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Iran's Support for Russia and Lessons Learned from Ukraine

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BEFORE THE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SECOND SESSION

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IRAN'S SUPPORT FOR RUSSIA AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM UKRAINE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Tuesday, April 21, 2026.

The hearing was held from 2:32 p.m. to 4:23 p.m., Room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Co-Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Commission Members Present: Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Co-Chairman; Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Ranking Member; Representative Jake Ellzey [R-TX]; Senator Thom Tillis [R-NC]; Senator Sheldon Whitehouse [D-RI]; Representative Marc Veasey [D-TX]; Representative Greg Murphy [R-NC].

Witnesses: Ilan Berman, Senior Vice President, American Foreign Policy Council; Behnam Ben Taleblu, Senior Director, Iran Program, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies;Aaron Zelin, Gloria and Ken Levy Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

OPENING STATEMENT OF JOE WILSON, CO-CHAIRMAN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Co-Chairman WILSON: [Sounds gavel.] Ladies and gentlemen, I am Joe Wilson, a member of the Helsinki Commission, grateful to call to order the Helsinki Commission hearing "Iran's Support for Russia and Lessons Learned from Ukraine."

The United States is—we will begin with opening statements, and then I am really grateful, and I am confident that our member of the House of Lords—I mean, Senate—will be here any second. Senator Whitehouse, I believe, is on the way, and I am grateful to be here with Congressman Ellzey and also Congressman Dr. Murphy. We will be having people coming forth, and then I want to pre-apologize: We have votes at some time, and so we may be recessing, but we will be back.

With that in mind, the United States is addressing the nuclear threat of Iran, along with the axis of the Iranian regime, war criminal Putin, and the Chinese Communist Party working together to threaten American families. Over the past several weeks, with President Trump's leadership, the strongest military in the world has decimated the murderous regime in Tehran. Unsurprisingly, war criminal Putin has aided the terrorist regime in Tehran. Russian tactics and intelligence methods used to murder Ukrainians

and Syrians over the past decade are now being used by the Iranian military to target and kill Americans and our allies in the Gulf of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman, along with Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Azerbaijan. Russia is teaching Ukrainian—or Iranian military how to use drones, sending them components for drones and other weapons, and providing intel about the allied positions and capabilities to kill our allied personnel. War criminal Putin understands that when the regime crumbles, as it is—just as Maduro of Caracas, Venezuela, and butcher Assad of Damascus, Syria—there will be victory for Ukraine, courageously led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Cooperation between the genocidal regimes in Tehran and Moscow did not begin in the last several weeks. The Kremlin and ayatollahs have had a deep history of sharing the information, tactics, and weapons needed to repress their own people, threatening chaos and destruction around the world. In the 1990's, Moscow and Tehran, brought together by their anti-Americanism, began their close collaboration. In fact, it was Russia that provided Iran its first centrifuges, helping Iran to launch the nuclear program it has used to terrorize Iranians, Americans, and Israelis for decades. More recently, Tehran has been a lifeline for war criminal Putin following the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Iran produced and provided Russia the initial Shahed drones used to terrorize Ukrainian cities, where families sleep under constant threat of attacks on civilians. Now there are factories across Russia producing cheap and deadly Shahed drones, which swarm by the hundreds. The Iranian regime has also enabled Russia to evade sanctions and continue funding their murderous war machine, as war criminal Putin has used the CC-controlled port of Anaklia port of the Republic of Georgia to provide arms to Iran, collaborating with the illegitimate Georgian Dream regime, which should be replaced with fair and free elections in the Republic of Georgia.

The proliferation of cheap drones intercepted using expensive Western technologies is meant to overwhelm conventional methods and cost Western countries billions to rearm against this threat. The Chinese Communist Party is taking notes and producing their own army of drones.

As the brave men and women of the United States military face down this Axis of Evil, we do so with battle-tested expertise of the Ukrainians. Ukraine is cementing alliances with the Gulf allies whose skies are threatened by waves of Iranian drones and ballistic missiles. Even as they defend their own country from war criminal Putin's genocidal invasion, Ukraine offers its capabilities to allies fighting the same Axis of Evil. Shared values of freedom, prosperity, and sacrifice for future generations are the cornerstone of the alliance been America and Ukraine.

We welcome the witnesses today exposing the collaborative murderous relationship of the regimes in Tehran and Moscow and what efforts can be undertaken in Congress to better integrate the Ukrainian experience to defeat this axis of dictators with efficiency. We must ensure that Ukraine's hard-won expertise adapting to and producing weapons to defend their families, nation, and the free

world becomes a lasting feature of transatlantic defense architecture.

Here today—and we have been joined by our co-chair, Congressman Steve Cohen of Tennessee, and indeed he is co-chair, but also this makes it bipartisan and something that is going to be really unique, as you are going to see bipartisan support for the people of Ukraine and bipartisan support for liberation of the people of Iran.

Here to share their expert perspectives are Ilan Berman, the senior vice president, American Foreign Policy Council. We have Behnam Ben Taleblu, the senior director of the Iran Program at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies; and Aaron Zelin, the Gloria and Ken Levy fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. We are grateful that each of you is here.

Co-chair Cohen, would you like to make an opening statement?

STATEMENT OF STEVE COHEN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TENNESSEE

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

First of all, I would incorporate by reference everything Mr. Wilson said. Even though I did not hear it, I know it is the right thing to have been said.

Hello, Senator. One of my favorite senators. Tell them you were just teasing about coming back. [LAUGHTER.]

[OFF-SIDE CONVERSATION.]

Representative COHEN: Back to my opening statement. [LAUGHTER.] Thank you for coming. Senator Tillis told me he was going to come hear it. [LAUGHTER.]

For decades, Russia and Iran have been bound by their shared disdain of freedom and democracy, and their insistence on overturning the rules-based world order that has kept Americans safe and secure for generations. Despite overwhelming evidence that the Russia-Iran relationship has deepened over the past several years, the Trump administration is willfully ignoring the pattern.

We all know that Russia's been using Iran-designated Shahed drones to continue its genocidal war in Ukraine, and The Wall Street Journal recently reported Russia's sharing intelligence with Iran about U.S. positions and capabilities in our conflict or encounter, whatever we call it now, with Iran. Still, the Trump administration has no intention of punishing Russia. In fact, it defended Russia by taking upon themself to explain their point of view, saying they would say we would do it against them when referring to our support for a democratic nation that was attacked unprovoked. On the other hand, President Zelenskyy shared remarks that he received a request from the United States for support and protection against Shahed drones and said yes immediately. Ukraine is ready and willing to help, while Russia's actually working to endanger American lives.

Russia and Iran have also supported each other in evading Western sanctions, attempting to save their failing economies while refusing to stop the behaviors that motivated these sanctions to begin with. Like the Kremlin, Iran's regime is using war as an opportunity to tighten its grip on power and deepen their repression, escalating violence and imprisonment of dissenters.

While dictators freely share information and resources, the democratic world is falling sorely behind in strengthening our cooperation in advancing the cause of freedom. Ukrainians are eager to support us and our allies in defending against Iranian attacks cheaply and efficiently, and yet President Trump's Pentagon is dragging its feet in fully integrating Ukrainian expertise and capabilities into our national defense. We should accept Ukraine's hard-earned expertise in defending against the Iran-Russia axis as quickly as possible. Encouraging Ukrainian drone production in the United States and creating pathways for the United States to buy Ukrainian drones, for example, is a clear step that the Pentagon should be exploring to simultaneously improve U.S. capabilities and support Ukraine. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses what concrete steps the Department of Defense should be taking to better learn the lessons Ukraine is offering to teach us.

