

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

“Russia’s Occupation of Georgia and the Erosion of the International Order”

Committee Members Present:

**Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), Chairman;
Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ), Co-Chairman;
Senator Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), Ranking Member;
Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO);
Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI);
Representative Richard Hudson (R-NC):
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX);
Representative Randy Hultgren (R-IL)**

Participants:

**David Bakradze, Ambassador of Georgia to the United States;
Luke Coffey, Director of the Allison Center for Foreign Policy, Heritage
Foundation;
Damon Wilson, Executive Vice President, Atlantic Council**

**The Hearing Was Held From 11:00 a.m. To 12:43 p.m. in Room 124, Dirksen
Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS),
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2018

WICKER: This hearing of the Helsinki Commission will come to order. Good morning, and welcome to this hearing on “Russia’s Occupation of Georgia and the Erosion of the International Order.” As you know, the Helsinki Commission monitors the compliance of OSCE-participating states to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. In recent years, we have been compelled to pay particular attention to Russia’s clear, gross, and uncorrected violations of all 10 principles of the OSCE’s founding document.

In August 2008, Russian armed forces invaded Georgia in direct violation of the territorial integrity and political independence of states. This initial invasion has sadly led to 10 years of occupation, affecting one-fifth of Georgia’s sovereign territory and causing incalculable political, economic, and humanitarian cost. The invasion of Georgia demonstrated that Vladimir Putin is ready and willing to use his military and intelligence services to redraw international borders and meddle in the internal affairs of a neighboring state. Moreover, Mr. Putin clearly sought to sabotage Georgia’s progress toward membership in NATO, contravening the principle that sovereign states have the right to freely join security alliances of their choosing.

The response to the Kremlin’s aggression against Georgia was not enough to deter Mr. Putin from trying this hand again in Ukraine in 2014. In fact, Georgia and Ukraine are only the two most egregious examples of Russian challenges to the integrity of our borders, our alliances, and our institutions over the past decade. The Helsinki Commission is holding this hearing to make sure the American people and the international community do not lose sight of the continued illegal occupation of Georgia, as well as its costs and implications. The experts before us will help assess if the United States is doing everything possible to restore Georgia’s territorial integrity and reverse Mr. Putin’s assault on the borders of a neighboring state and on the international order. We also intend to ensure Georgia’s contributions to our common security are recognized, and that we continue to help it advance along its path to Euro-Atlantic integration and full NATO membership.

Under my chairmanship, Ranking Member Cardin and I have worked across the aisle to demonstrate the firm bipartisan resolve of the United States Congress to restore Georgia’s territorial integrity and see the alliance make good on its promise of membership. To that end, in March of last year we introduced Senate Resolution 106, condemning Russia’s continued occupation and urging increased bilateral cooperation between the United States and Georgia. More recently, ahead of last week’s NATO summit, Senator Cardin and I, along with Commissioners Tillis and Shaheen, introduced Senate Resolution 557, underscoring the strategic importance of NATO to the collective security of the United States and the entire transatlantic region. This resolution explicitly encourages all NATO member states to clearly commit to further enlargement of the alliance, including extending invitations to any aspirant country which has met the conditions required to join NATO. I’m especially looking forward to hearing how our panelists assess the outcomes of the NATO summit.

Ladies and gentlemen, we will hear testimony this morning from a distinguished panel who will provide valuable perspectives on the current state of the conflict in Georgia, prospects for its resolution, and recommendations for U.S. policy. I am pleased to welcome Georgia’s Ambassador David Bakradze, to testify before us this morning. In addition to his firsthand

experience in managing Georgia's strategic bilateral relationship with the United States, Ambassador Bakradze has worked at senior levels of Georgia government to deepen Tbilisi's Euro-Atlantic partnerships. Prior to his appointment to Washington in 2016, the ambassador served as state minister of Georgia for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration.

Next we will hear from Damon Wilson, executive vice president of the Atlantic Council. Mr. Wilson's areas of expertise include NATO, transatlantic relations, Central and Eastern Europe, and national security issues. At the time of Russia's invasion of Georgia, Mr. Wilson was serving as special assistant to President George W. Bush and senior director for European Affairs at the National Security Council. In that capacity, he played a leading role at a critical time in managing interagency policy on NATO, the European Union, Georgia, Ukraine, the Balkans, Eurasian energy security, and Turkey.

Finally, we will hear from Luke Coffey, director of the Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation. Mr. Coffey was named to his post in December 2015 and is responsible for directing policy research for the Middle East, Africa, Russia, and the former Soviet Union, the western hemisphere, and the Arctic region. What's left? Before joining Heritage in 2012, he served at the U.K. Ministry of Defense as senior special advisor to British defense secretary helping shape British defense policy regarding transatlantic security, NATO, the European Union, and Afghanistan.

I'll now recognize Senator Cardin for an opening statement, to be followed by an opening statement by Co-Chairman Smith. Senator Cardin.

CARDIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm more than willing to defer to Co-Chairman Smith first, if you'd like.

Well, first, thank you all very much for convening this hearing, Senator Wicker. And I thank our witnesses, particularly the distinguished ambassador. It's a pleasure to have you here. I think we should acknowledge that what happened in 2008 with Russia's invasion of Georgia, it was done because Russia's calculations, Mr. Putin's calculations at that time, that under the circumstances he could get away with it, that the reaction would be minimal from the international community. And he looked at it as an opportunity to disrupt Georgia's accession into Europe and into NATO.

And, quite frankly, it worked. He was able to do that. It's not the first time he interfered. We know Russian troops in Moldova have been able to stay there, making it much more difficult for Moldova to be able to become a NATO member. And we've seen it since in what Mr. Putin did in Ukraine with an invasion and annexation of Crimea. And his calculations have always been that if you let me get there, let me do it, I'm going to do it, because his objective is to bring about lack of unity within Europe and to compromise democratic institutions or governments that depend upon democratic institutions.

So we should learn from this lesson of history. And I mention that because Senator Wicker, as we were talking before the hearing started, yesterday was an amazing moment in regards to the Trump-Putin summit. And yes, there is no dispute, at all, that Russia interfered in

our elections in 2016. That's not subject to any serious disagreement. And it is true that Mr. Putin interfered in the European elections. That absolutely factually established. Six months ago, I authored a report on behalf of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that talked about Mr. Putin's design on democratic institutions and talked about his asymmetric arsenal of weapons that include the use of cyber, that includes the use of military, that includes the use of energy, that includes the use of corruption. It includes all these tools in order to disrupt democratic governments.

And that report points out very clearly, you give Mr. Putin an opening, he'll take it. He'll take it as far as he can go. And what really worries me about yesterday's press conference – there's a lot of things that are concerning. I mean, to discredit our own intelligence agencies to side with a dictator rather than with our allies – I'd go on, and on, and on. But it's a signal to Mr. Putin that you can attack the American election and you have the president of the United States on your side. So what happens in 2018? What happens with Mr. Putin saying, well, it worked with elections, let's try something else in the United States. Because I have a friend in the White House that wants to establish a relationship with me that allows me to do these nefarious activities against democratic institutions.

And the report that we issued makes it very clear why Mr. Putin is doing this. His corrupt system of government depends upon corrupt governments. It can't – won't survive in democratic-controlled governments. So it's in his interest in restoring the Soviet power, to bring down democratic governments and to show as much lack of unity as possible among the West. And he was involved in Brexit, and the list goes on, and on, and on.

So I think we got to learn our lesson from history. I want to thank Senator Wicker. He's been a great leader on bringing the Senate together on this issue. He mentioned the resolution we did in 2017 on Georgia. It was a pleasure to join you on that. Clear statement. Also, I might tell you, our resolution that deals with NATO expansion was passed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Gardner, of course, was a major player in making sure that happened in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. So we've passed both of those issues. As I'm sure everyone here is aware, we passed the CAATSA statute, which made it very clear about taking action against Russia as a result of their violations of the Helsinki commitments.

And I was pleased to see at NATO that the Bucharest summit document, that commits us to the full membership in Georgia in NATO, was reaffirmed just in this most recent summit in NATO. Despite some of the publicity that was brought about before and during the NATO summit, the final document reinstates – or, reemphasizes our commitment, Mr. Ambassador, to Georgia's full membership in NATO. And we're committed to that. And we want Mr. Putin to know that it's not up to him. It's up to the people of Georgia. And it's up to the NATO partners.

WICKER: Thank you, Senator Cardin.

Co-Chairman Smith.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this important and very timely hearing.

Ten years ago, as a consequence of Russia's invasion of Georgia, two of my constituents were trapped behind Russian lines in South Ossetia. The girls, Ashley and Sophia, were seven and three years old. Russia's landgrab transformed the girls' summer trip visit to their grandparents' home into a family nightmare. Another young girl from my district was trapped in Abkhazia. Again, what could have been a great visit with grandmom turned out to be a horrifying experience. Matter of fact, after we got her out I remember her telling us how she was – and her grandmother – were prostrate on the floor of their home, their flat, as Russian tanks rumbled right in front of their home. So, again, a very, very frightening experience for that young girl.

