



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

**Hearing on
“Tools of Transnational Repression: How Autocrats Punish Dissent
Overseas”**

Thursday, September 12, 2019

10:15 a.m.

Room 210, Cannon House Office Building

Opening Statement of Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Roger Wicker

This hearing of the Helsinki Commission will come to order.

Good morning. Welcome to this hearing on “Tools of Transnational Repression: How Autocrats Punish Dissent Overseas.”

We have assembled an expert panel to probe how autocratic states project repressive force beyond their borders to silence dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists, and other perceived enemies overseas.

Autocrats today have access to a range of tools to extend their reach by thousands of miles, sometimes in fractions of a second. Some schemes rely on 21st century technologies to hack, surveil, and intimidate targets, while others use blunter tactics such as extortion, abduction, and assassination.

This practice of transnational repression constitutes a wholesale assault on the rule of law internationally. It requires the attention of all democratic nations. This Commission is particularly concerned by the politically-motivated abuse of INTERPOL by autocratic states wishing to harass and detain their opponents overseas, often in the hopes of trying them on bogus criminal charges.

INTERPOL is a legitimate instrument for international law enforcement cooperation, linking the law enforcement arms of its 194 member countries through a global communications and database network. The United States relies on INTERPOL systems daily to bring criminals to justice and foil threats to global security. As with the UN, however, INTERPOL's broad membership leaves it open to manipulation by authoritarians.

Repressive regimes have seized on INTERPOL's potent tools to harass and detain their perceived enemies anywhere in the world. INTERPOL Red Notices and Diffusions are among the most commonly abused instruments, as they constitute international requests for detention and extradition.

The Helsinki Commission regularly receives reports from dissidents, journalists, and human rights defenders across the OSCE region who are the targets of INTERPOL Notices or Diffusions issued by autocratic states on trumped up charges.

Perhaps the most prominent case is that of outspoken Kremlin critic Bill Browder. After his lawyer Sergei Magnitsky was murdered by Russian thugs for exposing state-sponsored corruption, Mr. Browder emerged as a champion of transparency and accountability for President Putin's misrule. In response, the Kremlin embarked on a more than decade-long campaign to silence him.

To date, Russia has issued at least eight politically-motivated Diffusions against Mr. Browder, and yet—to our knowledge—INTERPOL has not penalized Russia in any way to punish or deter this abuse. To the contrary, Russia felt comfortable enough in its position in the organization to have proposed a leading candidate for the Presidency of INTERPOL last fall. At the time, I joined with fellow Helsinki Commissioners Shaheen and Rubio and Senator Coons to denounce the Russian candidacy, which was ultimately defeated after an outcry from the U.S. and our European allies.

Of course, Mr. Browder is one victim—and Russia one abuser—among many. Ahead of this hearing, the Helsinki Commission received statements from individuals from China, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan who have been targeted by authorities using INTERPOL—without objection, I request that these be entered into the record of this hearing.

The Helsinki Commission is taking action to address these assaults on the rule of law. Chairman Alcee Hastings and I are preparing to introduce bipartisan legislation in the House and Senate to tackle the abuse of INTERPOL by autocrats. The Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention Act will lay out priorities for U.S. engagement with INTERPOL, encourages executive branch agencies to improve processes for responding to politically-motivated INTERPOL notices, and codifies strict limits on how INTERPOL communications can be used by U.S. authorities against individuals in our country. In addition, this legislation will require the State Department to report on trends in transnational repression in its annual human rights report.

The U.S. has long been a champion of reform and good governance within INTERPOL. Since 2016, INTERPOL – with U.S. support— has enhanced vetting of Notices and Diffusions, created special protections for refugees, instituted greater transparency regarding its adjudication of complaints from victims, made rulings on complaints binding, and begun reviewing thousands of longstanding Notices and Diffusions. But more remains to be done. The organization is in dire need of greater transparency, and countries should face consequences – including being denied leadership positions – for repeated abuses.

Our witnesses this morning will provide expert testimony on the scale of this problem and policy recommendations to address it. Before I introduce them, however, I would like to recognize other commissioners for opening statements.

[Opening remarks by other commissioners]

Now to our witnesses:

First, we will hear from Alexander Cooley, a political science professor at Barnard College and director of Columbia University’s Harriman Institute. Professor Cooley wrote the book on extra-territorial authoritarian practices: *Dictators without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia*, which was co-authored with John Heathershaw, and published in 2017. Drawing on his scholarly work, Professor Cooley will explain the origins, scope, and trajectory of transnational repression.

Next, Nate Schenkkan will provide concrete examples of these authoritarian practices based on his work as director of special research at Freedom House.

Our third witness, Bruno Min, is senior legal and policy advisor at Fair Trials, an international non-profit that monitors criminal justice standards around the world. Mr. Min will present his experience leading Fair Trials' advocacy relating to INTERPOL and other examples of cross-border justice and discrimination.

Finally, we will hear from Sandra A. Grossman, an immigration lawyer and founding partner of Grossman Young & Hammond, where she has honed her expertise in complex and sensitive immigration issues, often involving clients targeted by politically-motivated INTERPOL communications.

I will refer you to the materials in your folders for our witnesses' full bios. I look forward to their testimonies and hereby invite Professor Cooley to begin his testimony.