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## MENENDEZ: THE CASE ISN'T 'CLOSED' ON RUSSIAN MEDDLING, NEED FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION IS NOW

"THE MUELLER REPORT IS THE WAKE-UP CALL OF THE CENTURY. IT IS A CLARION CALL TO ACTION. WE MUST TREAT IT AS A PREVIEW OF WHAT'S TO COME."

Menendez to McConnell: Case isn't 'Closed' on Russian Meddling, Need fo...



**WASHINGTON** - Following Senate Majority Leader McConnell's declaration this morning of "case closed" and that it's time to "move on" from the Russia probe, **U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**, spoke on

the Senate Floor refuting Sen. McConnell, detailing the case against Putin, and outlining immediate actions the Senate must take to increase economic, political, and diplomatic pressure on Russia for its election interference and malign activities abroad.

"I am worried that in the face of Russia aggression, we are getting lost -- not in the fog of war, but in the fog of politics. And our inaction today will have consequences that outlast any presidency, haunting us for years or even decades to come," **said Senator Menendez.** "...In the wake of the Mueller report, I wonder, where is our sense of urgency? Where is our outrage? Where is our sense of collective responsibility? If my colleagues take nothing else from the Mueller Report, they should at least be willing and eager to respond to what Russia did to us two years ago, and what FBI Director Wray tells us they continue to do."

The senator called upon Senate Republicans to stop obstructing The Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act (DASKA) that seeks to increase economic, political, and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation in response to Russia's interference in democratic processes abroad, malign influence in Syria, and aggression against Ukraine.

"Because we must remember that Russia's attack in 2016 did not occur in a vacuum. It's part of Putin's larger mission to disrupt democracies around the world, from his support for dictators in Venezuela and Syria to Russian meddling in the political affairs of our European allies," **concluded Menendez.** "The breadth of Russian interference laid out by the Mueller report demands the kind of comprehensive foreign policy response put forward in DASKA, and the American people deserve a markup and a full vote on the Senate floor. As their elected leaders, we owe Americans action."

**Below are the Senator's remarks as delivered:**

I come to the floor today to once again discuss U.S. policy towards the Russian Federation. I fear this body is the grips of a paralysis that has rendered us flat-footed in the face of a multitude of threats from Russia.

This is not a paralysis due to lack of knowledge, lack of facts or lack of intelligence. It is a paralysis of our politics. A paralysis born out of a lack of political will to do what is necessary in the absence of presidential leadership. A lack of will to stand up for our national security. A lack of will to defend our democratic institutions. A lack of will to fulfill the oath that every single member of this chamber swore to uphold.

The inaction from this body since the beginning of the year on Russia has been astounding. It gives me no pleasure to think that political considerations could be compromising the Republican Majority's willingness to respond robustly to the Russia threat. But how else can I explain why the party of Reagan has gone missing?

What force other than politics can explain our failure to demand the Administration robustly respond to Russia's seizure of Ukrainian ships in the Kerch straight?

What force other than politics can explain our feeble response to Russia's chemical attack in the UK?

What force other than politics could explain our failure to thwart Russia's hand in Syria, and allow Putin to sit back and enjoy the political instability spawned in Europe by the resulting migration crisis?

What force other than politics could have us playing right into Putin's hands?

What force other than politics could explain the remarks made earlier today by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in which he suggested that Democratic efforts to access the full and un-redacted Mueller report are impeding the ability of this body to shore up our election security?

Well, that's rich! Might I remind the American people that it was Majority Leader McConnell who, when presented by top intelligence officials in the Obama Administration about Russian efforts to help President Trump's candidacy, blocked efforts to inform the public?

But I am not here today to talk about conspiracy or obstruction or Trump.

Make no mistake, these issues are deeply concerning, and contrary to the Majority Leader's words, the case is not closed. However, there will be other opportunities to address these issues, and when it comes to shoring up our defenses, we are running out of time.

As the Ranking Member of the Foreign Relations Committee, I am here to flash a red warning light about what the Mueller report means for our national security. What it means for America's geopolitical standing with respect to Russia. What it means for our credibility on the world stage as democratic institutions are attacked.

I am worried that in the face of Russia aggression, we are getting lost -- not in the fog of war, but in the fog of politics. And our inaction today will have consequences that outlast any presidency, haunting us for years or even decades to come.

Let's review what we know about the Russia threat, and how long we've known about it.

It was over two years ago, in January 2017, when the Director of National Intelligence determined that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. Our intelligence community released that assessment that concluded Russia's efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election 'demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations.'

They concluded that this attack was ordered by President Putin himself, and that 'Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. 'And they concluded Russia's efforts 'Blend[ed] covert intelligence operations - such as cyber activity - with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users, or 'trolls' to undermine our 2016 elections.'

