regime in Russia he would give Congress an opportunity, and the American people, to understand the policy before that could go into effect. It is bipartisan, and I think that's the way we should operate. I've also filed with Senator McCain and with other senators from this committee, Senators Rubio, Portman, Gardner, Menendez, Shaheen and Murphy, a bill that would strengthen our ability to use sanctions against Russia because of all of [this conduct]. I think all of that's important.

"Washington needs to send a message of resolve because Moscow will continue to interfere in our democratic process and those of our allies. It will continue to violate the sovereignty of its neighbors, it will push until it's stopped.

"Mr. Chairman, I want to close with a quote from Vladimir Kara-Murza, the person we talked about in recent days. He's a courageous democratic activist in Russia who was poisoned in 2015. He asserts that the government attacked him for his activism. Last week we once again received word that he was in a coma as a result, we believe, of another effort to poison him. I just want to say one word of encouragement. We heard today that he is coming out of that

coma. That's good news, but he's still very, very seriously ill. This is what he said—and he testified in front of this committee, sat where our two witnesses are sitting today--he sat there on June the 7<sup>th</sup> last year.

"And this is his quote: 'Our friends in the West often ask how they can be helpful to the cause of human rights and democracy in Russia. And the answer is very simple. Please stay true to your values. We're not asking for your support. It is our task to fight for democracy and the rule of law in our country. The only thing we ask from Western leaders is that they stop supporting Mr. Putin by treating him as a respectable and worthy partner, and by allowing Mr. Putin's cronies to use Western countries as havens for their looted wealth.'

"I pray that Mr. Kara-Murza will recover, I pray that he will continue to be allowed to participate in the Russian society, I pray that the Russian people will have a government that is reflective of the greatness of them as individuals, and I think we can play a role in this committee and I look forward to this hearing."

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