

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

“Russia’s Counterproductive Counterterrorism”

Committee Members Present:

**Representative Richard Hudson (R-NC);
Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO);
Representative Robert B. Aderholt (R-AL);
Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)**

Witnesses:

**Dr. Michael Carpenter,
Senior Director, Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement;
former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia; former
National Security Council Director for Russia**

**Rachel Denber,
Deputy Director, Europe and Central Asia Division,
Human Rights Watch**

**Dr. Mariya Y. Omelicheva,
Professor of Strategy at the United States National War College, National
Defense University; author, “Russia’s Regional and Global Counterterrorism
Strategies” and “Russia’s Counterterrorism Policy: Variations on an Imperial
Theme”**

**The Hearing Was Held From 10:31 a.m. To 11:51 a.m. in Room 2255,
Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Representative Alcee L.
Hastings (D-FL), Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in
Europe, presiding**

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HUDSON: OK. On behalf of Chairman Alcee Hastings and co-Chairman Roger Wicker, I'd like to call this hearing of the U.S. Helsinki Commission to order. (Sounds gavel.) Let me thank our distinguished panel who have all agreed to join us to offer their expertise and help inform our work. I want to introduce them in a moment, but before I do, I'll offer a few of my thoughts on this topic.

We convene this hearing to examine the Kremlin's counterterrorism policies and practices. We want to better understand what those practices are, how they developed over time, whether they're effective, and to what extent they dovetail, or not, with U.S. interests. I want to offer a couple of illustrations of why it is so important that we maintain a clear sense of what Russian counterterrorism practices do and do not offer. The first reason is that Russia seeks to claim the mantle of leadership on this issue internationally.

I'd like to quote the worldwide threat assessment of the U.S. intelligence community provided to Congress on January 29th of this year. That document includes the following passage: China and Russia are expanding cooperation with each other and through international bodies to shape global rules and standards to their benefit and present a counterweight to the United States and other Western countries. Russia is working to consolidate the U.N.'s counterterrorism structures under the U.N. undersecretary general for counterterrorism, who is a Russian. Both countries probably will use the U.N. as a platform to emphasize sovereignty narratives that reflect their interest and redirect discussions away from human rights, democracy, and good governance. And so I would ask the panelists, should we be comfortable with Russian leadership in this area? Does the Kremlin have so-called best practices that they can share?

Second reason we should care about Russia's counterterrorism practices is that Russia's actions in this space have impact far beyond Russia's borders. As regional experts recently said at a Helsinki Commission briefing, Russia's significant influence in Central Asia can be deeply problematic, through cooperation on repressive measures between security services or by the propagation of disinformation. In addition, as one panelist put it, Russia – this is quote – “is a particularly nefarious influence within the sphere of religious affairs across the region,” end-quote, by painting peaceful religious groups with the label of, quote/unquote, “extremism,” and repressing them ruthlessly, potentially furthering radicalization in the process.

I'm grateful to the panelists who are with us today, and I'd like to introduce them now. We'll first hear from Dr. Mariya Omelicheva. Is that correct? Professor of strategy at the United Nations War College – United States National War College at the National Defense University. Dr. Omelicheva received her Ph.D. from Purdue University, and also holds a J.D. in international law from Moscow National Law Academy. She is the author of numerous well-received research articles and volumes related to our history today.

Next we'll hear from Rachel Denber, deputy director of the Europe and Central Asia Division at Human Rights Watch. Ms. Denber previous directed the Human Rights Watch's Moscow Office and has authored reports on a wide range of human rights issues throughout the region. Thank you for being with us in Washington for this hearing.

Finally we'll hear from Dr. Michael Carpenter, senior director Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement. Dr. Carpenter has worked these issues as a senior official in the prior administration, as former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia, and as a former National Security Council director for Russia. This is not Dr. Carpenter's first appearance before a Helsinki Commission. And I suspect given the quality of his contributions, this will not be the last time we call on his expertise.

So thank you all for being here.

And finally, I would like to thank Chairman Hastings for allowing me the opportunity to convene this hearing on behalf of the Commission. As a member of the United States Helsinki Commission, I focus my engagement in a number of areas, including combatting religious persecution and antisemitism, preventing human trafficking, and promoting economic cooperation and free speech. As part of my role as a Helsinki Commissioner, I'm regularly called upon to represent the United States at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which facilitates inter-Parliamentary dialogue among the 57 participating states. This assembly is a valuable forum where my congressional colleagues and our counterparts from countries ranging from Canada to Russia get together to have frank discussions about the issues of the day. And we try to find common solutions that benefit all of our citizens.

In recent years I've been really pleased to see this assembly paying increased attention to the issue of tackling terrorism. In July of 2017, the assembly created the ad hoc Committee on Counterterrorism. As vice chair of that committee, I'm in regular dialogue with colleges, including from Russia, on the very questions we'll be examining today. So I'm particularly grateful for the information that we'll receive from our panelists.

Now, see my colleague, Senator Cory Gardner from the great state of Colorado has joined us. Would you be interested in giving an opening statement?

GARDNER: Thank you, Chairman Hudson, for the chance to be here to share with the witnesses this conversation and the important work that the Helsinki Commission continues to do. I've introduced legislation, a number of bills, to increase pressure of Russia, responses, considerations that we have made, and how they respond to terrorism within Russia without the region. So I look forward very much to this hearing. And I thank Chairman Hastings as well, and appreciate the witnesses' time, testimony, and commitment to this issue.

HUDSON: Thank you, Senator. We appreciate you being here, making the trek all the way across.

So at this point we'd love to hear from our panelists. Dr. Omelicheva, you have the floor.

OMELICHEVA: Test, test? OK. Thank you so much for your kind introduction and, of course, inviting me to testify here, Congressman Hudson. You already know that in the past twenty years or so fighting terrorism has become the top priority for the Russian government. And it is understandably so because over those two decades the Russian authorities have been fighting Islamist insurgency and terrorism, mostly originating from the tumultuous North

Caucasus – Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, and a number of other subjects of the Russian Federation. And since recently, the Russian government has been grappling with the threats posed by international jihadist groups as well.

I do want to acknowledge the sheer complexity and magnitude of the challenges that Moscow faces. But I also content that, overall, Russia's counterterrorism policy, as you already mentioned in your introductory comments, has been both deficient and counterproductive. And I believe that two trends in particular have contributed to these deficiencies.

One trend has to do with the fact that Russia has always emphasized punitive counterterrorism measures at the expense of kind broader preventive socioeconomic approaches targeting the root causes of violent radicalization and terrorism. Whether domestically in North Caucasus, or regionally in Central Asia, or internationally in Syria or elsewhere, Russia has used kind of that approach that was singularly focused on the use of military force or security services operations. And those have been counterproductive.