I arrived in Tbilisi on August 19th, 11 days after the invasion, and worked with U.S. Ambassador John Tefft – who is one of our finest and he went on, as we all know, to be our ambassador to Russia – with French Ambassador Eric Fournier, who also did a magnificent job particularly on the girls. It was he who, because they had the European Union presidency that cycle, volunteered in direct request from us to go, and it took six hours through checkpoints to get to two girls, put them in the back of his limo, and bring them out safely. That would be Sophia and Ashley.

We also met with the Red Cross and many others who were working overtime to try to mitigate the damage brought about by this terrible Putin invasion. Ashley and Sophia were soon reunited with their parents in Howell, New Jersey. Then we worked with the Red Cross to secure others. When other members of Congress knew I was going, all of a sudden I had a portfolio of family members and every one of them we worked to effectuate the release with our ambassador. And, one by one, they all got out of what could have been a disastrous situation.

As the first member of Congress to arrive in Georgia after the invasion, I also met with President Saakashvili, also with the prime minister, the Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II, and, of course, many other Georgians of all walks of time, including at an IDP camp. Despite Putin's aggression the people of Georgia showed great courage, great resolve, and competence during the national emergency. They were calm, even though time and again, even while we were there, Russian troops got on the road to Tbilisi in some kind of psychological move, only to turn back after going several hundred yards. What I found so incredible about the Georgians was their resiliency, their love for their country, and their love for democracy.

Two years ago, along with the chairman, we were back in Tbilisi for the annual meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. And several of us made a trip to the fence where the Russians – at South Ossetia. It was just like the old Soviet times. They stood there. They had a camera. They had a backlog of trucks and cars that were trying to get into South Ossetia. And when we arrived they took out the camera and with, what I remember from the 1980s with the Soviets, just kept staring and acting in a very defiant way. It was like the old times were back, or perhaps have never left.

I look forward to our witnesses today, learning from them what might be done to mitigate the humanitarian suffering caused by this new Iron Curtain. What can be done, because just like – I'll never forget, one of the first things that I was a part of with – and I was just there with him

– but when President Reagan had captive nations resolutions talking about the Balkans – Baltics, I mean, we said: We’re not going to recognize the illegal – just like Crimea – the illegal occupation of Lithuania, Latvia, or Estonia. And if you looked at any American map, they were not – they were independent. They were not part of the Soviet Union. We need to have the same kind of resolve when South Ossetia and Abkhazia and, of course, all parts of Ukraine, including and especially the Crimea.

So I want to thank our distinguished witnesses for being here. Yield back.

WICKER: Thank you very much for that fine opening statement, to both of you.

Ambassador Bakradze, we’ll begin with you. And if we have a timekeeper, let’s set the timer at six minutes and ask that the witnesses summarize their testimony. Your full testimony will be received, of course, in the record. But, Ambassador Bakradze, we are delighted to have you and you may proceed.

BAKRADZE: Thank you very much, Chairman Wicker, Co-Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cardin, Senator Gardner, and distinguished commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing.

Today we are speaking about the violations of the OSCE principles and commitments by the Russian Federation in the illegally occupied regions of Georgia. And I feel like this is a quite appropriate topic of discussion, not only because 10 years have passed since the Russia-Georgia War, when Russian Federation invaded and occupied two Georgian regions, but also because Russia continues its aggressive policy aimed at redrawing the borders and retaining the so-called zones of influence.

As Chairman Wicker, you have rightfully mentioned, this undermines the security and peace in Europe and creates a very dangerous environment that, if not appropriately countered, may lead to developments in the region that will be hard to reverse. In my remarks today, I will briefly introduce you to the situation in the Georgian regions illegally occupied by the Russian Federation. I would also like to draw your attention to the humanitarian, social, and other cost that Russian Federation and its occupation has imposed on people residing in the occupied and adjacent areas. And I will conclude my remarks highlighting the U.S. role.

Since 2008, the Russian Federation is in breach of full spectrum of the principles of Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers, refraining from the threat or use of force, refraining from making each other’s territory the object of military occupation, refraining for any demand for or act of seizure or occupation of territory of another state, the human rights violation, and many, many more. Through these 10 years, Russian Federation has intensified its illegal steps toward factual annexation of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

Moscow has further continued the implementation of so-called integration treaties absorbing Georgia’s occupied regions into Russia’s military, political, economic, and social systems. In gross violation of all international obligations, Russian Federation reinforces its

military presence and occupation, having illegally stationed fully operational military bases with 10,000 militaries, 3,000 FSB personnel, sophisticated offensive weaponry, constantly conducting military drills and violating Georgian airspace.

At the same time, Russian Federation intensifies the installation of barbed wire fences and other kind of artificial barriers along the occupation line. The total length of barriers reached, 49 kilometers alongside the occupation line in Abkhazia and 52 kilometers along the occupation line in Tskhinvali region. Against this background, the EU monitoring mission deployed in Georgia on the basis of ceasefire agreement is not allowed by the Russian Federation to enter the occupied regions to fully implement its mandate throughout the whole territory of Georgia.

The human rights situation remains alarming, with fundamental rights of local population infringed on daily basis, against the backdrop of intensified ethnic discrimination, restriction of free movement, illegal detention and kidnappings, deprivation of property rights, prohibition of education in native language, and other ethnically based violations. The local population is deprived of minimal safeguards for their lives. Martyr of ethnic Georgians by the representatives of occupation regime has become a dangerous trend. We all remember the killings of Basharuli, Otkhozoria, Tatumashvili. In all these cases, despite cooperation by the government of Georgia in the relevant formats, the questions still remain unanswered and the perpetrators unpunished.

This makes crystal clear that the occupation regimes in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali not only strengthen this sense of impunity, but also further encourage ethnically targeted violence and crime against Georgian population. In this regard, on the basis of resolution of the parliament of Georgia, Otkhozoria-Tatumashvili List was adopted that includes the persons convicted of gross human rights violations in the occupied regions. Georgian government seeks from its partners the imposition of sanctions on the persons included in the list.

With these provocative steps, Russian Federation tries to undermine the efforts of Georgia and its international partners for peaceful conflict resolution. Nevertheless, throughout last several years the government of Georgia has been pursuing peaceful conflict resolution policy unwaveringly. Unlike Russian Federation, we remain in full compliance with the EU-mediated 2008 ceasefire agreement. We have reconfirmed our adherence to the non-use of force principle, still awaiting further reciprocity from the Russian Federation. We pursue the policy of dialogue with the Russian Federation, aimed at de-escalation of tensions.

Reconciliation and engagement policy remains our priority, and we even reinvigorated efforts by presenting new opportunities through the new peace initiative, A Step to a Better Future. The document is distributed for your attention. At the same time, international support is decisive in order to succeed peaceful conflict resolution process. And I will be happy to elaborate on this more during the question-and-answer session.

While talking on peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia, I should emphasize that the United States has a particular role in this process as our strategic partner and a participant of Geneva international discussions. We greatly value the U.S.-Georgia partnership and contribution of the United States in peace and stability in Georgia. On a political level, Georgia

enjoys a widespread bipartisan support across the U.S. government, Congress, and the administration. The Georgia-U.S. bilateral relation has never been stronger, and continues to strengthen under the current administration, which has repeatedly stated its opposition to the Russian occupation of Georgian territories, as well as strong support for Georgia's NATO integration.

The U.S. Congress has been always vocal on these very important Georgia matters. In June, bipartisan Georgia Support Act was introduced by U.S. Congress by Congressmen Poe and Connolly. We greatly appreciate the recent bipartisan resolution offered by Senators Perdue, Isakson, and Cardin, marking the 100th anniversary of the first Democratic Republic of Georgia. We appreciate inclusion of Georgia language supporting territorial integrity issues in the Consolidated Appropriations Act and National Defense Authorization Act.

It is the kind that this political support is further reinvigorated in practical steps, in order to ensure the implementation of ceasefire agreement and comprehensive, peaceful settlement in my country. We believe, through consistence and hard work, we can lay the ground for a lasting peace and security in Georgia. In this regard, I would like to emphasize the necessity of the peaceful conflict resolution to be placed high in the international area, as well as in the U.S. dialogue with Russia. Strong leadership of the United States is essential to reach progress in the resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict.

We deem it crucial that the international society doesn't keep a blind eye on Russia's aggressive actions with regard to the occupied territories of Georgia, and severe security and humanitarian situation on this ground that this policy entails. Firm stance of the international society, and particularly the United States, is decisive to send a clear message to Russia that this policy directed against sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia is not acceptable.

Let me once again thank the Commission for organizing this hearing. And I'm looking forward to hearing from Luke Coffey and Damon Wilson, who I thank wholeheartedly for their input and long-time interest. Thank you.

WICKER: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

Mr. Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Co-Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished commissioners.