With that, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Co-chair.

We will now have each of the witnesses at five minutes, and then we will additionally from that then provide for each of members here to ask questions. I am really grateful that we have been joined by the very honorable, esteemed Senator Thom Tillis of the Republic of North Carolina. [LAUGHTER.] My next-door neighbor, so I am really happy to claim him as just a person that we all appreciate. We do.

Representative COHEN: It is the—it is the Bojangles State.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Bojangles. Hey—hey.

Senator TILLIS: Okay, SC.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Also, hey, also Pepsi-Cola. We could think a whole lot about it. Anyway, anyway, we have to be humble about that in South Carolina.

With this, Ilan Berman, thank you, the senior vice president, American Foreign Policy Council.

TESTIMONY OF ILAN BERMAN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL

Mr. BERMAN: Thank you, Congressman. Congressman, distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to talk about this issue. It is a critical issue, and I am honored by the opportunity to speak first because I think it is necessary as we get into the conversation of the—understanding the dynamics of the Russian-Iranian relationship to set the frame—to explain where it came from, how it is operating, and where it is likely to be going.

The proper place for us to start is to talk about the current conflict with Iran. This is fundamentally an effort by the United States, by the Trump administration, to address the gravity of the threat—the multifaceted threat that the Iranian regime poses to the United States, to America's regional partners, and to the international community at large. It is also in many ways a stress test of the international partnerships that Iran has built over preceding years, and the most prominent among these is Iran's evolving strategic partnership with Russia.

Over the past seven weeks, Russia has materially aided the Iranian regime in its fight against the United States in a number of

ways. It has provided Iran with vital intelligence that has improved the regime's targeting of Israel as well as U.S. forces and American installations in the region. It has supplied Iran with components for upgraded Shahed drones that are designed to improve navigation, targeting, and resistance to electronic jamming. Very importantly, these are innovations that Russia has developed through its own experiences in its war of aggression against Ukraine that it is now transferring in terms of technology and know-how to the Iranian regime. Russia has also provided Iran with tactical advice, including guidance on how many drones to deploy per strike at what altitudes, mirroring the mass drone swarms that it uses in Ukraine. As a result, Iranian strike patterns that we saw at the beginning of the war closely resembled Russian operations, with war—with waves of drones targeting infrastructure and radar following—followed by precision missile strikes on command-and-control systems.

This extensive assistance reflects the depth and the—and the vibrancy of the contemporary Russian-Iranian relationship, and it has a partnership that is become a defining feature of Iranian foreign policy as well as the emerging Axis of Upheaval that is now arrayed against the United States.

To understand the current scope of the Russian-Iranian relationship, we have to understand—we have to frame it as more than anything else a post-Soviet construct that emerged in the 1990's out of overlapping practical and ideological interests. For some three decades, however, the partnership has been deeply asymmetrical in nature.

The February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine fundamentally altered this dynamic. The support that Iran has provided to Russia over the past four years has been both extensive and consequential. This has included deliveries of drones, the provision of blueprints for the serial production of unmanned systems, and short-range ballistic missiles, artillery, ammunition, small arms, and associated logistics. In return, Iran has reaped substantial benefits from this new balance. It has received Russian help in upgrading its own missile forces, in intelligence collection, and in cyber capabilities. These are capabilities that the United States and its regional partners are being forced to contend with now.

These dynamics, I would argue, hold important lessons for the United States. There are many, but I will just stress three of them.

The first is that the Kremlin cannot be counted on as a partner for containing Iran. This is something that Russia has consistently tried to do. The Kremlin has consistently tried to present itself as a constructive actor in this regard and is doing so again now, including through offers of becoming a warehouse for out-shipped Iranian uranium as part of any potential agreement that has concluded between Washington and Tehran, but history, I think, is instructive here. For both strategic and ideological reasons, Moscow in practice has consistently prioritized its partnership with Iran's regime above and beyond any potential benefits that it—that may accrue to it from collaboration with the West. Today those calculations are even more compelling for the Russians in light of Russia's growing international isolation and its dwindling list of international partners.

The second lesson that I would take from this is that Russian-Iranian cooperation rests on fragile foundations. There is still mutual ideological distrust between the two sides, with Moscow distrusting Iran's expansionist version of Islamism and Tehran remembering Russia's foreign policy opportunism. Practically, as well, the two countries are natural strategic competitors across a number of domains, including in the Middle East and in the Caucasus. Both likewise rely heavily on oil and natural gas exports, and target many of the same markets, particularly in Asia, and specifically China. That competition is likely to become more intense over time.

Finally, I think it is necessary to understand that Iran's involvement in the Ukraine conflict and Russia's reciprocal involvement in the current conflict reflect the fact that the two conflicts are a common fight. There is debate now in Washington about whether the Middle East and Eastern Europe and the Indo-Pacific should be separated and they constitute separate problem sets, but the adversaries have made their opinions very, very clear. The current collaboration between Russia and Iran—and the broader political, military, economic, and information coordination that has visible across the axis—reflects the fact that America's adversaries are committed to each other's survival in the face of Western pressure.

Thank you.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Vice President Berman. We appreciate that so much.

We are grateful now to have Benham Ben Taleblu, the senior director of the Iran Program of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

TESTIMONY OF BEHNAM BEN TALEBLU, SENIOR DIRECTOR, IRAN PROGRAM, FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

Mr. TALEBLU: Thank you, distinguished Co-chairman. Honored members of the Helsinki Commission, thank you for the invitation and opportunity to testify. It is a privilege to present my analysis today alongside Ilan Berman and Aaron Zelin to unpack the challenges that Russo-Iranian cooperation poses to America, as well as to the security of our partners and allies in Europe and in the Middle East.

My written testimony goes into greater detail about the origins, evolution, and future of these ties, and more importantly, the exact exchange between both actors since 2022. Today I will focus my oral presentation on the changing strategic landscape of Russo-Iranian ties before pivoting to offer policy options, more of which can also be found in my written submission.

We are living today in an era of great-power competition and facing an interconnected web of strategic threats to the homeland. While the focus of this Commission is on Ukraine, it would be a mistake to disconnect the dots between Russia and Iran and look at these threats in silos. There is a rising authoritarian and anti-American axis of aggressors consisting of Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, increasingly looking for low-cost ways to magnify their relative power against the U.S. and against our democratic partners. This axis may be composed of states with different polit-

ical ideologies and systems, but they are predatory regimes that are linked by their oppression of their own people and their harboring of revisionist intentions abroad.

Iran's relationship with China—or, with Russia, forgive me, over the past five centuries can be described as, first, turbulent; then transactional; and now, more recently, transformational. There is, indeed, a history of mistrust and competition between Russia and Iran that spans multiple regime types in both countries over the centuries, but the Russia-Iran relationship today is a story of choices, not structural forces. Those choices have led Iran to be more deeper enmeshed in an anti-American axis by entering the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2023 and entering the BRICS bloc in 2024. In 2025, Iran and Russia signed a 20-year strategic agreement to cement their security, energy, economic, technological, cyber, and even political cooperation. Still, this agreement is notably silent on the issue of mutual defense. In many ways, the agreement revealed the limits of the Russo-Iranian partnership as much as it did the intent to grow this partnership and be committed to a new anti-American order.