In North Caucasus, for example, the brutality of those measures transformed what used to be localized struggle into the region-wide religious war. In Central Asia, as another example, the singular focus on military responses to counterterrorism also diverted attention of these governments from the root causes of terrorism. And I'm pretty sure my colleague, Dr. Carpenter, will talk today about Russia's efforts – counterterrorism efforts in Syria, where Russia's backing for authoritarian regime of Bashar al-Assad and its indiscriminate airstrikes have also contributed to the radicalization of the Syrian population.

And the second trend that I would like to emphasize in my testimony that also, in my view, explains deficiencies and counter-productiveness of Russia's counterterrorism policy has to do with the fact that the Kremlin instrumentalized counterterrorism, meaning that it has deployed counterterrorism as a tactic for accomplishing a variety of auxiliary benefits expedient to the government – usually geopolitical purposes which have been at counter-purpose with the very intent of counterterrorism.

So, for example, domestically, Vladimir Putin has used, you know, fear of terrorism and its ability to restore order and bring stability to Russia as sort of a part of his legitimacy narrative. In Central Asia, Russia has used the banner of counterterrorism to reassert its influence in that region. And of course, internationally, Russia's high-profile counterterrorism efforts have helped Moscow to establish itself as a much more prominent global player, which has lacked the resources, the assets to play such a role. And it has also used this opportunity to counteract the United States efforts worldwide.

So Russia has used United Nations platforms, including the newly created U.N. Counterterrorism Office, to shape global counterterrorism agenda. And there are risks associated with that, including these kinds of efforts may compel the United Nations to take a much tougher line on fighting terrorism while downplaying human rights protections. These efforts can also divert global efforts from measures aiming at countering violent extremisms and eroding internet freedoms, because for Russia CVE erodes the very essence of counterterrorism. Russia is fearful of engaging with civil society groups, which are believed to be the harbingers of Western

influence. So it is really focusing on kind of this harder counterterrorism responses domestically and worldwide.

So the two primary conclusions that follow from my recent testimony is that Russia's counterterrorism policy raises many concerns about its viability as a partner in counterterrorism. Russia's political goals and associated measures unrelated to the fight against terrorism have complicated the overall efforts to fight terrorism worldwide. And let me say just a couple of words about what I see the United States can do in these circumstances.

I think the United States can do more, either directly or through regional and global institutions like OSCE and United Nations. So it should continue supporting these global and regional institutions, promoting CVE measures, and work with the United Nations Counterterrorism Office directly or through the OSCE. And this engagement should seek building synergies between the OSCE and U.N. Counterterrorism Office, with the goal of promoting rule of law compliance responses to terrorism and CVE, while engaging civil society and protecting individual freedoms. I also think that United States should continue providing counterterrorism assistance to the many countries where Russia remains to be involved but couple this assistance with increased funding for CVE and civil society building.

So I'll stop here.

HUDSON: Ms. Denber, if you would.

DENBER: Thank you, Chairman Hudson. Thank you for inviting me to give testimony today. And let me express Human Rights Watch's great appreciation for the Helsinki Commission, which is a beacon of hope for many people in our region, and a great ally of human rights causes.

So my remarks today focus on Russia's counterextremism and counterterrorism policies and practices. My written testimony provides a lot of detail about Russian laws, their evolutions, both the counterterrorism/counterextremism law itself, the criminal code, administrative code. And I also provide some examples of how these laws have been selectively to persecute people who are inconvenient to the Kremlin, to persecute people who are inconvenient to local authorities, and to persecute particular groups.

So I will only summarize that here. I think, though, I would also like to point out that these laws and practices are deeply problematic. The laws themselves are quite – they're vague, they're overly broad, their definitions are overly broad. But I also want to emphasize that it's really important to note that, similar to what Dr. Omelicheva noted, that Russian authorities have also used these laws for legitimate purposes. So there is and has been a problem with extremist violence in Russia, hate violence in Russia. And the Russian government has used these laws to contend with racist violence, anti-migrant violence, far right-wing hate violence. So I think it's important to keep that in mind.

So I think an important question is to ask why it is that the Russian authorities have adopted and selectively enforced these really vague and elastic anti-extremism norms? And I

think that there's several answers. But I think maybe it's best to leave that to my written testimony. You can scroll through that. I think that the main impact of the restrictive laws and their selective enforcement is that many Russians now are increasingly unsure about what the threshold is of acceptable speech. And at the same time, are increasingly anxious about the consequences of speaking up – speaking out, especially on online and mobile applications.

Let me just move right now to what the problem is with Russia's counterextremism laws and practices. And I also I strongly recommend the Commission to become familiar with the work of the SOVA Center in Russia. It's a think tank that focuses on these issues. And they're very good. So the main problem with Russia's counterextremism – approach to counterextremism/counterterrorism, is that the definitions are quite broad. The law bans any public calls for promoting – for extremism, or extremist violence. It involves a whole range of acts, you know, ranging from violent overthrow of the government, committing terrorist violence, insulting the national dignity of others, or promoting the superiority of a particular race. It includes extremist – concepts like extremist materials, extremist organizations, banned extremist organizations, banned public communications, mass distribution, things like that.

So you have the basic law, that has become more harsh over the years, and you also have the criminal code which criminalizes these actions. Just to pick up on what Dr. Omelicheva pointed out, it's – this is a very punitive approach. The criminal code has become harsher with regard to these laws. So that now, for example, if you are declared a member of the Islamist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, or a leader of that organization – which is not a terrorist organization – it can get you a 20-year sentence, for just membership or affiliation, not for anything else. Not for any violent act.

The counterterrorism/counterextremism laws are used as a tool not only to legitimately address extremist violence, but also to crack down on inconvenient people. It's one of many tools that the Kremlin can use. And in recent years, since 2012, since President Putin returned to the Kremlin, and then especially since the invasion – since the events in eastern Ukraine and the occupation of Crimea – it has used these laws to crack down on dissent about Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine.

These laws also do things like – you know, the newer laws do things like – under the rubric of anti-extremism and counterterrorism – do things like increase – penalize – or, criminal insulting Russia's military honor, criminalize certain discussions about World War II, under the rubric of justification of Nazism. They do things like require internet companies to store data on Russian citizens in Russian – on Russian services, in Russian territory. So they're really trying to get control over the internet in the name of fighting extremism. And there's been a whole flurry of laws in this regard. In the years since the law was adopted, there's only been one kind of softening of the counterextremism law, and you can read about that in my written testimony.

