



U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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****Remarks Prepared for Delivery****

**Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
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Over the last seven years, Russia has slipped into a mire of authoritarianism, corruption, and manufactured belligerence.

These developments, along with many serious domestic problems, have been partly masked by an extraordinary oil and gas windfall.

But these resources aren't solving Russia's public health and demographic crisis; they aren't being used to modernize Russia's aging oil and gas infrastructure; and they aren't bringing peace to the North Caucasus.

Instead, we've seen the spread of rampant corruption, Kremlin efforts to muzzle dissent and bully neighbors, and a fixation on acquiring pipelines that deliver hydrocarbons to our close allies.

In view of these stark realities and the Kremlin's charged rhetoric about the United States, the most important conclusion we can draw about our strategy for dealing with Russia is that we need a new one.

Whatever our game plan has been – and I'm not convinced we've had one – it clearly isn't working.

Russia is important to the United States in at least three respects:

First, we have an interest in the country's domestic situation, including the security of its nuclear stockpiles.

Contrary to what the Russian media might say, the United States needs a Russia that is strong and stable. Russia is the only other state in the world with enough nuclear weapons and delivery capability to wipe us out and any other nation.

We can't afford to see its government crippled by corruption and a lack of accountability.

Beyond that, Russia's domestic problems, especially its looming demographic implosion, could become a source of significant instability in the world.

Russia is losing a population equivalent of the state of Delaware each year. Its population could be cut in half by 2050. No country can endure that type loss indefinitely without serious consequences.

Second, we have an interest in Russia's neighborhood. Many countries in Eastern Europe and along Russia's border occupy positions of significant strategic and political importance. They rely on Russia for energy and trust that it won't abuse its size and resources like a playground bully.

We must respond to Russian actions that destabilize the country's neighbors or undermine the region's young democracies.

Third, by virtue of its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and the size of its territory, population, and economy, Russia remains a significant strategic player with the ability to affect many of our global interests.

We've seen this recently from Kosovo to Iran to missile defense.

For years, the Bush Administration tried to paper over problems with Russia. More recently, the State Department has said it will work with the Kremlin when possible, and push back when necessary.

This formula sounds reasonable, but I worry that it provides neither the strategic vision nor a practical framework to deal with a Kremlin that has repeatedly and successfully outmaneuvered the West in recent years.

Mr. Putin has successfully exploited differences in the Euro-Atlantic community for years. But with new leadership in several of Europe's key capitals, it is time to forge a new common strategy for dealing with Russia.

When the United States and Europe come together around a single, cogent policy, we have a long, successful track record of managing relations with Moscow.

A joint U.S.-European approach would not and should not constitute a threat to Russia. Indeed, I believe the principal goal of such an effort should be to refocus the Kremlin on all that Russia stands to gain from working with the West – and all that it stands to lose by sticking to a zero sum mentality.

The West needs to offer a clear vision of the positive role Russia could and should play as a leader in the international community. We need to devise incentives that will recognize and reward Moscow's efforts to deal responsibly with the many common challenges we face.

Conversely, if Russian leaders continue pursuing a zero sum diplomacy, then it is time we address the issue together with our allies.

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