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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

January 29, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of State. I look forward to working with you in the pursuit of U.S. interests and values abroad in the coming years. Amid the host of challenges that were discussed during your confirmation hearing, I would like to highlight the unfortunate developments in the Russian Federation, including disturbing repression by the authorities there in advance of demonstrations this weekend.

In recent weeks, I have been very concerned by the Russian government's harsh response to peaceful democratic demonstrations across the country and the unlawful detention of anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny. As a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Russian government is obligated to respect certain democratic standards. Unfortunately, repression has long been a practice by a regime that stands in fear of accountability to its own people and the democratic process. It is disgraceful.

The Russian people's effort to create a more transparent and responsive political culture is their struggle, not ours. However, we should never make their work more difficult by turning a blind eye to violent repression or overwhelming cases of official corruption. I welcome the January 26th statement by the G7 Foreign Ministers that reiterated calls for Mr. Navalny's immediate and unconditional release. I support your efforts in calling out this behavior when it happens, and urge you to consider the following measures in response.

First, I strongly support the use of Russia Magnitsky sanctions to hold Russian officials accountable for violations of human rights. Mandatory sanctions under this law have not been imposed for more than a year, breaking with U.S. practice since 2012. I urge you to reinvigorate this important tool in coordination with officials at the Department of Treasury. Getting this sanctions regime back on track would explicitly demonstrate U.S. commitment to this law and to the principle of accountability.

Second, in order to address corrosive corruption in Russia, I strongly support measures that would deny corrupt Russian officials access to the U.S., including our financial system. I would welcome robust use of the Global Magnitsky sanctions regime as well as the "7031(c)" authority, which denies visas to corrupt actors abroad. Mr. Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation has

exposed countless cases of government corruption that the Departments of State and Treasury should closely examine for sanctions determinations under these laws.

Third, I urge the administration to impose sanctions in response to the chemical attack on Mr. Navalny under the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991 (22 U.S.C. § 5605). Moving forward swiftly with these sanctions will send a strong message that such behavior will not be tolerated by the Biden Administration, and will make clear to the Russian Federation and the international community that the United States will abide by its commitments and U.S. law. It will also send an important message of solidarity to our allies in Europe, who have already imposed sanctions in response to this horrific chemical weapons attack.

Finally, the strength of all these measures will depend on our ability to coordinate and amplify their effect with our European allies. I appreciate your commitment to the transatlantic alliance and support your efforts to act in solidarity with our friends in Europe against malign Kremlin behavior.

As you know, the U.S. has an important responsibility to demonstrate our commitment to anti-corruption, democracy, and human rights. I welcome the robust and early messaging by officials like you and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in support of these values. I urge the use of all available tools to give shape to these sentiments and to address this Kremlin aggression against its own people early in the tenure of the Biden administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez
Ranking Member