So a couple of examples of, I think, the really more really concerning examples of how these laws are abused. I think you mentioned that one of your main interests is religious freedom and how do these laws interact with religious freedom. Well, as you – I'm sure the Commission is aware, because you've spoken out on it a number of times – it was as an extremist

organization that the Jehovah's Witness organization was banned in Russia. It was banned as an extremist organization by the Supreme Court in 2017.

And that is not an idle definition. It's not one of those things that, oh, well, they adopted it, the Supreme Court made that decision, and no one pays attention to it. A lot of people are paying a lot of attention to it. Right now there are 200 people who are Jehovah's Witnesses who are facing criminal prosecution for continuing the activities of an extremist organization. Thirty-five of them are in jail awaiting trial. One has already been convicted and is currently serving a six-year prison sentence. So this is not a – this is not an idle definition.

I think the other thing – the other thing – the other really key way that these laws have been used against inconvenient or, you know, to silence criticism has been the way they've been used in Crimea against Crimean Tatars. Our organization has documented how 49 people right now are facing criminal charges, and some have been convicted, again, for membership in this organization called Hizb ut-Tahrir. It's not an organization I would endorse, what it promotes is something that's anathema to human rights ideals. But it is not a terrorist organization. And yet, these men – these 49 people are facing very big prison sentences, because – and are targeted especially because the Kremlin, I think, would like to tarnish, to demonize people in Crimea who oppose – like Crimean Tatars – who oppose Russia's occupation of Crimea. To tarnish them as terrorists. It also uses the label of extremist and terrorist to marginalize and demonize other people who oppose the occupation as well.

And there are just two more examples, if I have more time. Two more examples of how these laws have been, you know, used illegitimately. I would ask you to think about the case of Svetlana Prokopyeva, who is a journalist from Pskov who did a radio discussion about an act of terrorism that took place in a Russian city. And she was also, you know, talking about Russia's abuse of counterterrorism policies. And the authorities are using that discussion to justify – to ground charges against her for justifying terrorism. And she faces a seven-year prison sentence. So it's a very convenient tool for local officials to try to silence and intimidate inconvenient voices.

There are many other examples in my written testimony. I think if I would leave you with one thought, it would be – a couple of thoughts, actually. These laws, they do migrate to other to Central Asian countries in the OSCE region. I would love to talk about that more about that in question and answer. I think it's also a two-way migration. I think that if you look at the history of it, I think some of the harshest practices that we've seen since the breakup of the Soviet Union was Uzbekistan's approach to counterterrorism and counterextremism in the late '90s. I think these countries take the Russian template law on extremism and apply, in fact, much more harshly – or, very harshly.

If there's one recommendation I would have, it would be that for U.S. policymakers to be aware of Russia's overly broad definition of extremism and the abuses that stem from this – from their enforcement, and the ripple effect that these laws have in the region. And I think that any potential collaboration the U.S. enters into on counterextremism and counterterrorism should not replicate or unwittingly support or promote the abusive aspects of these laws and practices. Thank you very much.

HUDSON: Thank you.

Dr. Carpenter, you have the floor.

CARPENTER: Chairman Hudson, Congressman Aderholt, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on Russia's approach to counterterrorism and its implications for U.S. National Security.

Every so often, there are politicians or policymakers who call on the United States to cooperate more closely with Russia to fight terrorism. On the surface, it may not even sound far-fetched for two big powers, both afflicted by the threat of terrorism to cooperate more closely on a common threat, even when they disagree on other matters. But active cooperation with Russia – and by active cooperation I mean any sort of joint operations or sensitive intelligence sharing – would run contrary to both our values and our national security interests. Let me explain why.

The first reason is that Russia's chief geopolitical objectives are to weaken the United States, fragment the transatlantic community and delegitimize international norms of human rights. Given the opportunity, the Kremlin will undermine the United States and the NATO alliance. Russia's leadership does not think in win-win terms, even when we do. Consider Russia's intervention in Syria. Though Russia claimed to be fighting ISIS, its real goal was to prop up the Assad regime and diminish U.S. influence in the region by strengthening its own role and that of its key partners on the ground – Hezbollah and Iran.

To position itself as the key power broker and indispensable nation for solving the conflict, Russia benefits from uncontrolled migration and the flow of extremists into Europe. This may seem highly cynical, but Russia has no interest in any sort of political transition to stabilize Syria. Moscow will be happy, of course, to host dozens of international conferences, and will periodically suggest that a solution is within reach. But at the end of the day, its interests are best served when Iran, Hezbollah and Assad are in power to make mischief in the region, because that's when Russia's influence with the Europeans, with Israel, and the Gulf States is at its peak.

Second, let's consider Russia's actual CT strategy. This strategy, as Dr. Omelicheva has just mentioned, is almost entirely based on physically liquidating extremists. Russian authorities do not try to win hearts and minds or engage in efforts at deradicalization or social reintegration. Russian security forces in the North Caucasus frequently apply the principle of collective retribution – often imprisoning, threatening and, sometimes even killing, relatives of suspected militants. While sometimes effective at the tactical level, strategically this approach only engenders a perpetual cycle of radicalization.

Russian counterterrorism operations also pay little regard to civilian or, quote/unquote, "collateral" casualties. The botched raids of the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow or the tragic attempt to free hostages in Beslan demonstrate a shocking disregard for human life. Even worse, as my colleague Rachel Denber has noted, Russian authorities often use the pretext of fighting extremism to crackdown on dissidents. For example, a single mother was recently imprisoned

on extremism charges because she had posted comments critical of Russia's annexation of Crimea on her social media feed.

Third, Russia sponsors terrorist acts in foreign countries. In Ukraine, Russia's intelligence services have carried out car bombings in government-controlled territory to assassinate Ukrainian military intelligence officers. One such bombing took place in downtown Kyiv on a crowded street. The Ukrainian security service, or SBU, has also accused Russia of bombing cafes and other public venues in Odessa, Kharkiv, and Kherson. And of course, we must not forget that Russia provided the missiles, the launcher, the software, the training, and likely the triggerman to shoot down Malaysia Airlines flight 17, killing all 298 people on board. I don't see how one can characterize these actions as anything other than state-sponsored terrorism.

In Afghanistan, Russia has provided weapons and night vision equipment to the Taliban to undermine U.S. and NATO interests. In Europe, Russia has supported Neo-Nazi hate groups in Hungary, and financially supported violent protests in Greece and North Macedonia. In the United States, as has been revealed in the media, Russia has spread false conspiracy theories to radicalize Americans against their immigrant neighbors and coworkers. And in the United Kingdom, Russian intelligence officers brazenly tried to poison a former Russian spy using a large dose of a deadly chemical toxin.