On April 3rd, 2008 at NATO's Bucharest summit, just over 10 years ago, the consensus among allies on how to build a Europe whole and free fell apart. I was serving as senior director for European affairs at the National Security Council at the time and had a front row seat. In Bucharest, NATO leaders failed to agree to offer a membership action plan to Georgia and to Ukraine to help them better prepare to become allies. When Washington and Berlin were unable to reach a deal, Central European leaders stepped into the breach to push NATO to agree that Georgia and Ukraine, "will become members of NATO."

Seemingly, leaders decided that NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine would be a question of when, not whether. Yet today, 10 years on from Bucharest and 10 years on from the subsequent Russian invasions of Georgia and then Ukraine, we run the risk of our rhetoric becoming detached from reality. We've agreed a vision, but we don't really have a strategy to get there. Many allies have lost faith in this vision. And we run the risk of accepting an unstable gray zone of insecurity in Europe's east.

Since 2008, we've witnessed a revanchist Kremlin, intent on undoing the democratic gains of the post-Cold War period, reshaping the international order that allowed Europe to remain peaceful and prosperous, and ensuring the domination of its neighbors. The strategic environment has changed so dramatically. As a result, our approach to Europe's east should also change. We should, and can, correct the shortcomings of Bucharest and reverse these Russian gains.

In many respects, this process has already begun. The just-concluded NATO summit, we saw ally leaders invite the government in Skopje to begin accession negotiations, paving the way for the Republic of North Macedonia to become NATO's 30th member. And it was in Bucharest, after all, where NATO failed to extend this invitation, opening a decade of stagnation which Russia sought to exploit. Last week's decision overcomes that failure. We can do the same with Georgia and Ukraine.

With this decision, leaders recognize that enlargement is a stabilizing factor. Enlargement advances U.S. interests as it welcomes nations to our alliance which are willing and able to assume the responsibility of becoming an ally, while also ensuring that a new ally is more immunized from Russia's effort to destabilize it. We've witnessed this formulate in the Baltics. While the region is tense today given Russia's aggressive intimidation tactics, imagine what northeast Europe would look like today if the Baltic states were not in NATO.

This logic applies to Georgia. The Russia-peddled paradigm that enlargement is provocative is wrong. Leaving nations who aspire to join the alliance in limbo is provocative, as it tempts Russia to extend its sphere of influence, either through sowing chaos to ensure weak states, or occupation and domination to ensure obedient neighbors. As history has shown, this Russian strategy is not a recipe for stability but for perpetual instability and potential conflict. Even the most cynical grand bargain, consigning Russia and Georgia to Russia's sphere of influence, would not be durable as it denies the aspirations, the agency of the peoples of the nations themselves. They have a say in their future. Witness the Rose Revolution. Witness the Maidan.

To put today's dilemma in context, consider the Truman administration decision to bring Greece and Turkey into NATO in 1952. Greece was emerging from a brutal civil war. Turkey remained vulnerable as Stalin sought more reliable access to the Mediterranean. Russia sought to topple the government in Ankara during the Turkish Straits crisis, and we were waging war on the Korean Peninsula. Yet, President Truman acted decisively – first bilaterally and then through NATO – to anchor Greece and Turkey in the West. Rapidly, U.S. diplomacy overcame an obvious flashpoint and anchored a region bordering the Soviet Union and NATO.

It is the absence of security for Georgia and Ukraine that has tempted Russia to occupy and annex their territory. Georgians and Ukrainians have done more than most to fight to defend the principles of the alliance. Both spend well over 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Georgia is among the most significant troop contributors to NATO and other international missions. Ukraine has the most battle-tested forces of any European nation. Both already act as allies.

Yet, NATO has handcuffed itself by abiding by the principles developed in its 1995 study on enlargement and its adoption of the MAP process in 1999. The study on enlargement sets expectations that nations aspiring to membership will resolve any territorial disputes before entering the alliance. Allies adopted the MAP process to help nations take the practical steps to better prepare to become members. These policies were crafted in different – that is, benign – geopolitical circumstances. They made great sense then. Today, however, NATO's own policies incentivize Russia to hold onto occupied territories as long-term insurance to prevent enlargement.

In today's environment, MAP serves to signal to Russia that the alliance is getting more serious about membership, without yet being serious about membership. A MAP decision in many respects begins a countdown clock which may put pressure on Moscow to act to disrupt the neighbor's accession process before it accedes, much like we witnessed in Montenegro. To avoid this dynamic, we could update NATO's open-door policy for today's new circumstances. Allies should make clear that their commitment that there's no third-party veto over enlargement means that Russian occupation will not serve as an obstacle to membership. Allies should recognize that MAP is not a requirement for membership, but rather instruments like the NATO-Georgia Commission and its annual national plans provide even more rigor in helping Georgia prepare.

There's significant precedence in determining where NATO's security guarantee in Article 5 would apply. We've seen this with West Germany. We've seen this during the debates of where it would apply for France and Belgium in colonial days. In the case of Georgia and Ukraine, the North Atlantic Council can make clear that the Washington treaty does not apply to the occupied territories, but without relinquishing allied commitments to the nation's territorial integrity, and without Tbilisi and Kyiv giving up their claims of sovereignty.

Today, Europe finds itself at the center of global geopolitical competition. The circumstances mean that we cannot be ambivalent. Precisely because of this tension the elimination of gray zones of insecurity can help ensure durable peace in Europe's east. Permitting these nations' aspirations to be held hostage by Russian occupation and intimidation is a recipe for instability and conflict in Europe. We should not allow these nations, known as the captive nations for much of the 20th century, to become known as the hostage nations of the 21st century. Rather, we should recognize that they stand on the front line of freedom today and anchor them within our NATO alliance to ensure a peace in Europe's east.

Thank you.

WICKER: Thank you very much.

Mr. Coffey.

COFFEY: Thank you. Good morning Chairman Wicker, Co-Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cardin – who’s stepped out it seems – and distinguished commissioners. I’m honored to speak here before your esteemed Commission about “Russia’s Occupation of Georgia and the Erosion of the International Order.” With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I will summarize my prepared statement that has been submitted for the record.

In August 2008, while the world was fixated on the summer Olympics in Beijing, a Russian invasion force passed through the Roki Tunnel on the Russian-Georgian border. After five days of fighting, the fighting finally stopped after a ceasefire agreement was brokered by France. And a decade later, Russia is still not in full compliance with the ceasefire agreement. Today, thousands of Russian troops occupy the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which together account for 20 percent of Georgia’s internationally recognized territory. Mr. Chairman, if a foreign army occupied the equivalent one-fifth of the contiguous United States, it would be comparable to all land west of the Rocky Mountains.

Ten years later, we should not forget that it was Russia that invaded Georgia, not the other way around. In this case, Russia is the aggressor and Georgia is the victim. I submit to this Commission that Georgia is important for the United States for three reasons. First, Georgia is a dependable ally. At the height of the fighting, Georgia had more than 2,000 troops serving in what was statistically one of the deadliest places in Afghanistan, central Helmand Province. On a per capita basis, Georgia has suffered more killed in combat there than any other country that’s contributed to the operation, yet the only joined in any meaningful sense halfway through the campaign. And today, it has almost 900 troops serving alongside U.S. troops.

Secondly, Georgia’s strategic location makes it important for U.S. geopolitical interests in the broader Eurasian region. Located in the South Caucasus, Georgia sits at a crucial geographical and cultural crossroads that has been important for strategic, military, economic and energy reasons for centuries. Thirdly, since regaining independence in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia has been on a successful journey towards democracy. It is an example for the region. Have there been shortcomings and challenges along the way? Yes. But as we know here in the United States, democracy is a process and not a single event.

It is in America’s interests that Georgia remains on this path. Georgia’s journey to NATO membership has been a long and, at times, frustrating one. Even so, few countries in Europe express as much enthusiasm for NATO as the Republic of Georgia. It has the closest relationship with NATO that a country could possibly have without being a full member. It has made good progress. And in the words of NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg, Georgia has all the practical tools to become a member of NATO.

It is in America’s interests to keep Georgia on this path towards NATO membership. But looming over the NATO debates is Russia. Russia’s primary goal in Georgia is to keep it out of the Euro-Atlantic community. We must understand how President Putin sees Russia’s role in the world to understand why he does what he does in a place like Georgia. His actions are often described as Cold War behavior, like we saw during the time of the Soviet Union. But, Mr.

Chairman, in my opinion, this is an incorrect assessment. What we see today is an imperial Russia. We have a 21st century Russia with 19th century ambition. We're dealing with Russia like it was before the revolution in 1917, during the time of the czar.

During the Cold War, the goal was to spread an ideology. During imperial times, the goal was to maximize and spread Russian influence using political, diplomatic, economic, and military means. Therefore, Putin sees Russia's role in the region through an imperial lens. Russia views the South Caucasus as being in its natural sphere of influence, and it stands ready to use military force in the region when necessary to exert its influence. Since 2008, South Ossetia and Abkhazia have essentially become large Russian military bases.