More acutely, in Ukraine, Iran has provided Russia with lethal one-way attack drones, as well as the capability to domestically manufacture these drones on Russian soil. Tehran's decision to provide material support to Moscow represents a critical juncture, not just in their historic ties but also in the four decades of the Islamic Republic's ideological enmity with the West. For the first time ever, Iran can be considered an active participant in a war on the European continent. Although Russian military support to Iran has not been as extensive as the reported four billion worth of weaponry that Iran has been able to give Russia since 2022, zooming out, the breadth of what Russia has and can offer the Islamic Republic remains significant. This ranges from sending Iran cash, gold, captured Western weapons from the Ukrainian battlefield, more recently cyber tools to surveil and repress Iranian citizens, and much more recently, targeting data on U.S. positions in the region via satellite passes.

Broadening the aperture even further, since 2022 Russia assisted Iran by launching and placing eight—eight—Iranian satellites into low Earth orbit, with zero failures, a success record that Iran's own space launch vehicles do not have. In 2022, Russia even built a satellite for the sanctioned Iranian Space Agency. To counter this cooperation and more Congress should support Iranian freedom and internet freedom more broadly by supporting the FREEDOM Act, the Iran Human Rights Internet Freedom and Accountability Act, and the Internet Reach and Access Now Act, popularly known as the IRAN Act. Long as there is an anti-American, autocratic, and theocratic government in Tehran, Washington will have to contend with a growing Russia-Iranian axis.

More recently, the Congress could draw on battlefield lessons learned by countering Iranian drones in Ukraine, by building on the joint interagency task force, JITF 401, established by last year's [NDAA] National Defense Authorization Act. Congress can review and renew this mandate and build on it for an independent congressional review of its findings, and amend it to include specific references learned from the Ukrainian theater that could be

applicable to the Persian Gulf and broader Middle East and CENTCOM AOR for detecting and defeating Iranian and Russian unmanned aerial threats. Additionally, Congress can exercise greater oversight of legislation they have already passed in a key 2024 supplemental bill with funding for Ukraine possessing Iran-related provisions pertaining to counterproliferation, human rights, and even oil sanctions. These provisions are known as the Fight CRIME Act, the MAHSA Act, and the SHIP Act. What is their status today?

Congress should also not miss an opportunity to build on multilateral victories that it has already achieved, rather than letting them atrophy, like the snapback of U.N. sanctions on Iran which Russia declared it will not recognize. It should never miss an opportunity to put the evolving Russia-Iranian relationship into bright lights for the American public, for the Iranian people, for the Ukrainian people, and for the world, and to pressure, name, shame, and punish this cooperation wherever it manifests itself. On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for your time, attention, and the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Director Taleblu, thank you very much. We now proceed to Aaron Zelin, who is the Gloria and Ken Levy Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

TESTIMONY OF AARON ZELIN, GLORIA AND KEN LEVY FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Mr. ZELIN: Thank you to Co-Chairman Wilson and Cohen and the commissioners for giving me the opportunity to testify today on Iran's support for Russia, lessons learned from Ukraine, and the broader context that not only affects our allies in Europe and the Middle East but also the broader Asia-Pacific theater. Since the U.S. and Israel launched their war on Iran and its proxy network on February 28, Russia has reversed the flow of support that Iran had been providing Russia in its all-out war against Ukraine since 2022. Russia has been supplying Iran with parts to modify Shahed drones, providing improved communications, navigation, and targeting capabilities, while sharing its accumulated experiences from using drone swarms against Ukraine, including advice on how best to launch coordinated multi-drone attacks. Russia has also been providing Iran with targeting intelligence on the locations of U.S. warships and aircraft.

Outside of direct military support for Iran, Russia has also indirectly benefited. The war has drained supplies that Ukraine needs in defending itself against Russia, diverted diplomatic attention from Ukraine, and, as a consequence of the Strait of Hormuz being closed, has produced higher oil prices and increased export opportunities that boost Russia's ability to pour added income into its military spending for its continued military campaign against Ukraine. While Russia has certainly taken advantage of this war, it has also provided important opportunities for the Ukrainian government to build new ties with the Gulf states and Syria as well. In late March, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy embarked on a high-profile tour of the Gulf region, signing security partnerships with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. Ukraine agreed to provide

Gulf states with its complete air defense system based on its experiences dealing with Russia's use of Iran's Shahed drones.

In quick order, Zelenskyy dispatched more than 200 Ukrainian counter-drone specialists who helped directly shoot down Iranian Shahed drones across several Gulf countries beginning earlier this month. This is an important early step for Ukraine in undermining Russia in the Gulf. Russia is no longer seen by Gulf states as a neutral actor, but as a participant in the war on Iran's side, opening opportunities for Ukraine to attract investment, scale production of its defense industrial complex, and weaken Russia's position as a traditional player in the Middle East arms market. Additionally, Ukraine has leveraged the collapse of the Assad regime to build new diplomatic relationships with Syria. Zelenskyy even visited Damascus just a few weeks ago. Ukraine's foreign minister framed the Syrian opening explicitly in anti-Russian terms, stating that the collapse of Assad's dictatorship "significantly weakens the expansionism of Russia, which for years used Syrian territory, its resources, and people as a foothold to spread its destructive influence in the Middle East".

During the most recent meetings earlier this month, issues related to joint security were discussed, logistics related to securing trade and maritime routes, and food security related to grain transfers from Ukraine to Syria as an alternative to Russia. Since the two countries have restored diplomatic relations, bilateral trade has increased ninefold in just the past 16 months or so. This is all crucial since, even after the U.S. completed its full military withdrawal from Syria last week, Russia maintains a small foothold in its bases on Syria's Mediterranean coast. Therefore, an easy win for U.S. policy in the region that undermines Russia and indirectly Iran while bolstering U.S. security architecture in the region is to push Syria to ask Russia to leave its bases and have Ukraine replace them as a security partner.

Another component worth mentioning is the fact that Iran—that the Iran war has strengthened Russia's hand against our European allies, due to the Trump administration relaxing some sanctions on Russian oil and gas in the last month or so, which was extended for another month just days ago, making it harder for Europe to increase pressure on Moscow. This has undermined the U.S.-European relationship, since it has motivated number of European states to derisk from what it views as an increasingly erratic American ally and accelerate their own autonomous defense capabilities. Put together, the Iran war has allowed Ukraine, once entirely dependent on Western patrons and peripheral to Middle Eastern affairs, to leverage the deepened Russia-Iran partnership to position itself as a security exporter, trading battlefield-proven drone expertise for Gulf oil, Western weapons, Syrian diplomatic footholds, and a growing role in shaping post-American European defense architecture.

Instead of hindering Ukraine, Washington needs to be working with Kyiv to bolster its role regionally and for Washington to secure greater ties with Europe's largest country. Therefore, I urge the Senate and House of Representatives to heed the following recommendations going forward, and happy to discuss in more detail in the Q&A or refer to my written testimony. First, formally re-

frame Ukraine as a net security exporter and institutionalize that status through Congress. Second, negotiate a multiyear defense memorandum of understanding codified by Congress with a dedicated special envoy. Third, build a trilateral U.S.-Ukraine-Gulf security architecture around counter-drone technology. Fourth, weaponize Russia's role in the Iran war to deepen Gulf State estrangement from Moscow and tighten sanctions. Fifth, embed Ukraine's drone ecosystem into U.S. and NATO defense industrial strategy for the long term. Finally, sixth, use Ukraine's restored relationship with Syria as leverage to diplomatically pressure Russia's eviction from its Mediterranean bases, tying U.S. sanctions on Damascus to Russia's withdrawal.

Thank you very much.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much—very much, Mr. Zelin, for your participation.

