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### Engel Remarks at Full Committee Hearing on Countering a Resurgent Russia (/press-releases?ID=D3B73B76-35A0-4851-B61E-63937A53C682)

May 1, 2019

- As Delivered -

**Washington**—Representative Eliot L. Engel, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, today delivered the following opening remarks at the hearing "Countering a Resurgent Russia":

"Today we will hear from some of our best foreign-policy minds on one of our most pressing foreign-policy challenges: how to deal with an increasingly aggressive and belligerent Russia.

"Ambassador Nuland, Ambassador Fried, General Keane: welcome. Welcome to members of the public and press as well.

"If you look at a map of the world, you won't find too many places that Russia isn't stirring up trouble.

"On its own borders, Russia's illegal occupation of Georgia and Ukraine has shattered decades of work to build peace and stability in Europe. Propaganda efforts and cyber warfare across the continent have spread lies and confusion, with the clear aim of undermining western unity and the transatlantic alliance.

"Russia has weaponized its energy resources, expanding into European markets and creating greater and greater dependency, particularly with projects such as the Nord Stream II and Turkstream. These are clear efforts to increase its influence with European countries and advance its political aims.

"In the Middle East, Russia has served as a lifeline for the murderous regime of Bashar al Assad, aiding in the wholesale slaughter of innocent civilians. Russia has exported those same so-called "counterterrorism tactics" to sub-Saharan Africa where, for example, in the Central African Republic, civilian casualties are mounting.

"As we watch events unfold here in our own neighborhood, we're reminded that Putin has sent troops to Venezuela to prop up the

illegitimate dictator Nicolas Maduro.

"Here in the United States, of course, Russia put its thumb on the scale during the 2016 election to support President Trump's campaign, as Special Counsel Mueller's report puts it – and I quote, "in sweeping and systematic fashion" – unquote. And Russia continues to work to fuel political division and undermine American democracy.

"And the largest group victimized by Russia's harmful and destructive policies are Russians themselves, living under the tyranny of Vladimir Putin. Putin tries to silence his political opponents, honest journalists, and anyone else who dares to criticize his corrupt rule. His tools range from imprisonment to torture to assassination—as the world saw in the case of Boris Nemtsov – who I had the pleasure of meeting with right in this very building before he was brutally assassinated by Putin and his people. Putin and his thugs continue to tighten their grip on freedom of speech, expression, and access to information and economic opportunity.

"And let me add on that note that Russia continues to hold Paul Whelan, an American citizen, under false charges of espionage. Russia is denying him his basic human rights and has been dragging its feet every step of the way. I renew my demand that the Russian government end this charade and release Paul Whelan back to his family.

"What is Russia's aim with this unrelenting malevolence? What does Putin hope to accomplish by seizing territory, distorting reality, attacking democracy and supporting tyranny?

"First, of course, the answer is power—both domestically and on the international stage. Putin and his henchman in the Kremlin are desperate to keep their grip on power, whatever the costs. They need to hide the disaster that their oligarchy, kleptocracy, and corruption have been for their own country. Putin simply blames outside forces for Russia's troubles but we all know the troubles of the Russian people are the result of Russia's corrupt leaders.

"Secondly, Russia wants to peddle the lie that there is a better alternative to democracy a better alternative to the West. Putin wants a new Cold War a new battle of ideas. He thinks he can win by supporting dictators and cozying up to the West's adversaries, including his recent attempts to reach out to China. He's wrong. But that won't stop him from trying.

"It's a challenge we need to take seriously. And I don't think the Administration is doing nearly enough. We're being outplayed around the world and here on our home court. We're ceding ground in Syria and across the Middle East. We're letting Russia work its will in the European energy sector. And, of course with another presidential race gearing up, we haven't done nearly enough to shore up our own elections from Russian interference.

"The White House says no president has ever been tougher on Russia. I wish I could believe that.

"And I've got to wonder why this Administration won't meet the challenge head-on. The Special Counsel said in his report that he couldn't establish criminal conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia. But let's be clear: we know the Russians offered the Trump campaign stolen information about Hillary Clinton. We know the Trump campaign was eager to receive it. We know there was contact after contact after contact between campaign officials and Russian officials and we know that the President was working to expand his business interests in Russia right up to the election.

"The fact that such behavior is not illegal should be a call for Congress to act.

"And the fact is that we still don't know how deeply this President is involved with Russia—that we have no idea what the President and Putin discussed at their meetings— we have no idea — and that all underscores why this Committee's oversight and investigative work will proceed full speed ahead and why we will continue to shine a light on the real challenge that Russia poses.

"In fact, the Ranking Member and I are working on legislation to push back on Russian aggression, protect American interests, ramp up the targeted sanctions, and enhance diplomacy and counter-propaganda efforts to meet the Russian threat."

**05.01.19 Chairman Engel's Opening Remarks at Full Committee Hearing on Countering a Resurgent Russia**

00:00

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