Mr. Chairman, over the years I have visited the line of occupation on numerous times. This is a line that divides free Georgia from occupied Georgia. It is a line that divides communities, families, farms, and villages. Ten years after the war, the Russian threat is still present. I have seen the Russian flag flying on territory that the international community considered to be the Republic of Georgia. Over the years, Georgians have been abducted by Russian and separatist authorities. Some have never come back. Hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced. I have visited IDP settlements in Georgia and I have heard the plight of these people firsthand.

Russia has also implemented a policy of borderization in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As the ambassador said, this includes constructing illegal fence, so-called state border signs, and earthen barriers to separate communities and divide the Georgian people further. This is – in extreme cases, Russia has even taken more territory by moving fences a few yards at a time. This is Russia's creeping annexation. As you can see from this map, research carried out by the Heritage Foundation has found that since 2011 there has been 57 cases at 44 different locations of Russian borderization in Georgia.

In conclusion, Georgia represents the idea that each country has the sovereign right to determine its own path and to decide with whom it has relations and how and by whom it is governed. In the case of Georgia, this shows why territorial integrity must be respected, and why no outside actor – in this case, Russia – should have a veto over membership with organizations like the EU or NATO. Mr. Chairman, in the middle of Tbilisi there's a bronze statue of Ronald Reagan. The political reforms taking place today in Georgia reflect Reagan's belief in democracy, free markets, a strong national defense, and the importance of individual liberty.

For the Georgians, the statue stands as a reminder of how far they have come since the end of the Cold War. For the West, the statue is a reminder that the Cold War did not just end, but that it was won. And it was won because the ideas of free markets, economic freedom, individual liberty, and a strong national defense were much stronger than any army that the Warsaw Pact or the Soviet Union could ever put to the field. Georgia has shown a commitment to the U.S., it has shown a commitment to NATO, it has shown a commitment to difficult political, economic, and security reforms. And it has come a long way since 1991. Now is not the time for the U.S. to turn its back. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

WICKER: Thank you, Mr. Coffey. And thanks to all three of our distinguished panelists for excellent testimony.

What I'm going to do is defer my questions until our House members have had a chance to ask theirs. So I will recognize Mr. Smith first, and then Ms. Moore.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for that courtesy. And thank you for, again, pulling us together for this very, very important hearing. Pardon me.

Mr. Wilson, if I could ask you, have the reasons why NATO failed in Bucharest in 2008 to offer membership action – a membership action plan to Georgia been overcome? What are the remaining difficulties? And when do you think this will happen? Secondly, if I could, the Georgian parliament and the spirit of the Belarus Democracy Act and of the Magnitsky Act in March passed a resolution that calls on the Georgian government to work with international partners to impose travel bans on those who, quote, “accused of murder, abduction, torture, and inhuman treatment of Georgian citizens.” How is that being implemented? What would recommend the Trump administration and our European allies do to effectively implement that very wise move? And just one simple question, finally, how many ethnic Georgians are still in the occupied lands of Abkhazia and South Ossetia? And what is the state of their living conditions?

WILSON: Terrific, thank you, sir. Let me respond to the first one in particular, and maybe defer to the ambassador on the other two as well.

I worked for President Bush in 2008 and was involved in the negotiations between Washington and Berlin on trying to get to yes on a membership action plan for Georgia and Ukraine. They were quite extensive, involving many conversations between the chancellor of Germany and the president of the United States. The German opposition at the time was based on a pretty consistent articulation about the skepticism that Georgian democratic institutions had matured sufficiently enough that this was really in effect a country consistent with European norms, one that would be welcome in the family.

To the Germans' credit, they did not make an argument about Russia vis-à-vis their opposition to Georgia at the time. We could not bridge that gap as much as we thought we might be able to get there at Bucharest. We could not.

SMITH: But the Bush administration tried?

WILSON: Quite, expended a tremendous amount of political capital.

SMITH: And did the model of Turkey being a NATO member but not a part of the EU play into that at all?

WILSON: You know, I think – I think for – the chancellor had a high degree of skepticism of the Georgian leadership and Georgian institutions at the time. And was not willing

to move on this. It was really one of the first times within the alliance that an opposition from an ally really led to a split on a core strategy piece.

Now, in many respects, we've seen Georgia's democracy continue to evolve pretty significantly since 2008. And I would posit that the arguments that were presented in 2008 don't really hold today. And yet, we don't see quite a lot of enthusiasm from the allies. I think that underscores that second point. Many of the – much the unspoken opposition was about what to do about Russia. The idea of enlargement in NATO had always worked because we had a strategy of advancing some type of strategic partnership with Russia – the permanent joint council, the NATO-Russia council. In the time of President Bush, we were working on a missile defense, a strategic deal which also did not come to fruition.

So I think part of what many of the allies' concern is, the issue of Russia today. And so if you look objectively across the benchmarks, Georgia is well-prepared, has exceeded many of the benchmarks – as we watch Montenegro come in, as we see an invitation to accession – the talks begin for Macedonia. Its issue is geography and Russian occupation. And I think it's therefore why I've tried to make the case that unless we change our paradigm of thinking about it, if we accept the Russian argument that enlargement is provocative, our allies will object, we won't be bold enough to push. We have to recognize that the absence of security here is actually what is going to be a recipe for conflict and instability.

The inverse, enlargement to Georgia, much like the Baltic states, would create predictable relationships, would stabilize that situation. And there is precedence within the alliance in saying that for now Article 5 does not apply to the occupied territories of Georgia without sacrificing the principle of sovereignty or territorial integrity. This will only be able to come to fruition with U.S. leadership, because there will remain allied reservations. Turkey and Greece only came into the alliance at a very difficult time during the Cold War because of a decisive move from the Truman administration that took what would have been a controversial decision and made it momentous, but not controversial. That's the same what happened at the beginning of the Bush administration with the Baltic states.

And so I think that's where we stand on enlargement today with Georgia. I might defer to the ambassador on the specifics about the parliament's actions and the Georgians in the occupied territories.

BAKRADZE: Thank you very much for the question. Let me start with the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List. Giga Otkhozoria was cold-bloodedly killed at the occupation line. The person who has committed this killing is identified, but not punished. Tatunashvili, another Georgian, who was killed in the detention center in Tskhinvali occupied region. For almost 30 days, the body of the deceased wasn't returned. And when returned, it was without internal organs.

These two cases demonstrate the brutality. And the parliament of Georgia has come up with a resolution which is called Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List, which those convicted in the crimes in the occupied regions of Georgia. We appreciate very strong statement by the United States in this regard. And just a month ago, during the visit of the speaker of the parliament of Georgia in the United States, the Congressmen Poe and Connolly introduced the Georgia

Support Act, that includes the sanctions against people who convicted these crimes in Georgia's occupied regions. This is under discussion in the Congress, and we would highly appreciate the strong support of the Congress in this regard. The European Union has also adopted a resolution with regards to Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List.

About the situation of the ethnic Georgians, there are around more than 50,000 Georgians in the Abkhazia occupied regions. And the people are deprived of simple human and fundamental rights, including the right of education in their native language. And that was forcing the children to cross the occupational line and get education in the Georgia's controlled regions. But closing of the checkpoints, limiting them from 6:00 to 2:00, is also depriving them of that right. And as it was mentioned, on daily basis they suffer from different forms. They don't benefit from the freedoms of free movement, education, and all the basic rights.

WICKER: Thank you very much Senator – I mean, Chairman Smith.

Ms. Moore.

MOORE: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. It's really good to be here. Good to see you. Thank you all. Please forgive me if I have asked questions that you have already covered in your testimony due to my tardiness this morning.

Very curious, the Trump administration has provided lethal weapons to Georgia. And I want to know, has there been any indication of their being on the verge of using them? Is there any military or diplomatic advice that's being given to use or not to use them? And do you anticipate that they'll be used to stop the aggression?

BAKRADZE: Thank you very much. Georgia has pledged the non-use of force, and only peaceful way of conflict resolution. We benefit from the very close cooperation with the United States on different issues. Starting with the Georgia Defense and Readiness Program, that includes the training of Georgian military by the U.S. officers. That includes cooperation and exercises on yearly basis.

MOORE: And so these weapons are being used purely for exercises?

BAKRADZE: These weapons has been – these weapons are defensive weapons. And Georgia sees it this way. These programs strengthen Georgia's territorial defense, Georgia's defense capabilities, and the interoperability with NATO.

MOORE: Mmm hmm. Thank you. We are seeing very clearly, according to all of our intelligence agencies, a very sophisticated and continued attack by the Russians on cybersecurity. Is there – to what extent is Russia using cyber techniques to threaten Georgia's critical infrastructure? Do we have any notion of that?

BAKRADZE: Well, Georgia has been subject to the different forms of what we now call hybrid warfare throughout the years. Russian market was closed totally for any kind of Georgian product in 2006. The energy pipeline was blown up during the severe winter. And in 2008,

during the invasion also, the cyberattack took place against all Georgian governmental sites. And at that time, our close friend and ally, Estonia, was with us, which has suffered the same attack a year prior to that, to help us come out of that. Now we see – and during the last year, Brussels summit, very strong engagement and cooperation on cybersecurity with our friends and allies in NATO. And Georgia is preparing itself for the future.