To conclude, Russia's actions to undermine the United States and its allies, and its direct sponsorship and cooperation with groups that conduct terror, should preclude any active efforts at counterterrorism cooperation. Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

HUDSON: Thank you all for that testimony.

And before I ask my questions, I'm going to call on my colleague from Alabama, Mr. Aderholt, for any questions you might have.

ADERHOLT: Thank you. It's good to be here. Sorry I was a little late. Sort of – as you know, the schedule on Capitol Hill is very fluid. So it's – we go from one meeting to the other. But thanks for being here. And to discuss this issue on the issue regarding Russia and its implications.

Dr. Carpenter, you mentioned about state-sponsored terrorism for Russia – in Russia. And you know, I'm thinking back to the downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight over Ukraine in 2014, which 283 people were on board. Do you consider that state-sponsored terrorism?

CARPENTER: I do. I don't see how there's any other way to look at that incident, where Russia provided all of the – not just the hardware, which was brought in and then surreptitiously in the cover of night taken back into the Russian Federation. So not just the hardware, but then also providing the personnel and the training to be able to operate that relatively sophisticated system, knowing there were civilian aircraft in the skies at that time, and having previously shot down a Ukrainian military aircraft. I don't see how you can look at that as anything other than state-sponsored terrorism.

ADERHOLT: And how do you consider the impact of such a designation?

CARPENTER: Well, Senator Gardner has – who was just here – has introduced legislation on this and has called for designating Russia formally as a state sponsor of terror. I think we need to look carefully at that. It might preclude certain areas and certain areas where we might be able to work with Russia and other states. But as a principle, just calling actions for what they are, I think there's no other way than to label those acts, and others in Ukraine and other countries, including the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury as anything but attempts to spread terror.

ADERHOLT: And, Mrs. Denber, let me ask – Denber, let me ask you this. The – some have suggested there is the strong connection between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state has actually end up being – alienating Russia's more – other traditional faiths, religious groups, including Islam. How has Russia's Muslim population been affected by counterterrorism or this counterextremism policy?

DENBER: Thank you for the question, Mr. Aderholt.

So I think that there is a very – first, there is a very strong connection between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin. It's – I think it's a mutually – it's a relationship of mutual dependence. I think that we should avoid talking about Muslims in Russia as a monochromatic mass. I think there are many different kinds of Muslims in Russia, in different regions, and who have different concerns.

I think that what alienates – I think that there are many Muslims in Russia today who support these counterextremism policies that basically taint groups that are non-violent – taint religious groups that are non-violent – policies that taint them as violent, as terrorists or as extremists. So I think that some people support those, but I think that there are also large numbers of Muslims in Russia who are very alienated by these policies. There are hundreds of people today who are either in prison or facing pretty stiff prison sentences, Muslims mostly, for their membership in this organization Hizb ut-Tahrir which is, as I said, anathema to human rights norms, but not a terrorist organization.

And we need to remember that each one of those people, you know, has a family, an extended family. And for each time someone goes to jail for membership in a group like that, it affects the whole – it has a ripple effect through the whole family. It's not the only Muslim group that's been targeted. There are also there – there are other – for example, the followers of Said Nursi, who was a Turkish – a Turkish theologian, – you know, has a significant following among certain Muslims in Russia. That – the Russian government has banned as extremists an organization that they purport exists called Nurcular (ph). We can – you know, I think it's a legitimate question whether such an organization even does exist, but I think there's no question as to the peaceful nature and non-extremist nature of this group. It's ridiculous that it's been – that it's been tainted as – or, found to be extremist. And every single person who is being under criminal prosecution right now for involvement in that grouping, why, they are definitely being – definitely alienated, and marginalized by these practices.

ADERHOLT: And this doesn't apply just to Muslims, but also, like, other traditional Christian faiths in Russia, right?

DENBER: So the – so far, the only group – the only Christian group – Christian faith that's been branded as extremist, or found by a court to be extremist, is the Jehovah's Witnesses. They were banned as extremists by the Supreme Court in 2017. They were banned by local courts before that, local organizations were. I don't know of any other Christian religious organization that's been banned as extremists, but I think if I were a Baptist or a Pentecostalist I would start to get worried.

ADERHOLT: Mmm hmm. And you mentioned about some of the other former Soviet Republics that are impacted. Could you just touch on that briefly?

DENBER: Sure. So Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus – all these countries have counter – have an approach to counterextremism that is very similar to Russia's. So they have the same broad definition of what extremism is, right? So it's a whole range of activities that is not – that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with violence, right? So it's brochures, or just meeting, or just getting together. Or it's, you know, the promotion of some – you know, some vague definition of ideological supremacy over somebody else. It's very broad definitions.

And that's common to all of these – you know, the approach in all of these countries. And in some of the countries, it's quite harsh. So Tajikistan, for example – I'm not – I should also preface my remarks by saying I'm not an expert on all Central Asian countries, but I'm going to – I can still list out what some of these practices are. So in Tajikistan, for example, you know, you have – you know, wearing a beard could be enough to get – to get you tagged as an extremist. Or, you know, there are very harsh laws limiting religion, that are motivated by a desire to – or a determination to limit extremism.

In Kyrgyzstan, until very recently simple possession of a leaflet that was deemed – a leaflet, a brochure, or a video on your phone that the police consider to be extremist could land you a prison sentence. And there were dozens and dozens of people who went to jail because of a leaflet or because of a video on their phone. Now, Kyrgyzstan recent repealed that part of the criminal code, so now you have to have – possession can get you a prison sentence, but only with an intent to – clearly an intent to distribute it massively, which is still very, very problematic. But there are dozens and dozens of people who went to jail just for that. And many others who were very vulnerable to that charge.

Kazakhstan has also very harsh and vague counterterrorism/counterextremism laws and practices. And I very strongly encourage the Commission to get familiar with a report that just came out from the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism, who just finished a visit to Kazakhstan. She, and also Human Rights Watch, have documented extensively how the Kazakh government uses this concept of extremism to go after civil society activists, to go after journalists, to go after labor union leaders. So all over the region.

ADERHOLT: Thank you. Thank you for yielding.

HUDSON: Absolutely. My pleasure. And welcome our commissioner Mr. Fitzpatrick here as well. Appreciate you joining us.

So, Dr. Omelicheva, first question to you would be, how does the Kremlin seek to promote itself or its brand of counterterrorism around the world? In what ways has it sought to promote itself as a leader on counterterrorism in international bodies, specifically the U.N. and the OSCE? And for what purposes does the Kremlin seek to promote its officials and its viewpoints on counterterrorism in these international organizations?