We will now begin with questions. We will begin with Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina.

STATEMENT OF THOM TILLIS, U.S. SENATE, FROM NORTH CAROLINA

Senator TILLIS: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to my colleagues on the committee. All but Greg are a sight for sore eyes. [LAUGHS.] To my friend Dr. Murphy, who may or may not have participated in administering the Heimlich maneuver to me at one point a couple of years ago. [LAUGHTER.] I maintain it was just a matter of convenience. I would have figured it out on my own. [LAUGHTER.]

On a serious subject, I am actually wearing Ukraine colors, which I do at least once a week. Have since the illegal invasion. I want to drill down a little bit on what I think we need to educate this administration on. It is Russia, on the one hand, wanting to cozy up to us, and on the other hand I believe if you take—delineating Mr. Berman, what you said, the intel, the drone upgrades, the tactical advice, the strike patterns that are disturbingly similar to what we have seen Russia do in Ukraine, cyber capability-what part of this—I mean, how can I not possibly assume that one of the reasons why we have American servicemembers injured or dead in the Middle East right now is because of the capabilities that Iran received from the coaching and material support of Russia? Can I make that—is that a leap? Or is that a logical extension of the information that you and Mr. Taleblu have communicated in your opening statements?

Mr. BERMAN: Thank you, Senator. I think that is right. I think that is an accurate interpretation of—

Seantor TILLIS: In some ways Putin's the new Soleimani, right? He is out giving advice and telling people on the ground to kill American soldiers in American outposts outside of Iran. Is that hyperbole?

Mr. BERMAN: I think that description is a little bit overblown. Among other things, I think—

Senator TILLIS: Because of the matter of scale. In my opinion, if Putin is responsible for one dead American servicemember, he might as well be responsible for 5,000. Is it fair to say that the kind of advice that Putin and Russia have been giving Iran has

had deadly consequences, potentially, for military personnel in that area of responsibility?

Mr. BERMAN: Absolutely.

Senator TILLIS: Thank you.

Mr. Taleblu—is that—am I pronouncing that anywhere near right? Okay. You made a comment about the Russia relationship being turbulent, transactional, to transformational. The transformational component, I assume, occurred in and around the time they started collaborating with respect to using weapons manufactured in Iran and deployed in Ukraine. Is that when transformational took place?

Mr. TALEBLU: Exactly. The end of Syria and the beginning of the second Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Senator TILLIS: Yes. Is it—so is it fair to say that Russia has been able to create a capability in Iran that it is—they have asymmetrical capabilities and a level of execution that could only be explained through the coaching and constant mentoring of Vladimir Putin and Russia? Is that a fair statement? How much of this is organic, how much of this is learning from the battlefield of Ukraine?

Mr. TALEBLU: That the Iranians have learned, or that the—

Senator TILLIS: Yes, that the Iranians have learned.

Mr. TALEBLU: The Russians have materially supported that capability. Also, I would say—perhaps a bit out of the scope of this Commission—the Chinese. The Russians and the Chinese together, the targeting data given to the Iranians by virtue of the satellite passes, America's great-power competitors do not need to give guns for their support to be lethal. They can just be passive and give this satellite data, and it can have lethal consequences in the Middle East.

Senator TILLIS: Mr. Zelin, and you were talking about—as I understand it, in Syria right now Russia is—it is really rich coming from Russia—that they are kind of keeping the peace. What are they really doing in Syria now?

Mr. ZELIN: Right now in Syria they are just sitting in their bases, to be honest. They are not actually providing any training or help—

Senator TILLIS: Except that they have the benefit of presence there.

Mr. ZELIN: Exactly.

Senator TILLIS: Their presence has never produced a positive outcome, in my opinion, including in Syria.

Mr. ZELIN: No. They helped the Assad regime kill a million-plus Syrians during the civil war, prior to the overthrow in 2024.

Senator TILLIS: Yes. You know, what I want to know—I appreciate being able to come over here. Mr. Chairman, appreciate you calling on me to ask questions. You know, we are trying to communicate very clearly and plainly to our colleagues in Congress that Russia is a bad actor. Russia is killing thousands of people on the Ukrainian battlefield. They are responsible, directly and indirectly, for the deaths of thousands of people in Iran and American servicemembers. We have got to continue to communicate that message. Vladimir Putin is not an honest broker. He is a liar. You can tell when he is lying when his lips are moving. The last thing

we should be doing is trying to build any kind of relationship with this man who is responsible for untold deaths.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator. Indeed, amen. With that unbiased view of my—of what the Senator said. I am really proud of him. Anyway, we are going to proceed now to Co-Chair Steve Cohen. Then we will actually recess and come back for Congressman Ellzey, and Congressman Murphy, and myself.

Mr. Co-Chair.

Representative COHEN: Thank you. Appreciate it, Mr. Chair.

The missiles that—the Shahed missiles—they were originally developed by Iran, were they not?

Mr. BERMAN: Drones? Yes—

Representative COHEN: Drones, I am sorry, yes. They sent them to Russia?

Mr. BERMAN: Correct.

Representative COHEN: Then Russia has improvised upon them and approved them?

Mr. BERMAN: The Iranian cooperation also included the transfer of blueprints that allowed Russia to create serial production of Shahed-class drones in Russia at this industrial zone called Yelabuga. The Russians have not just produced them at scale. They have also iterated and innovated on those designs based upon their firsthand battle experience on the frontlines with Ukraine.

Representative COHEN: The Ukrainians have a counter-drone. Is it effective against these Shaheds or Shaheds, or whatever?

Mr. BERMAN: Yes, to a point. Because there is a scaling issue. Ukraine has figured out, over a very hard-fought four years, that the way to intercept and to deal with these swarms of Russian drones is not through the use of costly interceptor missiles, which they simply cannot buy at scale and they cannot produce, but rather to create interceptor drones. What they have done is they have created a very rapid defense innovation cycle that allows them to create capabilities that can keep pace with what Russia is doing.

Representative COHEN: They have offered this, as I understand it, to the United States.

Mr. BERMAN: Correct.

Representative COHEN: Has the United States had a response that you know of?

Mr. BERMAN: Not that I know of.

Representative COHEN: Either of you know of the United States response?

Mr. TALEBLU: Not that we know of.

Mr. ZELIN: No. My understanding is that there has been some ignoring of it, even though the U.S. should take the lessons learned from this for our own defense, but also other allies we have in Europe as well as in the Middle East.

Representative COHEN: Can you imagine a reason why they would not accept them? Is it just haughty?

Mr. ZELIN: I am not sure.

Representative COHEN: There is no reason not to accept the advice. They have identified themselves as being experts in the development of drones, and that is one thing that war has forced upon them, and they have adapted well. They have offered this, and not

to accept it is to potentially incur loss of American life. The idea that we would not accept it is just—is unexplainable. It is something that we should benefit from.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Indeed, we will be recessing for three different votes. We have been joined by Congressman Veasey from the Republic of Texas. We are grateful for his service, and so it is a team effort. I believe Senator—we will recess and then actually—and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse is on the way to preside as we are voting, so you can continue, however.

Thank you.

Senator TILLIS: I know how to clear a room. I do have some other questions.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Hey, this is even better. Hey, I am very grateful to turn it over to Senator Thom Tillis of the State of North Carolina.

Thank you.

Senator TILLIS: You know I love South Carolina. It is a cute little State. It is going to be just like North Carolina when it grows up. [LAUGHTER.]

Co-Chairman WILSON: Hey, hey, North Carolina is a valley of humility between two mountains of conceit, South Carolina and Virginia. [LAUGHTER.]