MOORE: Thank you. I think many parliamentarians in Georgia are frustrated with delayed efforts to be able to join the EU and NATO. Is there any indication, or is it your opinion, that perhaps the United States sort of slow-walking the efforts – the sort of disengagement with NATO that we've seen recently, and the EU, is somehow contaminating or slowing the process of Georgia attaining that membership? Is there any spillover, cross-contamination?

BAKRADZE: Thank you. We are as determined as ever. Georgia during the last four years have benefited largely on all the major direction of its foreign policy priorities – which is European Union, which is NATO, and strategic partnership with the United States. Georgia has signed the association agreement. Georgia has deepened comprehensive free trade area agreement with the European Union. And Georgia got the visa-free travel with the European Union. These are the benefits that not only the citizens of Georgia living in the government-controlled territories, but also citizens living in the occupied regions can benefit from. And this is an important incentive, to share the benefits of Georgia's European integration with our citizens in the occupied regions.

Georgia's public has a very strong support to EU and NATO integration. By the very recent polls, this number remains with 70 to 75 percent with regards to NATO and European Union. Georgia sees Europe and sees Western democratic way of development as part of its identity, as part of its history. And therefore, this way towards and this path towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integration is beneficial itself. And we are very optimistic that this, in time, will transform into the full-fledged membership of Georgia into European Union and into NATO, that Georgia is deserving.

With regards to the United States, throughout the years we have been benefitting from the very strong bipartisan support of the U.S. administrations, of the United States Congress. And under the current administration, this relationship is stronger than ever. We have last year benefitted from the very strong cooperation in defense and security, and at the political level. And we believe that this relationship that throughout the years transformed into the very solid strategic partnership will gradually form a very strong alliance.

WICKER: Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Moore.

MOORE: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman.

WICKER: Thank you so much.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Coffey, the consensus among NATO supporters has been that membership would not – full membership would not be offered to countries where there was a

territorial dispute. And both of you are arguing that we should put that aside and expedite Georgia's membership in NATO. Is this a new position for both the Atlantic Council and Heritage? How widely is it being embraced among like organizations? And if you could talk about that. And then I would ask the ambassador also.

The concern has been that to bring Georgia in or Ukraine in would be to freeze the lines where they are and, more or less, to recognize that. So if you'd talk about that, and I think you would acknowledge that this is a new position on your part. Mr. Wilson.

WILSON: Mr. Chairman, yes. This is a significant conceptual evolution, yes. I offer this as my thinking rather than presenting my institution's visions. It's my sense, rather than the Atlantic Council. But the point is that we adopted strategies for enlargement in the post-Cold War period when we had a peaceful, benign security environment. So it made sense. I was part of the teams that did this. We said, look: If you want to join our clubs of NATO and the EU, before you come into the club you need to resolve your border disputes, your territorial disputes. We didn't want the historic tensions that we saw in Central Europe being imported into the alliance.

So we pushed for border treaties. We pushed for treaties of friendship between the allies. And it was a great process that actually helped build the ethos of former adversaries becoming allies. It made sense in a benign environment. Flash forward. We're no longer in a benign environment. We're in a very tense geopolitical situation. So Russia sees NATO's policies of saying that we won't take new members if they have territorial disputes – that tells Moscow, OK, then I just need to have territorial disputes and, by definition, I've used their rules to create long-term insurance for me that NATO and the EU won't come to my borders.

So what I'm arguing is that, yes, the United States needs to lead the alliance through a conceptual reevaluation of how we think about our enlargement strategy, our open door, to say that we're going to say we will be willing to accept new members, even if they have territorial disputes, with the caveat that we will decide not to apply our security guarantee to those occupied territories. Furthermore, I'm trying to make the case that this isn't actually a new position, that there's precedent within NATO. 1955 we brought in West Germany without Germans giving up the sense of ultimate commitment to the idea of sovereignty.

At the beginning of the alliance, France actually wrote that the security guarantees would apply to Algeria, when they said Algeria was part of our country. We had to actually reverse that decision with the war of Algiers and Algerian independence. The Belgians argued unsuccessfully to apply Article 5 to their territory in the Belgian Congo. Today Spain has cities – two cities in the – on the African continent, in Morocco, for which we don't have NATO defense plans to guarantee.

My point is, is that this isn't radical. This is recognizing that the policies that we set up in a benign period, post-Cold War period, the Russians are now manipulating them by continuing to be incentivized to hold onto territory because they know that means we won't proceed with enlargement. So we have to change our own conception to say that doesn't apply anymore. We're willing to take you, Georgia. But we won't apply it to these occupied territories. And

that will only happen if the United States pushes for that way of thinking, leads the alliance through that process and that consensus and helps build support around that idea.

WICKER: Mr. Coffey, is your position yours or the position of the Heritage Foundation?

COFFEY: I believe, just like Damon, I speak on behalf of myself today. However, it was in a Heritage Foundation report back in February where I laid out in detail how this proposal could work. The important distinction between Georgia and Ukraine in this case is that Georgia has a non-use of force pledge. Ukraine doesn't. Ukraine is fighting a war in the east. Bullets are flying. Soldiers are dying. It's very kinetic. Whereas with the situation in Georgia with the non-use of force pledge, if you pledge not to use force to get the two occupied regions back, then why would you need a security guarantee on these two occupied regions?

Now, Mr. Chairman, I want to make very clearly that if NATO does down this road – which I think with U.S. leadership it should – it should be made very clear that this is not to question Georgia's territorial integrity. In the event of my proposal, which I'll submit the report for the record along with a detailed article I wrote on the subject, all of Georgia would be joining the alliance, but only the regions not under Russian occupation would get the Article 5 security guarantee until the conflict is resolved peacefully through a non-use of force method, as the Georgian government has said.

We should never – we, being the alliance – should never ask the Georgian people to make a choice between NATO membership or their territorial integrity. One of the things that first attracted me to Georgia was the sense of pride in the Georgians have with their country, their history, their culture, their identity. That goes back a millennia, two millennia. And I suspect that well into the future, a thousand years from now when NATO probably doesn't exist for whatever reason – hopefully it'll be a good reason – the Georgian people will still be there and they will still have their unique identity and culture and way of life. So to me, it would not be worth it as a Georgian to give up my territorial integrity to join NATO.

But thankfully, no one is asking them to do so. And the proposal, as discussed, is not asking them to choose between territorial integrity or NATO membership. But it's time that we start getting creative on how we can get Georgia across the finish line on this. Otherwise, as Damon pointed out, Russia thinks that all they have to do to block a country from joining NATO or the European Union is to invade and partially occupy. And I think that's unsustainable. Thank you.

HUDSON: Thank you.

And this time I'll recognize Mr. Hultgren for any questions you might have.

HULTGREN: Thank you. Thank you all. It is – this is an important ongoing topic. And especially just recognizing 10 years of occupation here and really seeking and searching for the answers and solutions of what really would be effective here.

I do want to follow up – and I apologize as well if there were things that you discussed before I was able to get over to the hearing. I apologize for that. But wondered if, just for my own understanding, what would be the process for us to change policy for us to be able to accept – you know, for Georgia to be accepted into NATO, even though this conflict continues. What practically has to happen and what changes it? And what timeline potentially could that work in?

COFFEY: Well, it would require U.S. leadership. That's the bottom line. If the U.S. wants to lead on this, if the Trump administration wants to lead on this in the same way the Bush administration did and spend the same amount of political capital that Damon described during his tenure, then we could really move the ball on this, I believe. The situation has changed since 2008. And I think that over the years there's been this sort of repetition of the stale argument that Georgia can't join, Ukraine will never join, because they're partially occupied. But there are ways around this. And I think it goes back to leadership.

HULTGREN: Can you flesh that out a little bit more for me? What do you think the leadership needs to look like? Is it resolutions? Is it hearings? What specifically do you think ought that leadership to look like?

COFFEY: Very clear and vocal public statement by the President of the United States and members of his Cabinet that they are going to pursue NATO's enlargement agenda with great rigor. And was already said earlier in this hearing, NATO's enlargement brings stability and prosperity, and then economic development and economic prosperity to regions of Europe that otherwise would not enjoy these things. And making the case not only to the American public, but to our European allies who are hesitant and to the European publics on why NATO is relevant today, why it's a good thing that it adds new members when they meet the criteria, and how we cannot allow a third party – in this case, Russia – to essentially block the Euro-Atlantic integration of certain European countries.

HULTGREN: That's helpful.

WILSON: If I could just add a little bit.

HULTGREN: If you would.