OMELICHEVA: Thank you for this question. Thank you for the question.

So Russia is a weaker partner. It doesn't really have the assets, the resources to be able to – doesn't have the kind of the soft power that United States has around the world. So for it to be able to project its influence regionally, and especially globally using platforms like the United Nations, it usually capitalizes on the vacuum, or any kind of gaps particularly left by the United States. So it is no secret that the current administration has not been favoring the United Nations, and it has withdrawn some support.

So, for example, the United Nations Counterterrorism Office, this new institution that was stood up last year, initially the United States pledge \$2 million to support this agency. And when the chief, the Russian who mentioned, Vladimir Voronkov, was appointed as undersecretary general and the head of this agency with a very, very broad mandate. And he called for the inaugural conference, where he decided to exclude civil society groups, nongovernmental groups from at least some of the hearings. So the United States withdrew its pledge of financial support, and it also lowered the status of the representatives that took part in that inaugural conference.

So that's the situation that provided Russia with an opportunity to kind of step and say, hey, I'm pledging \$2 million for 2018, and you know, half a million each year thereafter. So Russia has been able to capitalize on these kinds of circumstances where the United States would be either retrenching, or withdrawing, or kind of limiting its input or its interests. And this is where Russia would say, hey, I'm willing and able to say to lead, to provide financial support, to play this leadership role. And I think this is how it was able to really shape, you know, the way the United Nations counterterrorism office has been shaped up, what its priorities have been.

And so even though the language of its mandate says that the emphasis should be on preventive measures, on CVE, so far we've seen, again, most of the efforts aiming at preemptive disruption and interdiction of foreign fighters, but not much work done on CVE. So, again, I am just drawing these kinds of associations without making any conclusions about causation. But it seems like Russia has had a way to influence the work of this office, either through the chief, the head of this office, or through other diplomatic avenues.

So, you know, it uses the rhetoric of the need for tougher counterterrorism responses. And I think it's very, very important that there is fear around the world. And fear is a very

powerful tool when, you know, individuals who fear terrorism, fear death, are willing to give up their liberties. And they approve of harsher responses. Whatever it takes to make us safe and secure. So Russia has been using this rhetoric, this discourse, that have resonated very strongly with many countries' leadership and peoples around the world.

So I think we need to be cognizant of the fact that in contemporary global context, where we are witnessing lots of turmoil, there are, you know, threats to liberal international order as we know it, there are many competing frameworks about how the world should operate, so this kind of uncertainty and, you know, these claims about we need stronger states, we need to give more tools to the governments to be able to deal with the threats, they're very palpable. You know, they're very compelling to many countries and leaderships around the world. So that resonance between what Russia says and what, you know, other countries may want is also, you know, giving Russia, you know, that push to influence – to be able to influence international agendas.

And unfortunately, your colleague left, but I would like to give another example. So my colleague Dr. Denber mentioned now Russia's legal templates have been used for legislative purposes in Central Asian republics and in countries which are members of the CSTO, Collective Security Treaty Organization. Those member states, they also have rosters that are put together on the basis of the local courts decisions about which groups they consider to be extremists and terrorists, and which individuals they consider to be threats to the regime.

So, you know, recently Tajikistan banned what used to be a political party, Islamic Renaissance Movement. It was branded extremists and now terrorist groups. So it travels both ways. So they maintain this shared rosters of individuals and groups that are regarded as threatening to the regime. And they're deemed to be terrorists and extremists, in addition to a variety of other areas – like, you know, joint counterterrorism drills, war games. So Russia is a major supplier of weapons supplies, troops. And so the military and security services border security services of these republics. They still learn about the ways of conducting those operations through those joint exercises from Russia.

HUDSON: Would any of the other panelists like to answer that question, just in terms of Russia's involvement with the U.N., OSCE, other international bodies?

CARPENTER: Well, I will just chime in to note that Russia has abused Interpol and its red notice system extensively to go after not just dissidents who are speaking out against the Putin regime abroad, Russian dissidents, but also international figures like Bill Browder. The notion that Russia's applying any kind of rule of law through its participation in these multilateral institutions is just folly, because they're not. They're abusing the system. Once they gain membership in an institution, whether it's the OSCE, some of these CT bodies, or more broadly, you know, Wassenaar group on conventional arms limitations as well. Russia hollows out these institutions, undermines the norms, in order to advance its particular interests, which are always those of the authoritarian, kleptocratic regime of Vladimir Putin.

And so when we look at various CT bodies, you know, sometimes Russia will play along and indicate that it shares the same concerns and values as the rest of the members, but we

always have to be conscious of the fact that Russia has its own motivations. And frequently those rub against the rest of the members of those organizations.

OMELICHEVA: Just one more example. I think it's important to pay attention to yet another area, where Russia has been trying to influence its regional global partners. It's in the area of internet censorship. We've heard a lot of examples of the most recently 2016 Yarovaya package laws that now requires telecom providers and other providers of social media access and whatnot to retain all of the data and metadata. It has been, you know, playing with the idea of cutting Russia's internet off the rest of the world. And so it really contrasts with the approach that the OSCE or the United States has been advocating for, which is countering extremist ideologies with counter messaging on the internet rather than using internet censorship.

And I think this kind of conflict between whether we should address ideology with counter-ideology but keep internet free versus do censorship of internet is being played out at the U.N. as well. So we need to watch and really advocate for not allowing the U.N. and its various counterterrorism bodies to embrace this idea that censorship is the answer.

HUDSON: For Mr. Carpenter, you didn't mince words in saying that you don't think it's productive for us to cooperate with Russia on CT. But in your experience in the past administration, could you maybe go a little deeper in what your experiences were in working with Russia? And were there some benefits? Were we able to gain best practices or was there any value in that relationship? And maybe just expand a little bit on your point there.

CARPENTER: Sure. I will say that I do support having the U.S. government provide information on any active terrorist threats that would implicate the lives of Russian citizens, whether those be civilians, Russian diplomats, or military service members. I think morally it's the right thing to do if we don't jeopardize sources and methods to provide that information. We have done that in the past. We should continue to do so. And I'm not opposed to receiving information from Russia that they provide voluntarily to U.S. law enforcement agencies, but we should be very cautious with that information because there are concerns that, for example, Russian dissidents could be included under a list of persons suspected of being extremists or terrorists. And we would have to scrub any kind of information from Russia very carefully with those sorts of concerns in mind.