Senator TILLIS: Actually, I will, just so that we can keep the discussion going, and then my colleagues have to vote, the one thing I wanted to say, I wanted to get to these points. There were very important points; I have my staff here. We will be following up. I mean, we really do need to have people recognized—and we have been tracking China too—but to remain focused on Russia. There are some people now that believe that Russia can be trusted. There are some people that think maybe there was some legitimate reason to go into Ukraine here, which is absurd. I feel very strongly that we have to communicate to our colleagues in the administration that you cannot trust Russia. They are murderers. I have been to—[coughs]—excuse me—Ukraine and Bucha, and it is real. In fact, I am going to be going back there before I end my tenure in the Senate.

The other thing that I think is important to look at is exactly what I think Mr. Zelin said. What an enormous capability. Ukraine went from being attacked—I remember the intelligence estimates before the invasion, when the lying Vladimir Putin said they were going to—they were just doing a special exercise. They were massing at the border. You know, it was no big thing to watch here. Then I went to a military—special military operation. We were getting briefings back then that estimated that Ukraine [sic; Russia] would have air superiority within 72 to 96 hours and have control over whatever ground they wanted in Ukraine within a matter of weeks. Our estimates were way off.

They were probably off for two reasons. One, we had no earthly idea how much in disrepair the officer corps were for Russia. They just did not know how to fight. They are incapable of doing multipillar, complex operations, like we do in our sleep with our allies on a repetitive basis. They were weak. Russia—and Ukraine proved to be enormously strong, resilient, and courageous. Now we have

a country that was invaded, that has become the largest, most lethal, sophisticated army in Europe. They are still holding off this so-called near-peer competitor, the United States. Well, we clearly now know that the only reason they are even a near-peer competitor is because of their nuclear arsenal. It is certainly not because they have a conventional force that could not be dealt with. Having said that, they are building a relationship with Iran that is deadly and having deadly consequences on the battlefield in Iran and in Ukraine.

The testimony that you all are providing, I think, is very, very important to be heard on both sides of the capital, because we can never change our posture toward a totalitarian. That is what Vladimir Putin is. I guess the question that I had, Mr. Zelin, that I did not have time—I was taking my notes back. I have my staff here to followup. What would be the rational basis—other than we do not like Russia anywhere—what would be the rational basis from the perspective of U.S. diplomacy that we would want them out of Syria? I mean, that they are—that they are potentially disruptive, malign. In other words, how can I build—I want them out of everywhere. I mean, anywhere out of Russian soil is too much for me. What rational basis, as a matter of diplomatic communications, would you use to argue that case?

Mr. ZELIN: I mean, for one, we already know, based off of information that has come out publicly, that parts of Russia and their intelligence community have assisted former regime officials from the Assad regime being involved in an insurgency against the new Syrian government. They are undermining what is going on. Plus, their own disinformation networks within the Syrian ecosystem. Even if we want to, you know, take away sort of the U.S. frame for it, from the perspective of the Syrian government, they are not necessarily helpful either.

One of their challenges is that much of the military hardware and technology they have, because there is this 60-plus-year historical relationship going back to the Soviet Union, and then, you know, with Russia, they are reliant on it. That is why I think Ukraine could be an important piece in that because, you know, just in the same way the U.S. pushed sort of Central and European countries to help the Ukrainians out, because they had old stockpiles of weapons from that time period, we could do the same with the Ukrainians because they have the old Soviet and Russian gear as well, to try and push it out before, you know, the U.S. starts partnering them more and bringing in more Western tech and hardware. It is definitely an important step.

Plus, Russia does not just use the base in Syria just to be there to annoy us, or the Turks, or the Israelis, or even the Syrians. But it is a launch pad for their operations into Africa. Without that base there, they would be having more of a difficult time moving a lot of their assets into what they are doing in Africa, which is obviously destabilizing as well.

Senator TILLIS: That is a great point. Yes. Yes. I have tried to continue to remind everyone that Russia is not just in Ukraine. Their cancer has metastasized itself all throughout, particularly northern and central Africa.

Mr. Berman, I would like to try and find a smoking gun. Everybody believes that Putin is involved in this. I have gone so far as to use hyperbole to say he is not much different than Soleimani, except for the number of bodies or the number of dead people that he can be responsible for. Like I said, after one, it could be 5,000. The number is not different to me. How do we actually connect those dots, where if I want—you know, intuitively their actions, I think, have resulted in some of the strikes that you have seen outside of Iran. Their actions have resulted in the injury and death of American servicemembers. Is there any way to really kind of come close to connecting the dots close to a smoking gun to say, but for Russia's involvement it would have been less likely that those operations would have been successful?

Mr. BERMAN: I think it is certainly possible to do in the context of Russia and Ukraine, because the type of capabilities that you see Russia employ on a daily basis against Ukrainian population centers and Ukrainian civilians are a product of that strategic partnership. The technology—

Senator TILLIS: Mmm hmm. For that collaboration?

Mr. BERMAN: But for—

Senator TILLIS: That level of sophistication and execution would have been unlikely?

Mr. BERMAN: Absolutely. In fact, what we saw before—what we have seen as a central dynamic in the Russian war against Ukraine, Russian war on Ukraine, has been the fact that Russia has run into unforeseen difficulties in terms of manpower, in terms of technological capabilities, in terms of force projection, that have forced it to rely not just on conscripts, including inmates and convicted criminals, but also on human capital from as far afield as Africa. The technological injects that Russia has received, Iran ranks very high on that list in terms of increasing the lethality of the Russian offensive.

Senator TILLIS: Well, my—in the summary that was—I wanted to make sure that I got over here for this hearing, and my—I have two staff present here. I want to—if we can get information from any of you, but, you know, we intend to—I intend to focus a floor speech on this, to not forget Vladimir Putin is a bad guy and should not be sitting at the table, treated at a peer level with the United States of America. That has to do with our ongoing discussions in Ukraine. He is a liar. He is responsible for the deaths of Americans, and to the extent that we can get, but also, I want to be as—I want to—I want to have as many connecting points to the smoking gun as possible. All of you, if you can maybe indulge my staff, we will be in touch to see how we can put that together and then prepare a floor speech to keep people focused on this.

Senator Whitehouse, I inadvertently became an interim chair while you were on the way over here. Our colleagues in the House have had to go to the chamber to vote three times. I am supposed to pass the gavel to you.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: I am sure you have been doing a superb job.

Senator TILLIS: You know what? I love it. You know, it is kind of like I have gotten a lot of questions in. I went into overtime. I did not get admonished. Normally, I get admonished. If they are

not back by the time you complete your questions, I think you can put them in recess, subject to the call of the chair.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: I will do so.

Senator TILLIS: Senator Whitehouse.

STATEMENT OF SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, U.S. SENATE, FROM RHODE ISLAND

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Thank you to the witnesses for being here. If you need any clearer example that Ukraine is a friend to the United States and Russia is our enemy, look no farther than the war in Iran. Russia is assisting Iran in targeting American troops, while Ukraine is helping U.S. forces and our allies in the Gulf defend against those Russian-guided Iranian attacks. Iran sent Shahed drones to Russia to use in their attacks on Ukraine since 2022. Moscow is repaying the favor to Tehran, assisting Iran's war effort with intelligence, targeting data, and combat drones.