WILSON: It all begins, yes, with political will, but let me unpack it if I were back in my old job as a diplomat. To operationalize that political will, we – I would – we would want to see the United States lead an effort to get a tasking to come out of the North Atlantic Council to reexamine the open-door policy, the enlargement strategy, so that there is a conceptual policy reexamination of how we do enlargement. Through that study, the United States could help shape that so that it comes out that it removes the sense, the requirement that territorial disputes by definition have to always be resolved in advance of enlargement, and saying these egregious cases, coupling that with a non-first use of force, that there will be – the aspirant pledges not to use force first to resolve these disputes. And you can see a recrafting almost adapting the NATO study of enlargement from a peaceful post-Cold War period to now, a period of geopolitical competition, to make it more relevant to today's security environment.

I'd say second, then have the North Atlantic Council reexamine the process. When I was in government we created a membership action plan to help countries prepare. There's no reason it has to be part of that process. And I think the NAC should recognize that Georgia has the tools necessary. It doesn't need to wave a red flag before those that oppose membership by requiring MAP as a next step, which is now a diplomatic way of putting obstacles, barriers, and prolonging the path. But then it does come back, once you've done the homework, cleared out the underbrush, updated a policy, removed the obstacles on paper – it still really does come down to a political decision and a political will that will require our allies to have confidence that the United States is leading on this, just like Greece and Turkey.

The other allies didn't have the capacity to think that they could play a real role with Greece and Turkey coming in. It was – they had to be assured that the United States was serious. In fact, President Truman stepped forward bilaterally first. And with such a decisive bilateral step forward, the allies were willing to see the United States was serious, we'll come along and make this a NATO decision. So it will – there is some bureaucratic diplomatic process to unfold, which I would do that homework to remove the excuses. But it will come back to political will and American determination.

COFFEY: If I may just – if I just may quickly add to that. If you see – if you start to see things changing with the opinions and the attitudes of the administration on this issue – not to say that it hasn't been good on Georgia. I mean, the U.S.-Georgian relationship has thrived under the Trump administration, you could argue, then you will see other European countries start to follow suit. And the important thing that Damon just said about how Truman led on that bilateral relationship with Turkey and Greece at the time is important today because any future membership of Georgia into NATO will be built on the foundation of a strong U.S.-Georgia bilateral relationship. And I think that's very important, that we don't lose that in the weeds – that importance of that bilateral relationship.

HULTGREN: Can I add on just real quickly, of what you would all suggest? Certainly I think the step for NATO is important and something I would support, and I think many of us would, but also looking at OSCE and EU and how does this all fit together, again, to address this ongoing occupation of Georgia? Which is the best structure or grouping of structures, do you think, to potentially push back on that? Any thoughts?

WILSON: I guess the configuration of this is that we haven't made it uncomfortable for Russia to be occupying territory. The status quo is actually pretty easy for them. And so I think I'm arguing is that if we don't actually change our policies, change our attitudes, we have to create a pain threshold for occupation. Right now, we've incentivized Russians troops to stay because they think we've basically come to a stalemate. And, you know, they're comfortable with that. We have to change what we're doing through NATO – I would argue also EU would have to follow. But I would – I would think it would only follow. And then using the OSCE in a more assertive way, where the Russians have a voice, so it's difficult. But we haven't created pain points for the Russians through their occupation right now. And how do we use all of our instruments of power – diplomatic and otherwise – to create costs on the Russian occupation – be they financial, be they political, and in some cases be they security commitment side of this?

It does have a prerequisite that the allies have no doubt about America's commitment to NATO. I think that's a prerequisite to get all this right. And that's why I think the Congress's voice on NATO this past week is really important. Some of the rhetoric has caused questions. But I think that has to be clear with our allies, they understand American commitment to NATO first before they'd be ready to go down a path of something that if there weren't political will would be seen as risky. If there's a decisive attitude on the part of the Americans, it reduces risk and actually provides a sense of predictability and stability.

HULTGREN: OK. Can I ask one more question, or no? Is that all right?

Just quickly, Ambassador, maybe I'll address this to you. And it really is in regards to some of the violations of Moscow with the terms of the August 2008 ceasefire agreement, denying humanitarian access to occupied areas. I wonder if you could just briefly talk about how and when Moscow is hindering humanitarian aid delivery and the work of international human rights monitors. And specifically in that situation, what can we do to make sure that aid, and these entities can get into deliver that aid?

BAKRADZE: Thank you very much. If I may, very briefly, to respond to the previous question, and to say that Georgia is as ready as any country can be to become a member of NATO. This is important, because Georgia is already an enhanced opportunity partner, Georgia is an aspirant country, Georgia is spending two percent on defense spending, 20 percent of which are on acquisitions. And is a willing and able partner to contribute to the international security, as we have demonstrated so far and as we have been standing together with allies with the largest per capita contribution.

And I believe that with this administration we see a very strong appreciation of that dedication by the Georgian people. We see a forward-leaning position of the State Department and the White House for the preparation of the Brussels summit. And I would say that this is the first week after the Brussels summit, which means this is the first week of the coming two years to prepare for the next summit. And we'll be working very closely with the administration, with Congress, with organizations like Atlantic Council, Heritage Foundation, to build a strong case for Georgia's membership, that I believe there is.

With regards to the situation in the occupied regions, Russia has been violating the many norms of the Helsinki Final Act, but also its own commitments taken during 2008 ceasefire agreement. If I may just underline that OSCE is a member of the Georgia international discussions. And we believe there is a potential to reach progress on the core items, like non-use of force commitment by the Russian Federation, like implementation of the principles and establishment of international security arrangements on the ground – something that was also part of the six-point ceasefire agreement. And the dignified return of IDPs to their – to their homes.

Implementation of ceasefire agreement by the Russian Federation with including the withdrawal of forces to the pre-war position. This was also the commitment taken by the Russian Federation that it has unfortunately not fulfilled. I think Geneva international

discussions, the very strong presence of the OSCE, the participation of the United States and European Union, our partners, will be important to find the ground to advance in this process of peaceful conflict resolution.

HULTGREN: Thank you all so much.

Chairman, thank you. I yield back.

HUDSON: Thank you.

And this time I'll recognize the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, for any questions you might have.

JACKSON LEE: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And let me thank the chairman and ranking members of our United States Commission on Security and Cooperation and the U.S. Helsinki Commission. Let me thank the witnesses as well. And thank you for your service.

I think this is probably a more important hearing than we might have expected in the context of which we are here today. I just left a Judiciary Committee hearing and serve on Homeland Security. And we will be meeting this week as well. So, Ambassador, let me thank you for your presence here. And let me join in acknowledging that you live in a challenging neighborhood. And the very fact that Georgia has committed to a non-aggressive posture as it relates to disputed territories speaks volumes for what I believe is your commitment to democracy. Tell me how dangerous is your neighborhood, Mr. Ambassador?

BAKRADZE: It's as dangerous as you can get. But despite that, I thank you for the recognition –

JACKSON LEE: Let me particularly focus – Mr. Ambassador, let me focus on how dangerous your neighborhood is. How dangerous is your neighborhood with Russia being one of your neighbors in particular? Let me just focus on that relationship.

BAKRADZE: Thank you very much. Thank you for recognizing that despite the difficult neighborhood, despite the 20 percent of Georgian regions being occupied, Georgia is a very committed partner of the United States, of the European Union. Georgia has proved that a small nation can be a strong contributor to the regional security that we are, can be a model country for the democratic transformation as we are. And reliable and loyal ally for the United States that we are.

It is difficult. And with the support of the United States, of our European friends, we have managed to live in the very difficult neighborhood, being subject of the different forms – starting from invasion, from cyberattacks, propaganda that takes place –

JACKSON LEE: Coming from where, sir?

BAKRADZE: From the region that is – and from the country that is subject to the Russian invasion. After the collapse of Soviet Union in the beginning of '90s, the Russia-fueled separatist movement started to take place in Georgia, that has caused different processes including the passportization of people living in the occupied regions in the end of '90s, including the energy shutdowns, including the blockades, including the cyberwarfare and informational propaganda. So throughout these years, we have maintained a very strong support to Georgia's choice of being the part of the Europe, being a part of the organizations that believe in the liberties and democratic development.

JACKSON LEE: Specifically, if I might –

BAKRADZE: European Union and NATO.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you. Specifically, if I might, how does Russia exert malign influence today in Georgian politics and society?

BAKRADZE: The Russian Federation on weekly basis, we face the building of razor-wire fences inside Georgia's territory. The length of the artificial barriers, which includes the razor-wire fences, are 52 kilometers on the occupation line with Tskhinvali region, which is 49 kilometers at the occupation line with Abkhazia. The Abkhazia region, Russian Federation and the – (inaudible) – from the occupation regime takes place on weekly basis. The murders that I've described previously have taken place on numerous times. And this engagement, these efforts by the Russian Federation, of course, disrupt Georgia, disrupt its internal political stability.

Despite that, we have managed to create enough stability in Georgia to manage and during the past five years advance on Georgia's European integration process, signed association agreement, free trade agreement, started visa-free travel with the European Union, advance on the NATO membership. And as Damon Wilson mentioned, Georgia already has all practical tools. And this is recognized by the NATO. And probably Georgia doesn't need any additional tools to prepare for the membership and to advance our bilateral relationship with the United States, which is our strategic partner, and which we believe in time and gradually will become our strategic ally.