In addition, our intelligence community warned that 'Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the US presidential election to influence future efforts worldwide, including against US allies and their election processes.'

That was more than two years ago. And today, thanks to the work of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, we now have an even more thorough understanding of Russia's interference in 2016.

While much remains redacted, the Special Counsel's report describes in painstaking detail the scope of Russia's interference and the sophistication of their tactics.

Here's what we know.

First, Russian officials interfered in the U.S. presidential election in support of Putin's preferred candidate, and attempted to make inroads with his campaign.

Second, the Russian government and individuals with strong ties to the Kremlin carried out what Mueller concluded was a "sweeping and systematic" campaign to influence and sway support of U.S. voters.

Third, the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency, or IRA, sought to use social media and embedded employees to influence U.S. voters in an effort that was funded in large part by an oligarch with known links to Putin.

The IRA's malign social media influence campaign was nothing short of 'information warfare.' Internet Research Agency employees created fake social media personas and posed as American citizens on sites like Facebook and Twitter.

These Russian operatives were keenly aware of the politics of division. They capitalized on sensitive social and political issues, from immigration policy to police brutality, in an effort to divide Americans against each other.

They targeted voters in key swing states in an effort to dissuade certain demographics from turning out on Election Day. They staged real political rallies by masquerading as activists. And they destroyed evidence in an attempt to avoid detection and impeded U.S. investigations.

Fourth, the Mueller report confirms that Russian military intelligence deployed 'multiple' units to engage in 'large-scale cyber operations to interfere with the 2016 U.S. presidential election.'

Officers with the GRU - Russia's intelligence agency - hacked into democratic campaign networks and individual email accounts in order to steal emails and other sensitive information.

Armed with those stolen emails, GRU officers timed the release of damaging information in order to maximize their impact. Subsequent releases were conspicuously timed in an apparent effort to help their preferred candidate.

Russian hackers also conducted cyber surveillance of at least 20 state election systems, and the Kremlin intended to use this information to cast doubt on the legitimacy of a Clinton victory.

This revelation should shake us to the core, because clearly President Putin understands that for our democracy to work, the American people must have faith in the results of our elections. Chip away at that faith, and you chip away at our democracy itself.

GRU operatives also targeted employees of a voting technology company and successfully installed malware on their computer networks. In a handful of states, they gained the capacity to actually manipulate and even delete voter registration data. And to top it off, Russian hackers successfully infiltrated the network of at least one county government in Florida.

Finally, following the election, Putin unleashed hand-picked oligarchs to pushback against anticipated U.S. sanctions. And let's remember who these Russian oligarchs are.

They are billionaires hand-picked by Putin, who solidified his grip on power not only by oppressing the Russian people, but also by systematically seizing their assets and transferring them to a select group of cronies and allies.

Through business dealings, real estate transactions, shares of companies, shell corporations, money laundering and more, these oligarchs act as extensions of Putin's power. They advance Russia's economic influence and do Putin's bidding around the world. And according to the Mueller report that's exactly what they did after the 2016 election.

They reached out to the President's inner circle and members of his transition team to begin laying the groundwork for what Putin wanted in return for his help during the campaign. Most prominently, protection from further sanctions and relaxation of those imposed for Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

This short summary should be offensive to any American elected official. This short summary should spur anyone to action. To shore up the security of our elections at home, and counter Russian aggression abroad.

Indeed, just last week FBI Director Wray warned that Russia continues to pose a very significant counterintelligence threat. He also said that 2018 was a dress rehearsal for the big show in 2020.

This report cries out for action. It screams for legislation. And it demands preparation in advance of 2020. We are in trouble people. We can argue with each other. We can score political points against each other.

But the United States of America remains in Russia's crosshairs, and we must act. Putin has set his sights on us again in 2020. The Russian government continues to pursue the eroding of democracy across Europe. It has partnered with dictators and war criminals in the Middle East.

And in Venezuela, Putin clearly sees an advantage in prolonging a destabilizing conflict in our hemisphere. He and his cronies are selling arms, striking oil deals, and robbing the Venezuelan people of future prosperity all to prop up Maduro's criminal regime. So while President Trump may claim that 'Putin is not looking to get involved' in Venezuela... We already know he is!



M. President, the Mueller Report is the wake-up call of the century. It is a clarion call to action. We must treat it as a preview of what's to come. We already know some of the actions worth taking.

Senator Graham and I have a bill. A bipartisan bill called the Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act or DASKA. I have come to this floor to talk about it again and again.

But in the wake of the Mueller report, I wonder, where is our sense of urgency? Where is our outrage? Where is our sense of collective responsibility?

If my colleagues take nothing else from the Mueller Report, they should at least be willing and eager to respond to what Russia did to us two years ago, and what FBI Director Wray tells us they continue to do.

The Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act will ensure our diplomats have the tools to advance our interests and stand up to the bully in the Kremlin. The bill includes new sanctions, but also provisions designed to harden our democratic institutions and make us less vulnerable to attack. Our bill would improve our ability to coordinate with Europe on the Russia challenge.

It would invest in democratic institutions in countries most vulnerable to Kremlin aggression.

Because we must remember that Russia's attack in 2016 did not occur in a vacuum. It's part of Putin's larger mission to disrupt democracies around the world, from his support for dictators in Venezuela and Syria to Russian meddling in the political affairs of our European allies.

DASKA would also increase transparency with respect to real estate sales in the United States that we know is a go-to strategy for oligarchs looking to launder money.

I know that many of my colleagues have no interest in learning more about the President's own business dealings with these unsavory figures and whether those relationships influence his decision-making about U.S. foreign policy.

But we should agree that we must do more to prevent Russia from getting American businesses and leaders financially entangled in Russia's tentacles, like the NRA. DASKA would also protect the NATO alliance.

Senator Graham and I have included an important provision that would prevent any President from pulling the United States out of NATO without Senate approval. To pull our nation out of a military alliance so vital to America's security when we could have stopped it from happening would be a tragedy fit for the ages. A Senate vote was required to get us in to the North Atlantic Treaty – it should also be required on any attempt to get us out. This is critical to providing a sense of security and stability to our allies in NATO.

Finally, DASKA also includes new sanctions pressure on Moscow, including on Russian oligarchs complicit in the spread of Russian malign actions. In addition, it includes increased sanctions on Russia's energy and financial sectors. The bill has specific sanctions on the Russian ship building sector, to the extent that Russia continues to interfere with freedom of navigation in the Kerch Strait or elsewhere, and on those complicit in the November attack.

M. President, in the final analysis, we have few peaceful tools of diplomacy to address malign actors around the world. The court of international public opinion, in so far as the government in question cares about such things. Our trade and aid as an inducement to behavior change.

And then there's the denial of trade or aid or access to our financial institutions, what we call sanctions.

President Putin is willing to use his military as a means of first resort to advance his interests.

We are not. Therefore, sanctions are the tool. They are how we send the message and they are how we will defend ourselves.

Growing up in New Jersey, I learned that if you didn't confront a bully on the schoolyard his reign of terror would never end. He would create a climate of fear. He would create a climate of intimidation... until you wacked him in the head with a 2x4. Until you said enough is enough. Until you made clear that you and your fellow students wouldn't accept this kind of behavior.

If you didn't stand up for yourself, the bully would press ahead.

And ladies and gentlemen, that is what we have in Vladimir Putin. He will continue to push until he meets resistance. Until he meets a 2x4. And that is what we have in DASKA.

We have a responsibility in this body, a responsibility shared by all 100 Senators, to protect our national security and the integrity of our democracy. It is our most solemn responsibility. Some may not care. Some may think we've done enough to deal with the Russia threat.

But our intelligence experts disagree. Bob Mueller disagrees. FBI Director Wray disagrees. And clearly those living under the threat of Kremlin aggression in Eastern Europe disagree.

This body has come together before. I've seen it. We came together in 2017 to pass the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA.

But since then we've struggled to get this Administration to fully implement the law.

Are we supposed to just throw up our hands, say 'oh well,' and hope they will see the light? Or are we supposed to demand nothing less than rigorous enforcement, and take legislative action if need be?

I stand firmly for the latter – and I hope a majority of my colleagues stand with me.

It's long past time we sent another message to the Administration, to the world, and most importantly to the Kremlin that the United States Senate is prepared to defend American interests.

We will not tolerate intrusions by a hostile foreign power. We will not leave our democratic institutions vulnerable to further interference. And we will not allow any foreign adversary to meddle in our democracy.

The breadth of Russian interference laid out by the Mueller report demands the kind of comprehensive foreign policy response put forward in DASKA, and the American people deserve a markup and a full vote on the Senate floor.

As their elected leaders, we owe Americans action. We owe them fulfillment of our oath. And we owe them a robust and unflinching defense of our democracy and our values. Enough with the delays. Enough with the excuses. Enough with the politics.

We have a bill ready to bolster our defenses. We have strong bipartisan support. Let's mark up this bill now – and send a message to Putin that we will not tolerate a repeat performance in 2020.

I will just say: this is not about president Trump. It's not about the last election – other than that they attempted to influence it. That we should recognize and want to deal with. But it is about preserving our national security, our democracy, and our interests in the world. Putin is unbridled. This institution—republicans and democrats—have always joined together to meet Russia's challenge when Russia posed a challenge. The party of Reagan is absent. If this was going on during the Obama Administration, I'd be peeling people off of the Capitol ceiling.

Let's get to work. Let's defend our interests. Let's stand up together. Let's send Putin a message, and let's defend our democracy.

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