Moscow also provided Iran with satellite imagery used in the March Iranian drone and missile strikes on U.S. planes and personnel at the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. These attacks injured multiple U.S. servicemembers, guided in with Russian intelligence support, and led to the death of one soldier, Sergeant Benjamin Pennington of Kentucky. On April 5, President Zelenskyy stated that Moscow is also giving Iran satellite imagery and intelligence data on Israeli energy infrastructure sites to help Iran bomb our ally Israel more precisely and successfully. Russia is also suspected of sending drones in road shipments disguised as humanitarian convoys.

Despite the battle Russia is waging against Ukraine, which is taking all its energy and resources to defend itself, Ukraine still comes out to support friends in need, demonstrating, yet again, their worthiness of our continued and loyal support. Just one day after we requested assistance, Ukraine sent a team of drone experts and interceptors to the Middle East. Working to support U.S. forces in Jordan and other locations, Ukrainian trainers shared expertise in countermeasures, electronic warfare, and best techniques for shooting down Iranian drones. Zelenskyy's diplomatic engagement in the Middle East has led to security agreements to provide Ukraine's battlefield-tested technologies and experience to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Ukraine has started defense talks with Jordan, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

The assistance includes not just interceptors, but entire drone and anti-drone systems that include software, training, electronic warfare systems, and even maritime drones. In return, these new 10-year defense deals will provide a vital alternative source of finance for Ukraine's defense industry. Russia arms our adversary, aids lethal attacks on American military and civilian targets, and assists the attacks on our friends and allies in the neighborhood, while Ukraine offers us and our allies its hard-earned expertise and help. The contrast could not be clearer.

One other point of moral comparison here is that Vladimir Putin targets maternity hospitals for bombs. The Ukrainians, by contrast, even tried to spare the horses that the Russian army was using in cavalry charges against Ukrainian positions. You could see from the drone videos that they were using the drones to spook the

horses so the horses would throw the soldier, so that the Ukrainians could then attack the Russian soldier without harm to the horse. You know, there is something about a people that will go to that level of trouble in the middle of a war to protect horses, up against people who, as the aggressors in a war, think that maternity hospitals are a proper target for rocket and bomb attacks.

I do not know why this is not clearer to the administration, but I think it is clear to the world. I am eager to be of help. If any of you have a brief comment in response to what I have said, or a reaction, I invite you to make that comment now. If no House members have arrived, we will then go into recess, but please proceed. We will just go right across.

Mr. BERMAN: Sir, I agree completely. I think the way Ukraine has been prosecuting the conflict speaks volumes, not only about the moral imbalance that you see in the conflict but also about the stakes that are involved. When I meet with Ukrainian officials, when you meet with Ukrainian officials, I hear the same refrain repeatedly. Which is that Ukraine is the tip of the spear of a larger—of a larger problem, right? Ukraine is fighting on the front line against Russian revisionism.

I think that is a message that needs to be heard clearer here in Washington. It is certainly a message that is being heard on NATO's eastern flank, where there are countries in the Baltics and countries in Eastern Europe—Central and Eastern Europe that are arming because they hear and they feel a bear at the door, the way the Ukrainians do. I think we do them no service in terms of our partnership if we do not recognize that fact that Russia may have begun with Ukraine, but it will not end there.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Yes. Agreed.

Mr. Taleblu.

Mr. TALEBLU: Just very briefly, because I wholeheartedly agree with what you said, sir. Looking at most military conflicts, there is seldom the opportunity to marry your head and your heart, your strategy and your values. Both in the Ukrainian theater as well as in the Middle East, we have that opportunity. We just have to see it for what it is, and not disconnect the dots. Actually, it takes effort and time to disconnect the dots. That is where I really do feel like Uncle Sam is making an own-goal, or is working on an own-goal there.

I mean, just think about it materially for a second. The defense industrial base of Ukraine, strength to that is strength to our defense industrial base. In terms of the battle tactics, the knowledge gleaned against unmanned Iranian aerial threats and unmanned Russian aerial threats is a boon not just to us but our partners in the region who we have spent so much time and money, like the Gulf Cooperation Council states like Israel, trying to help in this exact space. Whether we are looking at this through the strategic lens or all the correct moral lenses that you mentioned, sir, this is a huge value-add in the plus column.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: Mr. Zelin.

Mr. ZELIN: I have to heartily agree with everybody else on this panel, too. Ukraine is a true friend of the United States, whereas Russia is duplicitous. In many ways, they can be a key ally in this new world we are starting to see develop in recent years, as well

as—you know, obviously a lot of the discussion today has been about, you know, the Middle East, and related to Europe as well. I would also go as far as to say that Ukraine could be an important component in the U.S.' strategy vis-á-vis the Asia-Pacific as well, because they have learned a lot in fighting the Russians.

Therefore, that could be important when we are thinking about what the Chinese could potentially do vis-á-vis Taiwan, or Japan, or South Korea. While our adversaries are all teaming up, as was mentioned earlier—Russia, China, Iran, North Korea—we need to bring our great ally, Ukraine, the biggest country in Europe, into our strategy, related not just with Europe but also with the Middle East and Asia-Pacific too.

Senator WHITEHOUSE: It would be nice if we could encourage their rapid entry into the EU as well, and get a defense agreement that would be akin to NATO Article 5, so that this does not recur.

I will make one additional point while we have a moment, which is that I think that there are elements of the American press who have bought into a false Russian narrative that Russia is actually winning this war. When you are sacrificing 35,000 soldiers a month into the meat grinder of the line of contact, it is hard to say that you are winning. I am sick of reading about the fall of Pokrovsk, as if something important happened there. As if Russia took over a city. For starters, Pokrovsk is mostly rubble right now. What happens is that Russia will send a doomed small patrol into the rubble. They will hoist a Russian flag, take a picture of it, and send that out, and within half an hour, they are all dead, but the picture goes out. Moscow believes that something positive has happened. Moscow puts out the propaganda that something positive has happened. You see another headline in the West: Pokrovsk has fallen.

I just think that, particularly considering their resources, everything looks like—to me, like the Ukrainians are winning. I would particularly salute the work that they have done on the Russian shadow fleet. I think somebody called them the Ukrainian kinetic sanctions program. [Laughter.] It has actually been quite effective, not only against the affected vessels, but against the insurance and support networks that are behind those ships. They have dramatically raised the cost and shrunk the availability of shadow fleet ships to feed Russia's revenue machine in oil sales. Even there, again, you see the Ukrainians going out of their way to minimize casualties and even to protect against oil spills.

They are in a war for their lives. They were frozen through the winter by attacks on civilian electricity infrastructure. The maternity hospitals are being bombed. The Russians are kidnapping Ukrainian children and sending them to unwelcome foreign homes. In that context of battle, they care to take the trouble to make sure that they are only destroying the steering and guidance systems of the ship. If they have figured out how to get on board and sabotage the ship from within, they make sure that they leave the explosive device in a place where, when they detonate it, it will not harm crew members. Bravo to them, and onward with the kinetic sanctions program. Thank you, again, to Ukraine for demonstrating that even in the midst of a brutal attack you can still be humane and decent people.

Ukraine makes me proud to be a human being. That is where we are. With that, I will put the hearing into recess, subject to the call of the chair upon the return of our House friends from their votes.

Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE.]

[RECESS.]

Co-Chairman WILSON: Ladies and gentlemen, we shall resume again with the Helsinki Commission, continuing the hearing this afternoon to address the issues, so important, of Iran's support for Russia and lessons learned from Ukraine. As the other colleagues come back from the floor, and we are—as you can tell-we never know what our schedule is. We do know one thing: We appreciate the people of Ukraine. We appreciate the efforts being made.