JACKSON LEE: Well, let me be very clear as I pose one or two more questions. You are obviously in the posture of having the building blocks and the indices and the check marks that it takes to get into NATO membership. Is that your – is that your statement here today, ambassador, that you have – you have made all of the steps toward the requirements for NATO membership?

BAKRADZE: Yes, we have.

JACKSON LEE: And you continue to be a democratic nation.

BAKRADZE: Yes, we are.

JACKSON LEE: And what you relayed to me that is on the record now is the intrusions and the undermining of your sovereign nation.

BAKRADZE: Yes.

JACKSON LEE: And you've indicated that the perpetrator of that is Russia.

BAKRADZE: Yes, ma'am.

JACKSON LEE: Is that under the present leadership of President Putin?

BAKRADZE: Yes, ma'am.

JACKSON LEE: Let me also raise the point of the creative thinking that I heard as I walked in about creating a carve out or an exception for nations that have territorial disputes and having NATO in its effort to be fair to draw in those who desire to be part of the European network and NATO to look at that. And is that, Mr. Ambassador, what you would hope that you could be considered with the principles that you have, but recognizing that the dispute has not been generated by Georgia, or at least it is not something that's going to be readily resolved, but you are ready to be in NATO? Is that the point you're making?

BAKRADZE: Dispute has never been initiated by Georgia. And Georgia's NATO integration and membership is not directed against any other country.

JACKSON LEE: Let me ask you, Mr. Wilson – and let me thank you for your work. And you worked on – I believe, for my fellow Texan. I think you might have worked for Mr. President George W. Bush. And certainly we know the secretary of states at that moment. And they certainly were strong supporters of NATO.

What do you surmise is the impact of the press conference on yesterday?

WILSON: To be frank, the press conference yesterday is a challenge to, I think, what is important in this region. The Russians have assaulted Georgia in many ways – from an invasion, through hybrid tactics, through intervention in their politics, their media, fueling stories against the United States. The Russians are able to succeed if there is a sense that the United States is ambivalent, not deeply engaged, and that the European partners are not with us there. And so coming out of this NATO summit, coming out of our meetings with the European Union, these things have consequences for the small nations around who depend on a sense of unity out of the Western nations – the United States with its allies and the transatlantic community – because it's a united approach in a country like Georgia. That's where we're able to push back on this malign Russian influence.

It's not clear to me that there was any specific conversation about these issues. I don't know the details. But I do think it's important that Russian occupation in Georgia, certainly its actions in Ukraine, be a constant issue that we raise with them. Again, President Putin has to feel that there is a cost for his behavior against his nations. And I think we've got to do as much

as possible – whether it’s raising these in private meetings or having policies that actually raise the physical financial security costs of their occupation, that that needs to be part of our quiver.

JACKSON LEE: Do you think – what are Georgia’s prospects for membership in NATO, from your perspective? And are we doing enough as the United States? As much as the ambassador’s been very gracious, what can we do as a strong supporter of NATO?

WILSON: I think we’ve had two good things that help in this equation. I think it’s been remarkable the strength of the voices coming out of the U.S. Congress that have been consistent in a bipartisan fashion in support of Georgia. And I think that sends important signals to our allies. And so thank all of you for being part of that. Second, we really have advanced and developed a security and defense relationship with Georgia that’s quite significant. We used to be quite nervous about supporting Georgia’s territorial defense. The United States is now providing the kind of lethal defensive weapons Georgia needs to make clear that it can actually help protect its own. I think those are two good steps.

I think we do need to take a step further than that. I think we have to help the allies imagine how we actually deliver on the promise of the Bucharest summit that they will be allies one day. Right now, essentially, we’re stuck because everybody assumes: Russian occupation, we can’t advance. We have to change that paradigm to understand that it is only with enlargement to Georgia that we provide a network of stability and predictability in this region. It is our ambivalence or uncertainty, unwillingness to do this which will only tempt Russia to play games and actually is a recipe for conflict.

And I think Americans have to lead that conceptual evolution so that it becomes actually policy evolution. We’re not there yet, and I think that’s what I’d like to see the United States more on.

JACKSON LEE: Let me just conclude and just say thank you. I think the Congress should go on record as a strong supporter of NATO, and strongly encouraging the admission of Georgia. And I know Ukraine is likewise in the same posture. And I do think that we should speak long, eloquently, and definitively against the inappropriate and disgraceful presentation yesterday. We are for NATO. On our own personal note, we understand the invasion in our own elections. And we should say that. And anyone who represents us internationally should say that as well.

But I believe that what Russia says is that we provoke them by admitting a nation like Georgia. And I would say that Georgia is peaceful, NATO is peaceful – except for its provision to protect. And we should continue to do the North American and European peaceful relations with all the countries that want peace in this world. I yield back.

HUDSON: Thank the gentlelady.

At this point, I’ll recognize the senator for Colorado, Mr. Cory Gardner.

GARDNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much. And I would note, with some agitation, that my colleague in the House has reached the chairmanship before I ever will, so – (laughter) – it's great to see you here. To both of you here, thank you.

Ambassador, it was great to see you in the office a couple of weeks ago with the speaker. I thank you very much for the visit. The speaker of the Georgian parliament was there. And I'm grateful for the opportunity to engage in a conversation that is incredibly important. I'm going to ask a question, Ambassador. I don't know that it's appropriate to be directed to you, but it certainly is to Mr. Coffey and Mr. Wilson.

A couple of months ago I wrote an op-ed in The New York Times. And it was titled: Is Russia sponsoring terrorism? And the gist of the editorial – the op-ed that I wrote was about Russia's activities. Russia has invaded its neighbors, Georgia and Ukraine. Russia supports the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad and our enemies in Afghanistan. Russia is engaged in information warfare against the United States and our allies around the globe. Russia has meddled in the U.S. elections and attempted interference in other elections around the globe. Russia has now carried out a nerve agent attack on allied soil.

Just considering such a toxic label for Russia ought to be cause enough for Vladimir Putin. Should the United States – should the United States Congress pass legislation asking the State Department to consider whether we should add Russia to the state sponsor of terror list, Mr. Coffey?

COFFEY: Well, I think it's beyond a shadow of a doubt that Russia enables terrorism and terrorist states to act. I mean, the diplomatic top cover it gives Iran on the international stage has huge implications for U.S. interests in the Middle East and the broader region. It's also puzzling from a historical point of view, when you look at the fraught relationship that imperial Russia had with the Persian empire, where for centuries these two entities were often at competition if not conflict with one another, that today Vladimir Putin would do Tehran's bidding for it on the international stage. I'm not quite sure, at the end of the day, what Moscow thinks it's going to get out of it.

But, yeah, I mean, the downing of MH17, which happened four years ago today, 298 innocent civilians killed over the skies of eastern Ukraine. Just a couple of weeks ago the British citizen killed in Salisbury. The list goes on and on. And we should not be fooled into thinking the President Putin is going to be part of the solution. He likes to inject himself into these problems so that he then becomes part of the solution. And Syria is a great example of that. But I could tell you, the U.S. and Russia have the same common goals in Syria in the same way that a robber and a customer have the same common goals in a bank. And we should go into any engagement, any meeting, any summit with Vladimir Putin with our eyes wide open, because nothing – since 1999, when he first came to power – indicates that he can be a trustworthy partner for the United States.

GARDNER: Thank you. Mr. Wilson, the legislation that I've introduced would require the State Department to make such a determination in 90 days. Should Congress take up that

legislation and pass legislation to require the State Department to consider naming Russia a state-sponsor of terror?

WILSON: I think it's a very useful step for two factors. One, it helps us establish the sense that we're going to speak truth, we're going to speak clearly about the threat we face, a country that's been involved in the downing of MH17 and the Skripal attacks. At the Atlantic Council we've hosted nearly every dissident that has been poisoned and survived on our stage. And we should recognize that and speak clearly about the threat that we face. And so I think, one, Congressional discussion of this is a way for the United States to project clearly the understanding of the threat and challenge that we face from a KGB agent who's managing Russia out of the Kremlin right now.

Second, I also think it creates the right kind of – the right kind of pressure on the administration and the types of works that we need to be taking forward. I think there is always scope, potentially, for an element of dialogue, even with some of our adversaries, under the right circumstances. But the right circumstances mean that you come with eyes wide open and you speak clearly at what's happening. We had a problem with Georgia and Ukraine before, in which a lot of international officials were afraid to say Ukraine has been invaded, a simple statement which the American people can understand. And I think the utility of what you're pushing here in Congress is plain English about the threat and challenge that we see, so that it helps us shape more informed decisions on our policy and our outcomes.

GARDNER: Thank you to all three of you. Ambassador, thank you. And if you would care to comment?