I will say that I have participated in a number of efforts to work collaboratively with Russia on counterterrorism. From my office's oversight of the Bilateral Presidential Commission in the Obama administration, which included a counterterrorism working group, to a more specialized bilateral approach to ensuring security and counterterrorism in advance of the Sochi Winter Olympics, where I participated and led a National Security Council delegation that liaised with Russian Security Council members to discuss preparations for Sochi. And then a number of other efforts where we quietly discussed exchanging information, particularly after the Boston Marathon bombing, where we were trying to glean more active sort of exchange of data on potential militants and suspected terrorists.

And I will say, you know, the tone of these interactions was always cordial. The Russian approached these professionally. They bring professionals to the table to be able to discuss the

issues. The problem I have is at the end of the day none of these efforts ever panned out in terms of significant, meaningful exchange of information. Certainly not best practices. Russia's opposed to many of the best practices that we have been putting forth in terms of countering violent extremism, seeking to deradicalize communities through socioeconomic integration, so on and so forth. That's not how they operate. And so on the best practices front, we really achieved nothing.

On the exchange of information, there was, in fact, an active exchange between the U.S. and Russia for a number of years in the Obama administration but, again, that comes with risks. It comes with risks that, A, the information is not what it proports to be – that there are, for example, dissidents mixed in in terrorist watch list notifications. And then also that some of the data could be – that we could be given reams and reams of data for the purposes – which would cause our system to be clogged up as analysts had to verify whether in fact those were legitimate designations or not.

In advance of the Sochi discussions, I mean, the United States approaches any Olympic Games as the country with the most number of athletes, the most sponsors, usually the most viewers on site, as well as in terms of television viewers. And so we approach this very seriously and wanted to cooperate as much as possible with Russian authorities to ensure that the Sochi Olympics came off smoothly, that there were no incidents. And obviously that was a huge concern given terrorist activity, insurgent activity, very nearby in the North Caucasus.

And so the Russians knew this. And they entertained us with a series of meetings and purported to want to give us information and brief us on their security preparations. But in fact, what we found at the end of the day was that the briefings were always superficial, the information was minimal. And when we pressed for more and more information, we were essentially told: No, we've got this under control. You know, we're not going to give you all that information that you want and need. Trust us. And very little in terms of actionable intelligence that law enforcement authorities could act on at any given time. And so frankly, we were quite blind going into the Sochi Olympics, and we had to rely on the Russians to provide that security.

I will say, some of the practices they employed in Sochi also gave us enormous concern at the time. For example, there was a bombing in Volgograd just before the opening ceremonies of the games. And Russia really used that as a pretext to take large numbers of militants from the North Caucasus and essentially facilitate their travel out of Russia, knowing that most of those folks were going to Syria to participate in the fight alongside ISIS. And we saw this sort of draining out of the North Caucasus prior to the games for understandable, you could say, reasons on Moscow's part. But with huge apprehensions in our side because of the consequences of this.

And I think we have yet, in fact, to see those consequences now that the ISIS caliphate has been decimated. You know, some of those foreign terrorist fighters are returning not just to Russia, but to Europe and other places. And it's thanks to that fact that they were essentially let go and not screened at the time in 2013 and early 2014.

HUDSON: Very troubling.

At this point, I'll call on my colleague from Pennsylvania, Mr. Fitzpatrick, who brings a broad experience and background on this issue. And we look forward to your questions.

FITZPATRICK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here.

In my – the majority of my time in the FBI was focused on international terrorism. We put a lot of emphasis on the international enforcement academies that we had throughout – across the globe. The one in Budapest would have been the one that covered Eurasia. We could never get Russia to participate much at all. And that's where we had a lot of intelligence sharing, information sharing on investigative techniques, best practices, and fighting terrorism. We had a model at the FBI that we put a lot of investment into as far as having cross-agency support at the federal level. Taskforces, working with our state and local partners, having citizens academies, getting the public involved on how they could help. Putting a lot of investment in intelligence gathering and information sharing, as well as source recruitment.

We never really had a good sense, since they never really cooperated with us, what exactly the Russian model was. How many agencies are involved across their government? What is the state and local interaction with the national system? How often do they engage members of the public? We never really had that sense, because they never really did a whole lot with us. So if you could just let us know that, or let me know that, that would be helpful.

OMELICHEVA: Let me take a stab at this question. So in 2006, Russia adopted a law titled Law Counteraction to Terrorism. And it is still in the force, but it essentially established the legal framework for creating kind of the institutional infrastructure for intelligence gathering, prevention, and then reaction to terrorist attacks. So this law provided a foundation for executive decree that established the National Counterterrorism Committee, which exists at the federal level. And its task is to coordinate counterterrorism efforts of, like, 18 different agencies – Russia's federal security service, FSB, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Emergency Situations and a number of others.

So it has a permanent secretariat. It has a leader. So it is kind of the agency that collects all of the information from various agencies at the federal level. And there are republican counterterrorism committees that are established in each and every subject of the Russian Federation. And the operational counterterrorism is carried out through counterterrorism headquarters that are kind of nested within this counterterrorism structure. So, again, there is a National Counterterrorism Committee at the top, there's a vertical structure with regional counterterrorism committees established in each subject of the confederation. And within them, they have counterterrorism headquarters.

I think they are currently led by a representative the FSB, the security services. So if a situation arises of a hostage incident or another terrorist attack, the law allows establishing counterterrorism operation situation, which is like martial law but does not require approval by the parliament. So once there is counterterrorism operation established, it allows the government to deploy a variety of very extensive measures of cutting down a variety of individual liberties –

freedom of movement, freedom of information. It allows for the use of the military force. So that's, in a nutshell.

FITZPATRICK: Any idea as to why they were so reluctant to participate with the international community in programs like we had set up specifically to do that, given that terrorism is an international fight, and the only way we can really address it is through the use of our friend and allies to be our eyes and ears across the globe? They were very, very hesitant to do that.

OMELICHEVA: I do have an idea. So Russia is reluctant to collaborate with the United States because it doesn't believe that it is going to be able to collaborate on equal terms. So let me take a step back. Everyone in Russia – the government, the people – they believe that Russia is a great power by virtue of its history, cultural heritage, the sheer size, and many, many, many other things. This identity of a great power that inherent in what Russia is, entitles it to act in certain ways regionally and globally. So Russia has the right and responsibility to do the kinds of things that you would expect a great power to do internationally.

And the narrative goes that the only nation that has been frustrating and kind of impeding Russia's effort to fully realize its potential of a great power has been the United States, OK? And so Russians can provide you with lots of examples of how we've tried to collaborate with the United States, but every time we would be looked upon as a junior partner and not taken seriously. So Russia mistrusts the United States. It does not believe that the United States when it wants to collaborate it will come to collaboration from the position of strength. And it will do my way or no way, and kind of Russia's input or Russia's effort to contribute is going to be downplayed.