With that in mind, Mr. Berman, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is the first European head of State to visit with President al-Sharaa of Syria, with additional visits to our Gulf State allies. President Trump has been visionary to give Syria a chance, and ultimately welcomed Syrian President al-Sharaa to the Oval Office. This was extraordinary because it is the first time in 250 years that the leader of Syria has visited the Oval Office. That is from the American point of view. From the Syrian point of view, it's the first time in 8,000 years that there has been a president or representative from Syria to visit the Oval Office. With that in mind, how can we promote the emerging Ukraine-Syria-Gulf alliance to counter Russia and Iran?

Mr. BERMAN: Sir, well, I think there are two things here. First of all, to echo what my colleague Mr. Zelin has said, the idea of ousting or at least lessening Russia's influence in the new Syria is essential, because the Russian footprint is a legacy of—a legacy of Baathist rule, but it is also a legacy that Russia has parlayed into force projection capabilities, not only in the rest of the region but also onto other continents, like Africa. It was a partnership that was created—and we saw this for years—a partnership, a tandem, between Russia and Iran in terms of bolstering the Assad regime.

I think it only stands to reason that as we turn the page in Syria, we should have expectations of the al-Sharaa government that their partnerships will evolve as well. And moving from Russia to a greater appreciation of Ukraine and what Ukraine can do, I think, aligns Syria very well with the emerging reality in the Gulf, where Ukraine has had an increasingly large presence as part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. As a defense against the type of offensive technology that Iran provided to Russia, and now Russia is providing back to Iran.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Indeed, I was grateful—thank you—to have a hearing in regard to the expulsion of the Russian bases in Syria. The entire region has suffered from the presence of the Iranian regime and Russians in Syria. Weapons and mercenaries are transported through the deep-water base at Tartus, the only Mediterranean base port that Russia has in the Mediterranean. Along with the Russian air base in Syria, and they still have one, it actually threatens the American air base of Incirlik in Türkiye to be so close. Equally significant, the Russian air base is logistics for maintaining the Russian Wagner dictatorships that they have in Africa. It is just so much to the interest of the world that the bases be ex-

pelled. What can we do to assist the people of Syria to remove the bases of war criminal Putin located in Syria?

Mr. BERMAN: Well, I think that is probably a question better suited for my colleague, Mr. Zelin, but I would just end with this. I would say that there is a tremendous amount of leverage that the Trump administration has over the new government in Syria, precisely because President Trump is prepared to turn the page, prepared to create a qualitatively new relationship. I think the Syrian—the new Syrian regime expects that there are going to be conditionalities that are placed upon this relationship. Realigning those partnerships and dislodging Russia, I think, should rank high on that list.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Well, thank you so much. Mr. Zelin, what comment do you have about that?

Mr. ZELIN: Sure, yes. I mean, it is extremely important. One way to transition this, in many respects, is that one of the main concerns that the Syrian government has is that, because of the historical relationship between the Baathist and Assad regime with Russia, all of Syria's military hardware is Soviet or Russian. They do not have access to Western equipment. Ukraine could be a crucial component of this because they still have access to the old weapon systems that they had from back in the day before the U.S. and NATO started assisting them with what more Western equipment in recent years. Therefore, you could trade them out as sort of a transition phase before the U.S. and Syria then deepen any potential military relationship and bring in Western technologies as well.

Co-Chairman WILSON: We really—our experience at transitioning Soviet equipment in Central and Eastern Europe—

Mr. ZELIN: Exactly.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Okay? It has been done. Then we want to encourage in Syria, and another country comes to mind: India, that there needs to be a transition. With that in mind, Iran and Russia are particularly active in the Republic of Georgia, backing the anti-American Georgian Dream regime. This is an illegitimate regime in Tbilisi. The collaboration of Georgian Dream with war criminal Putin is so clear. Additionally, with the regime in Tehran. The Chinese Communist Party controls the Black Sea port of Georgia, Anaklia, and controls the rare earth trade with Central Asia, and it has ramifications far beyond anything else today. Also, it provides for funneling of shoulder-fired missiles to Iran by way of Anaklia, to kill Americans. With that in mind, what can we do to counter the collaboration of the illegitimate Georgian Dream government with the Chinese Communist Party, the war criminal Putin, and the rogue regime in Tehran? For either one of you.

Mr. BERMAN: I confess, I am not a Georgia specialist, so it is always good to articulate what you do not know. I would say that, in terms of the broad frame of the South Caucasus, I think the administration made a really strategically significant play in August of last year when it had the Armenian and Azeri leaders sit at the same table and articulate not just a normalization of ties, but simultaneously articulate a trade and investment and commodity transport corridor, which we know as TRIPP, the Trump Route for Peace and Prosperity.

There are additional steps that need to be taken in terms of boosting investment, in terms of lowering border closures between Georgia and Azerbaijan, for example, that would allow that corridor to have greater resonance in the region. The reason this is significant is because the TRIPP corridor simultaneously disadvantages both Iran and Russia, which have played very heavy in the geopolitics of the region. We are now looking at a way to transition the region out of Russian control, out of Iranian control, and into a much more European and Western direction. I think those steps should be encouraged, with Georgia in mind as well.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much. It really is incredible, the thought that President Aliyev with Prime Minister Pashinyan would also be in the Oval Office. That is just inconceivable. Two former Soviet republics happily together with the president of the United States. Additionally, I am glad you mentioned working with Azerbaijan; how incredible that is to see the changes there. Also, it is so important to me too that Türkiye; I am just confident that efforts are going to be made to restore the trade capabilities throughout the South Caucasus.

Again, it is so sad to me; the Republic of Georgia, with the rigged elections by Ivanishvili, the Putin billionaire, of a country that had been invaded was South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It is just inconceivable that there would be a pro-Russian government, which has been so oppressive of the people of Georgia, who are so dynamic and have been such a great ally of the United States in so many different ways. I am just so hopeful for fair and free elections, ultimately, in the Republic of Georgia.

With that, we will now proceed to the Republic of Texas. There really is a Republic of Texas, and with Congressman Marc Veasey.

STATEMENT OF MARC VEASEY, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TEXAS

Representative VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I want to thank the witnesses here today for providing some really critical testimony. I think that it is really important that we continue to talk about everything that is happening in Russia right now. I know that with everything that is going on in Iran, that is where most of the foreign policy focus is at this moment. This is critical. I mean, we did not do all of that work in the 1980's, you know, under President Reagan, and before that Carter, and Eisenhower, and Kennedy, to all of a sudden just turn our backs on it and walk away. It is important that we continue to make sure that we are highlighting what is happening right now.

I did want to ask you some questions as it relates to Russia, with the current conflict in Iran. I specifically wanted to talk with you a little bit about oil. I know that that is obviously going to play a factor, and has played a factor, in the war—Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine, should I say. I wanted to ask you, is the U.S. conflict with Iran making Russian oil more valuable by tightening global supply? Is Moscow going to be a net beneficiary of the war? Because that has been something that I have been really concerned about.

Mr. BERMAN: Thank you, sir. This is a large conversation. I will try to, sort of, have a bite-size answer. I think there are two things to consider here. First of all is the question of what Ukraine has

done in response to the outbreak of the U.S. conflict with Iran. Obviously, it' is very natural for attention to shift away from Europe and toward the Middle East in light of this conflict. The Ukrainians as—both as a way of assisting American allies but also as a way of remaining part of the conversation—the Ukrainians have used very adroit diplomacy to offer themselves as part of the solution for defending regional states in the Persian Gulf. This has been very successful so far. It has kept Ukraine, I think, front of mind for a lot of regional governments, in a circumstance where it would not otherwise.

