

United States Senate Committee on  
**FOREIGN RELATIONS**

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**U.S. Senator Ben Cardin Releases Report Detailing Two  
Decades of Putin’s Attacks on Democracy, Calling for Policy  
Changes to Counter Kremlin Threat Ahead of 2018, 2020  
Elections**

*U.S. Remains Vulnerable to Russian Interference without Unequivocal  
Presidential Leadership, Learning Lessons from European Democracies*

*Top Foreign Relations Committee Democrat Makes Series of Recommendations to  
Counter Putin’s Asymmetric Arsenal, Bolster Defenses Ahead of Future U.S.,  
European, Elections*

WASHINGTON – A Senate Foreign Relations Committee Democratic staff report released Wednesday and commissioned by U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.), the Committee’s ranking member, details Russian president Vladimir Putin’s nearly two decades-long assault on democratic institutions, universal values, and the rule of law across Europe and in his own country. The report comes one year after Senator Cardin introduced the Counteracting Russian Hostilities Act of 2017, which served as the basis for the sanctions package signed into law last August, and makes a series of recommendations to adequately bolster U.S. and European defenses and counter the growing Kremlin threat to democratic institutions.

**“Putin’s Asymmetrical Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. National Security,”** finds that President Trump’s refusal to publicly acknowledge the threat posed by the Russian government has hampered efforts to mobilize our government, strengthen our institutions, and work with our European allies to counter Putin’s interference in democracies abroad.

Never before in American history has so clear a threat to national security been so clearly ignored by a U.S. president, and without a strong U.S. response, institutions and elections here and throughout Europe will remain vulnerable to the Kremlin’s aggressive and sophisticated malign influence operations.

**“As the extent of Russia’s obvious meddling in the 2016 U.S. election continues to be investigated, it is imperative that the American people better understand the true scope and scale of Putin’s pattern of undermining democracy in Russia and across Europe. That is why I commissioned this report shortly after the 2016 election,”** Senator Cardin said. **“This threat existed long before President Trump took office, and unless he takes action now, it will continue long after his administration. While President Trump stands practically idle, Mr. Putin continues to refine his asymmetric arsenal and look for future opportunities to disrupt governance and erode support for the democratic and international institutions that the United States and Europe have built over the last 70 years.**

**“President Trump must be clear-eyed about the Russian threat, take action to strengthen our government’s response and our institutions, and – as have other president’s in times of crisis – mobilize our country and work with an international coalition to counter the threat and assert our values,”** Cardin continued.

Across eight chapters and several appendices, the report meticulously details the tools the Russian government has repeatedly deployed from its asymmetric arsenal, and how the Kremlin has learned and perfected its techniques attacking democracy both internally and abroad. Such tools – drawn largely from a Soviet-era playbook, but updated with new technologies – include military incursions, cyberattacks, disinformation, support for fringe political groups, and the weaponization of energy resources, organized crime and corruption.

Putin first developed his techniques at home, against his own people. In Russia, he repressed independent civil society, journalists, and the political opposition, while manipulating cultural and religious institutions, the media, and fueling a corrupt kleptocracy to bolster his regime and increase his net worth. Putin’s increasing aggression abroad is directly related to his need to maintain power at home. As he looks to maintain power in Russia, he is likely to step up his attacks on democracies around the world.

Some European countries have shored up their democracies with a strategic, whole-of-government approach: publicly warning Moscow of consequences if it meddles; mobilizing various sectors of society to neutralize and push back against Kremlin disinformation; and confronting Russian efforts to use corruption as a tool of influence. It is time for the United States to take similar actions.

The report includes more than 30 recommendations for the U.S. and its allies. Key recommendations include:

- **First**, Mr. Trump must demonstrate presidential leadership by declaring it is U.S. policy to deter all forms of Russian hybrid threats and begin to mobilize our government in defense. He should establish a high-level inter-agency fusion cell, modeled on the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), to coordinate all elements of U.S. policy and programming in response to the Kremlin’s malign influence operations.

- **Second**, the U.S. government should provide assistance, in concert with allies in Europe, to build democratic institutions within those European and Eurasian states most vulnerable to Russian government interference. As part of this effort, the President should convene an annual global summit on hybrid threats, modeled on the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL or the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) summits. To reinforce these efforts, members in the U.S. Congress have a clear responsibility to show U.S. leadership on values by making democracy and human rights a central part of their agendas. They should conduct committee hearings and use other platforms and opportunities to publicly advance these issues.
- **Third**, the United States and our allies should expose and freeze Kremlin-linked dirty money. The U.S. Treasury Department should make public any intelligence related to Mr. Putin's personal corruption and wealth stored abroad, and take steps with our European allies to cut off Mr. Putin and his inner circle from the international financial system.
- **Fourth**, the U.S. government should designate countries that employ malign influence operations to assault democracies as State Hybrid Threat Actors and subject them to a preemptive, escalatory sanctions regime that would be applied whenever the state uses asymmetric weapons like cyberattacks to interfere with a democratic election or disrupt a country's critical infrastructure. The U.S. government should also produce yearly public reports that detail the Russian government's malign influence operations in the U.S. and around the world.
- **Fifth**, the U.S. government and NATO should lead a coalition of countries committed to mutual defense against cyberattacks, to include the establishment of rapid reaction teams to defend allies under attack. The U.S. government should also call a special meeting of the NATO heads of state to review the extent of Russian government-sponsored cyberattacks among member states and develop formal guidelines on how the Alliance will consider such attacks in the context of NATO's Article 5 collective defense provision.
- **Finally**, U.S. and European governments should mandate that social media companies make public the sources of funding for political advertisements, along the same lines as TV channels and print media. Social media companies should conduct comprehensive audits on how their platforms may have been used by Kremlin-linked entities to influence elections occurring over the past several years, and should establish civil society advisory councils to provide input and warnings about emerging disinformation trends and government suppression. In addition, they should work with philanthropies, governments, and civil society to promote media literacy and reduce the presence of disinformation on their platforms.

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