And I think – so, you know, so the short answer to your question is that fundamental belief, you know, that grievance, if you wish, that Russia is entitled to something that it has never received whenever it tried to engage in the relations with the United States, and that no matter what it does – you know, the United – so Russians believe that United States fears having Russia as a peer to the United States. So it will do everything in its capacity to sort of keep it from actualizing its potential. So that mistrust and a belief that it cannot play an equal role in any kind of collaborative endeavors is probably going to continue to prevent the Russians from any kind of meaningful collaboration with the United States.

CARPENTER: So I don't disagree with anything that Dr. Omelicheva has just said. But I'll be a little bit more blunt. As I know you know, Congressman, our clandestine services are essentially at war with each other. Russia approaches counterterrorism from the vantage of counterintelligence. That's why when I travel to Sochi in 2013 to begin the process of discussing security for this Winter Olympics, our chief interlocutor was Russia's chief counterintelligence official, not their chief counterterrorism official. They treat information about the terrorist threat in Russia as secret confidential information that they don't want the United States or any other foreign power to get access to.

Similarly, when they want to cooperate with us, it is primarily with a view of gaining information on our sources and methods and our vulnerabilities. And so they approach this, they

stack a lot of the delegations that they send to discuss counterterrorism with intelligence and counterintelligence officials. And while Dr. Omelicheva went through the structure, the formal structure through which Russia approaches counterterrorism, with the National Counterterrorism Agency sort of overseeing the process, they, like we did, also reorganized following the Chechen wars in the '90s to better integrate their intelligence.

But let's be honest, the FSB calls the shots. The FSB is the preeminent agency, Putin's former employer and now one of the chief instruments that he uses to perpetuate power. And they use extremism and CT as an excuse to conduct any number of other missions that are not really CT related.

HUDSON: Thank you. It's fascinating.

Ms. Denber, I'd like to maybe drill down on the youth impact of the lack of CVE and some of the impacts of the policies coming out of Moscow. So what are the possible effects of the, as we said, worst practices of authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Central Asia, specifically on potential ongoing radicalization of Central Asian youth?

DENBER: That's a great question.

I want to start by saying that there isn't – you know, there are many different studies on the causes of radicalization and what leads youth to become involved in violent – you know, in violent extremism. There are – I think for as many studies there are just a large diversity of studies and opinions about that.

And I think that these very – as Dr. Omelicheva said, there are this very punitive approach to counterterrorism/counterextremism is really one of those factors, because when you're the target of criminal prosecution for something that is – either excessive criminal prosecution or selective criminal prosecution for something that probably shouldn't be a crime – like possessing a leaflet or being part of an organization that is not violent – that is profoundly alienating for you, for your family. You become part of – you become, you know, involved in the criminal justice system, which is in many of these countries very abusive.

You become vulnerable to torture and other forms of ill treatment. Even if you don't go to jail, especially in some of these Central Asian countries, you and your family would probably have to – once you, you know, get on the radar of the – of the anti-extremism police, you know, you become vulnerable to being extorted for bribes, very big bribes, you know, that cause a crisis in your family. So that is profoundly alienating. And that that makes the job of recruiters, for violent – you know, for violent extremist groups – it makes their job a lot easier.

I think another factor that is often cited in these studies and I think is important focus on when you look at the causes of – you know, what drives violent, you know, attraction to extremism – extremist groups, is the experience of being a migrant worker from Central Asia in Russia, right? Studies show that it's not so much that Russia has repressive, you know, policies on religion – although, in some cases, that may be the case, the way – as I said during my, you know, testimony, the way that these laws are used to oppress certain religious groups wrongly.

But the experience of a migrant worker is profoundly alienating for other reasons. It's because they're targeted – you know, they're targeted by police, you know, for searches, for getting extorted for bribes. There's tremendous antipathy and hatred and violence – and in the past, violence against migrant workers in Russia. And they are – their conditions of work – they're exploited quite extensively in many cases by their employers. And that's something that our organization has documented. So all of – you know, and really humiliating exploitation.

And so all of these factors combine to make them very vulnerable to skilled recruiters. Also, you know, these migrant workers and, you know, migrant worker experience shows that they – you know, that they – you know, they form networks, you know, networks of migrants workers. And so that also makes the job of recruiters probably easier.

HUDSON: How susceptible are these groups to Russian propaganda, particularly anti-West? So I guess the point is, how concerned should we be that these folks are being radicalized, but they're also getting the Russian propaganda that the West is the enemy and sort of this anti-West message?

DENBER: So that's a really good question.

I think that they get – Russian propaganda about the West is all over – obviously is all over the region. And I think that in the case of these – you know, through, Russian television is still widely watched throughout the region. Russian online media is popular in many of these places – in many of these countries. But I think that, you know, they definitely would get a message – an anti-Western message – a very strong anti-Western, anti-American message through that. But also, I think that the – you know, the extremist groups that are trying to recruit them already have a very strong anti-Western message. So I think that there's a sort of double messaging there that has an effect.

HUDSON: Dr. Carpenter, you've talked some about exporting of terrorists, about prior to the Sochi Olympics the folks from the Caucasus were sort of helped out of the country, maybe given passports in some instances, maybe just assisted. But, you know, letting these would-be jihadists potentially leave the country. Can you confirm that this is a policy of Russia? Is this something that's kind of a long-standing practice? And does the Kremlin view this policy as being successful, that they've now gotten rid of this problem and it's someone else's problem? And what impact does this policy have on global terrorist movements and on our interests?

CARPENTER: Well, I don't think, Congressman, it's a concerted policy that is written down anywhere. I think a lot of Russian counterterrorism policy is very short term in terms of its thinking. I think the motivation for this was hosting giant international event with close proximity to the North Caucasus and wanting to solve the problem very quickly in the runup to that event. And we saw massive, by the way, air campaigns as well targeting villages in the North Caucasus right up until the opening ceremonies. And so Russia was really focused on sort of cleaning out that problem, so to speak, in those few months before the Olympics. Perhaps realizing some of the possible implications, but more likely kicking the can down the road.

Now, I wouldn't say that this is an across the board policy that they would implement in every circumstance. And I don't even know that it was written down. We do know that there's extensive anecdotal and reporting evidence that suggests that this was systematic in terms of helping folks that would have – should have tripped various tripwires in terms of their possible belonging to extremist organizations, or having extremist views, being given passports and even potentially having their travel subsidized to leave the Russian Federation. So it was a policy then. Whether it continues, it's hard to say. Again, I don't think it's formal. But it was systematic in that – in that period of 2013-2014 for sure.

HUDSON: Appreciate that.