The second problem, though, is exactly what you mentioned. Which is that because of the rising price of oil and because of constraints shipping out of the Strait of Hormuz, Russian oil, de facto, becomes more valuable on the global market, even though the places where Russia ships it are constrained. The way Ukraine is addressing that is Ukraine has begun targeting, over the last couple of weeks, very significantly, Russian energy-related infrastructure, including ports and transmission pipelines.

Representative VEASEY: Let me ask you, do you think that Russia has a vested interest in wanting this war to be prolonged and go further between—what is happening right now in Iran?

Mr. BERMAN: I think there is a Russian interest, absolutely. There is a Russian interest both economically—even though their energy exports are now constrained by about one-fifth, nonetheless the higher the price of oil goes, the more they make up their economic shortfall. Second of all, because I think the Russians, long ago, realized, very astutely, that an America that is entangled in the Middle East is less likely to get involved in Russia's near abroad.

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Do you think that what is happening right now is going to strengthen the Russian-Iranian axis? Or do you think that it will weaken it over time? Do you think that there is an opportunity, you know, while we are in the middle of this, for us to figure out ways how we can sort of, you know, divide the two of those countries and exploit that?

Mr. BERMAN: I think dividing should be the word of the day. Figuring out how to draw fissures within that partnership, I think, is crucial. I think part of it depends on exactly what is negotiated when the parties ultimately come to the table in Islamabad. If there is a partnership—if there is a cease-fire agreement that incentivizes the partnership by, for example, giving Russia custody of Iran's highly enriched uranium, that is something that draws the two capitals closer together, does not drive them apart, and it empowers both. I think the devil is in the details with regard to what we negotiate.

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Yes. I know Ukraine has obviously emerged as a major exporter of drone technology. We have seen a lot of that in the news, and as a provider of counter-drone expertise to the Gulf states. Do you think that this is going to be likely to continue?

Mr. BERMAN: I certainly hope so. I think on a very basic level—I know we have talked—in this hearing we have talked about human rights, and we have talked about the different ways in which the Ukrainian military behaves, vis-á-vis the Russian mili-

tary. On a very basic level, if we strip all of that away, what Ukraine has developed over the last four years of war is a rapid defense industrial innovation cycle, one that has allowed it to really redefine modern warfare. That is something that could be a net asset for the U.S. military. That is something that could be an asset for the United States as we think about not just the Middle East, but also the Indo-Pacific. That would be my big takeaway, which is that we should invest much more in understanding what Ukraine has built.

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Thank you, Congressman Veasey. We are going to miss Congressman Veasey. He has announced that he is going to become a statesman and leave office. [LAUGHTER.] I am very proud—I am very proud of him. Hey, talk about a fissure, the ultimate fissure, and that is Khamenei's death. Many of his top colleagues are dead. That creates a fissure with war criminal Putin.

Then we are really fortunate to have Dr. Congressman Greg Murphy, all the way from North Carolina.

STATEMENT OF GREG MURPHY, U.S. HOUSE, FROM NORTH CAROLINA

Representative MURPHY: Thank you, sir. Thank you, guys, for coming today.

Sitting here listening to this has been extremely interesting. Permutations of all the different things that occur because of this. The real question is, can you paint me a picture of Iran if we had not intervened now, in the next five years? I would love for you guys to paint a picture, because we have been talking—presidents have been talking about this for 50 years. We tried to buy them off. We tried to believe them. None of this—

Mr. ZELIN: It is obviously hard to predict alternative scenarios in the future. They are obviously, you know, raising their capacity related to their nuclear weapons program. They are getting more and more ballistic missiles, not just ones that were shorter-range, related to the Gulf region, but ones that could reach Europe, Asia, even potentially, in the future, the United States. Then we did not—have not even discussed all of their proxy networks. Of course, they have been assisting the Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Palestinian territories. Without trying to deal with these issues, it is going to continue to expand. I mean, the reality is, we did not—the United States did not do anything for decades in relation to a lot of these issues, and really only started chipping away in recent years. That is part of the reason that we are in this hole, in some ways, in relation to this issue.

Representative MURPHY: Yes, you know, it is hard on the American people now, because, you know, the TV just talks about gas prices. They do not talk about the possible permutations of this. I thoroughly believe, being, you know, an international foreign affairs novice, that I believe this interdiction has saved millions of lives. You know, these people know no boundaries when it comes to human life. They just killed 30,000-plus of their own people. Un-

like China, even Pakistan, North Korea, they would have no qualms with using a nuclear bomb, because it says in their constitution—in their constitution—that they essentially will promote global jihad until they have one Muslim ideology, like they believe.

So, sad as it is, as challenging as it is, as hard as it is on gas prices, finally somebody had to say no. Now we are having to deal with the cleanup, which is hard. It is not easy. It is hard. There are so many permutations that have happened with this. You know, specifically when we talk about the nuclear issue, tell me what you think Iran can do, how we can offload this either into Russia, how we can use Ukraine in the future as possibly a bargaining tool to let these people take the Iranian—excuse me—the uranium capabilities away from Iran.

Mr. BERMAN: Well, again, you know, just to be—to be modest about—because we are in the realm of speculation. I think the Russian—the Russian strategy that they are employing, Moscow is very good at playing both the arsonist and the firefighter in a particular scenario. That is what it is doing here. Let us remember that Russia was the one that actually incentivized Iran to pursue a nuclear will to power, again, under the Islamic Republic. It was the one that built out the Iranian nuclear plant in the southern port city of Bushehr. It became, for a number of years, a turnkey Russian operation. This is sort of what built—upon which the edifice of Iran's current nuclear program is built.

Now the Russians are saying that they can be trusted with regard to offloading highly enriched uranium, which is buried under two or three or more facilities that were struck last summer as a result of the twelve-day war—offloading them onto Russian territory. I think there is a real problem, because it posits that we have to have utmost confidence that the country that helped Iran advance toward a nuclear objective is going to be the one that can be the security guard, be the watchdog of preventing that same nuclear will to power.

Representative MURPHY: Yes. How do you trust those people? You cannot.

Mr. ZELIN: I also think it is important to add that we have the scenario related to Syria under the Assad regime and the chemical weapons deal between Russia and the Obama administration, where after that deal was to bring out the chemical weapons following the 2013 red line, the Assad regime continued to do chemical weapons strikes 300-plus times afterwards. You cannot trust what Russia does or the people that Russia works with, because they are duplicitous.

Representative MURPHY: Sure. Sure. You know, I think a highlight of this, at least for me, I think this would be great for the American public to realize that, you know, especially the contingent—of which I am one—who supports our efforts to support Ukraine needs to understand that this action, in and of itself, is supporting Ukraine because we are pulling resources away from Russia, as Russia is trying to support Iran. That as an intermingled—not a triangle, rhombus, whatever you matter, as many sides as you wish—so much interconnectivity with trying to unbalance what was an unfair balance in Russia's favor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. Excellent discussion, gentlemen.

Yield back.

Co-Chairman WILSON: Indeed, thank you very much, Dr. Murphy. For a novice, you are doing very well.

At this time, we will be concluding, but I want to thank the organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, Helsinki Commission, staff for getting everyone together. I want to thank our witnesses. As we conclude, I would like to get a picture with—particularly with Marc Veasey and the two of you, and even Dr. Murphy and myself. We will gather up here, and we are adjourned.

[Sounds gavel.]

[Whereupon, at 4:23 p.m., the hearing ended.]

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