Dr. Omelicheva, what lessons did the Kremlin learn from previous terrorist attacks in Russia, such as the 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow and other cities, 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis, the 2004 Beslan hostage crisis? How has the Kremlin sought to apply those lessons?

OMELICHEVA: So both the Dubrovka Theater crisis of 2002, and of course September 1st crisis in Beslan in 2004, are known as 9/11 in Russia. And for those of you who are not familiar with, you know, the atrocities, in the first instance in the hostage-taking crisis in the Dubrovka Theater in October 2002, the terrorists took 800 theater viewers in the audience hostages. And as a result of the rescue operation, over 130 of them died.

In the case of Beslan, the terrorists took 1,100 hostages, mostly children. And then as a result of a rescue operation, which was provoked by a couple of explosions, as you may recall, one of those explosions broke a roof in the building that killed a lot of hostages to begin with. And it was interpreted as a kind of full signal for fleeing. The operation was complicated by the presence of the locals. Many of them were armed, and all of them had one or more hostages in the school. So there was a lot of, you know, firing that was not done by the special operation forces, which were practicing the retaking of the school close by, outside of the town itself. But as a result of this operation, we had 300-plus people died, mostly children.

And there was even lesson between 2002 and 2004. So in 2002, many analysts blamed the government for acting too soon. But I think the government was also informed by the way the Yeltsin government prior responded to a number of hostage taking operations in 1995 and 1996, Kizlyar, Budyonnovsk, other places that also resulted in lots of casualties. But the president interfered, top officials interfered in those rescue operations. And in the end, the government acquiesced in during the negotiations, letting the terrorists go. And as a result, these same fighters later on committed other types of terrorist attacks.

So those experiences informed the Russian government's responses to 2002 and 2004 incidents, in that President Putin and other top officials, they did not interfere, letting other counterterrorism specialists to be in charge. But in 2002, during the Dubrovka Theater terrorist attack, the special forces acted prematurely. Many believe that they did not exhaust all of the nonpunitive, nonmilitary means during the negotiations with terrorism.

What the government learned was that in both instances that they need to be able to secure the perimeter of the counterterrorism operation, because in both instances – in one, media interfered with the government ability to act secretly, because some of the hostages shared information about government action with the media, and it was broadcasted, and the terrorists learned about some of the actions and acted in anticipation of those. In the second instance, in 2004, you know, the participation of locals armed with light weapons also interfered with the success of the operation.

So the key lesson that the government learned was that they have to have sufficient force to secure the perimeter of the counterterrorism operation, that they need to be able to constrain the freedom of movement, the freedom of mass media, and other types of freedom. And I mentioned that 2006 law on Counteractions for Terrorism that integrated all of these lessons, providing legal basis for this counterterrorism operation mandate, you know, counterterrorism headquarters, and all of the constraints that can be imposed on the freedom of movement, the freedom of media, and many others.

So with your permission, if I may, I had a couple of things to the previous speakers in response to your questions on fighters in Central Asia, as well as Russia's policy to help the militants from North Caucasus to leave Russia. If you're OK with that.

HUDSON: Sure.

OMELICHEVA: So you know, it is true that it was not Russia's policy, but it was very well-thought out and orchestrated. This so-called green corridor was open as early as 2011 when, at that point, ISIL renewed its attacks in Iraq. This is when the first loads of militants from North Caucasus began departing the region, supported by the FSB agents buying them the tickets and whatnot. And it lasted all the way through 2014 or 2015, when the green corridor was closed, but the Russians kept the list of those who departed. And the Center for International and Strategic Studies evaluates that the number of those who left from Russia to Turkey can be as high as 11,000 individuals. And at least 6,000 of those made their way to Syria.

I do want to, you know, acknowledge how broad our understanding of foreign fighter is. That, you know, some of those foreign fighters are, indeed the religious zealots who go to foreign countries to fight for religious ideals. But there are also many of those who are religiously ignorant, and they just kind of buyout of the religious ideology of violence because they are desperate, because they don't have any other way out. And when they go there, especially if they are assisted by, you know, the FSB, they become quickly disillusioned and would like to return.

And there is a very large category of those who are forced to leave, or they are deceived or trafficked. You know, some of my research looks at terrorism and human trafficking. And there are a lot of people who are trafficked based on deception, or they are forced to live as wives, brides to be, or relatives of the fighters. So by different estimates right now, we have 700 or so Russian citizens, women and children, in prisons in Iraq. And so some of the things that Russian government has been trying to figure out what to do with, how to repatriate children,

because up until 2017 Vladimir Putin and Kadyrov, the infamous ruler of Chechnya, they tried to bring in both the mothers and the children.

Their fortunes varied. You know, the Dagestan courts imprisoned many of those. The Chechen courts, they kept them out of prison and did some – put some effort into repatriating them into the local communities –

HUDSON: Well, if I could ask you, of those 700 imprisoned in Iraq, do they pose a terrorist threat or are they victims? Or both?

OMELICHEVA: So the Russian intelligence – so the reason the Russian intelligence stopped repatriating women because there was suspicions raised that at least some of them may pose a threat. So I would say – and this is the danger, because we cannot establish motivation with certainty. And many of them are trained to say, you know, what the law enforcement officials want to hear. So, but the Russians stopped bringing the women back. But they continue trying to repatriate the children.

But, because, again, of these complexity, and so many categories that exist out there under the umbrella of foreign fighters. I think cautious has to be used, but we also need to be aware that those children are not going to go anywhere, and we should worry about who are they going to become, and kind of that forward-looking focus, especially on the children who probably know nothing but, you know, the war and violence.

HUDSON: All right. Well, I appreciate those thoughts . and I can tell you, today has been really illuminating for me. I really appreciate the perspective. One of the things that struck me early was civil society – the reason Russia is against it is because they see it as Western influence. I'd never quite made that connection. Ms. Denber, you were talking about inconvenient people, you know, that's sort of the view of terrorism. Counterterrorism is inconvenient people – that was – I really appreciate that. And obviously, Dr. Carpenter, you know, this concept that Russia approaches CT as a counterintelligence exercise and they sort of see it through that lens, those are all just a few of the things that were very illuminating to me today. And I really appreciate you taking the time, appreciate your written testimonies as well, which we've all studied.

This is important work. And you are informing us and helping us at the OSCE to do a better job from this perspective in dealing with Russia on the counterterrorism issue. And certainly being on the ad hoc Committee on Counterterrorism as a vice chair, this is really helpful to me. So thank you for your time today. Thank you for your excellent testimony. And with that, we will – we will adjourn. (Sounds gavel.)

[Whereupon, at 11:51 a.m., the hearing ended.]