BAKRADZE: Yes. In Georgia's case, what we definitely see is the Russian Federation being an occupier. And that Russia has military – fully functioning military bases in Georgia, 10,000 troops, 3,000 FSB border guards. And that is why Georgia has no diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. So we have the issues that we believe we can start solving with our citizens residing in the occupied regions. And as a country which believes in the peaceful resolution of this process, we believe that we will spare no efforts, together with our partners, to move to that direction.

GARDNER: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you all.

HUDSON: Thank you, Senator.

We got a few more minutes. If you'll indulge me, I'll have a few questions for you as well. I appreciate how much time you've given us today, very important topic. What are lessons that we can learn from Georgia's experience as a target of Russian hybrid warfare? And I represent Fort Bragg in North Carolina, home of special forces and airborne. And those folks know a little bit about hybrid warfare. But it seems to me, this has been a textbook example of the use of hybrid warfare both in Georgia and in Ukraine. What can we learn from those experiences? What might be Vladimir Putin's next target for a similar invasion or hybrid warfare operations? And what should the United States be doing to anticipate and deter that threat? And I would just open that up to the entire panel.

COFFEY: Great. On the first point about what can be done to counter hybrid warfare, this is a very challenging question because, firstly, no one's – there's not one commonly accepted definition of hybrid warfare. We all sort of know what it is but when you ask, well, define it, you get slight variations. But I would say that there are three things that a country can do to make itself more insular or protect it against the hybrid threat. The first one is good governance at the local and at the national level. If people feel like they're governed well and governed fairly, then they become less susceptible to active measures like propaganda and influence operations.

The second one is economic freedom. If countries enjoy economic freedom and economic prosperity, and people feel like that they have options in life and that their kids can have a better future, they become less susceptible as well. And a great example of this is Narva, Estonia, where more than 90 percent of the population on the border – in Narva, a city on the border on Estonia and Russia – are Russian speaking. But polling has shown that, you know, they do not want a repeat of Crimea in Narva, because they know their situation's better off being a part of Estonia.

And a third way to counter hybrid warfare and hybrid threats is a very respected and well-trained and professional security force. And I mean intelligence services. I mean law enforcement at the local level, at the national level. If people feel like they're treated fairly and they're protected, then I think they become less susceptible to the hybrid threat.

On your second question, it's always risky as a think tank analyst to predict the next move. But I could – I don't have to take a leap from reality to see a situation where Russia antagonizes or exploits some of the social cleavages in the Armenian section of Georgia. Or I would keep an eye on Gagauzia, which is an ethnically Turkic but religious Christian Orthodox community in southern Moldova that borders southwest Ukraine, where they have very strong connections to Russia historically, culturally, and have had a pro-Russian governor recently elected.

And these are areas that, you know, Putin can tinker around and meddle with to cause problems for us. And we need to be aware that it's not just South Ossetia or Abkhazia or Crimea or Luhansk or Donetsk. There are many places, many options for Vladimir Putin.

WILSON: I might just add, as someone who grew up in Buies Creek, North Carolina, not far from Fort Bragg, it's a pleasure to be here with you.

HUDSON: Thank you.

WILSON: A great area. But we have seen Russian hybrid strategy is asymmetric. So the premise of a hybrid strategy is that the Russians understand they can't really face us down in the Baltic states very easily in a traditional hard security way. They're not going to take us head on. So the premise of this is they're going to look for soft targets where they can play to cleavage issues and undermine from within and minimize their fingerprints. So Luke spoke to many of the elements that are required to create the resilience of societies. I think one of the

biggest and most important things is a common understanding of what Russia tactics and strategy is, so that your population is informed and less vulnerable to that kind of manipulation, and governments that are actually equipped to understand to respond to that. It's when our own political divisions allow – you know, cause complication, having clarity on the challenge posed from Russia, which becomes a problem.

In Georgia, we've seen – you know, because it's not in NATO, soft target in that sense, cleavage issues. We've seen them play out – gay marriage, other things – to try to associate these controversial social issues as being associated with the West, to create cleavages, to play on what are, you know, naturally tumultuous politics in democratic Georgia – which, in many democracies, how they can exacerbate some of those things. And so I think that's a particular concern. An awareness that it's happening, strategies that actually can stand up against it based on the credibility of the institutions. And this is where Georgia has some work to do. The confidence in its institutions, regardless of who's in charge, to be able to protect the state. And I think there's still work to be done in that front.

And your last part, I do think we need to pay attention as we have a series of elections unfolding. You know, Vladimir Putin wants to win the easy way in his neighborhood. He doesn't – you know, Ukraine has become a cost for him. So by being able to undermine these states from within through use of corruption – I think corruption has become purely a major national security issue for the United States and our allies – is going to look to actually play the levers in Ukraine as it faces major elections coming up. Particularly in Moldova this fall, where there is a highly competitive Russia-favorable party that's in play. These become the easier means for him to actually use his means to exert influence. And I think that's where we need to be vigilant in helping to expose the strategies underway, both strategically and tactically, and helping many of these new democracies withstand that type of pressure.

BAKRADZE: Well, Senator, thank you for the question. I come from the country which for 70 years lived under Soviet Union and therefore sometimes, more often, we recognize the propaganda when we see it. And therefore, there may be some stronger and more resilience in Georgia that one might think. And I think the small country advancing in many directions is a good demonstration of that.

Let me put what my co-panelists described in Georgia's perspective, how do we leverage our bilateral relations and transform it into the opportunity for the confidence and trust building in the war-torn societies that I think is a very important one. Presenting alternatives, because our citizens in the occupied regions are also subject to Russian propaganda that reminds them the war period and tries to aggravate the situation which is already very difficult. So presenting opportunities, presenting alternatives, sharing the benefits of the democratic development of the country – that includes the free health care that we were doing, that includes the visa-free travel with the European Union, free trade with the European Union.

And also I want to use this opportunity to express gratitude for the USAID support that has brought the small and medium enterprises projects in 41 villages adjacent to the occupation line, to give the possibility to co-work with the societies that are divided by the occupation line. Also, with the new initiative that is peace initiative for the better future, I believe that educational

possibilities for our citizens in the occupied regions can be a very significant part, as well as the trade opportunities. And I want to thank also Millennium Challenge and their efforts in education system in Georgia. And I believe that with these opportunities that we present, we build the trust that are divided. That is unfortunately – and the confidence that is unfortunately shattered throughout years.

And I believe that with new opportunities as we advance our defense and security cooperation, as well as possibility for the more stronger trade relationships – including through the free trade agreement – we believe this will expand the new alternatives and possibilities to our citizens living on both sides of the occupation line.

HUDSON: I appreciate that very much. I know we're overtime, but if I could just follow up with – just put a little more detail on the record here. As we've talked about Russian propaganda. We've talked about interference through cyber. There's also been threats to infrastructure – pipelines, major transit routes. Could you maybe give us some examples of what's Russia doing in Georgia to undermine this critical infrastructure? And what are they doing with cyber? And maybe an example of some Russian propaganda that you're seeing?

BAKRADZE: Russian cyber was more active during the 2008 invasion, when all the major governmental websites were targeted. And the Estonians have helped us a lot in overcoming this challenge.

When it comes to propaganda, it always differs. It differs not only from country to country, but even within small country of Georgia it is different from one region to another.

HUDSON: They're very sophisticated on how they –

BAKRADZE: Because – yes. Because they capitalize on fears, disillusionments, frustrations, disappointments of the societies. And therefore, our strategy is always very tailored. I, in my previous capacity as a state minister, I used to coordinate the work of the government on strategic communication to counter propaganda. The target of the Russian Federation is not to present alternative of Russia to the West, but to bring the anti-Western narrative in public and find the weak points where it should build. So our target was and maintains to be maintaining a strong support towards Georgia's European Union and NATO integration process. That, we are managing to do.

Now, coordinating the work of the government, of the parliament, of the civil society, of the media organizations, and only marginal groups that suffer from the Russian influence cannot counter the very strong stance of the public that believes in Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic future. Some examples you have asked, but I believe that when it comes to Georgia's European integration, that has been a target of the Russian propaganda, it always tries to on the one hand show that Georgia's reforms, that sometimes are not very popular, but on the way to Georgia's European integration are all in vain and futile, because it doesn't bring the tangible result. And therefore, bringing the result is critically important to counter that argument.

And on the other side, to – as Damon has mentioned also – on the other side, to show that this integration process going against Georgia’s traditional values. That, of course, is not true and has nothing – and no basis to exist in Georgian society. So our effort is working with all the major organizations and the institutions, and explaining and helping them to understand what Russia is doing, to clarifying their methods, and maintaining a strong support to EU and NATO.

HUDSON: All right. Thank you for that. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I’ll yield the gavel and my time to you, sir.

WICKER: Well, thank you very much to all of our witnesses. I think it’s been a very productive hearing. And before we adjourn, let me just say that it’s important at this 10-year anniversary of the invasion for the Congress and the general public to continue to shine the light of day on the facts and to call international attention to this violation of international law and the OSCE principles. And, Mr. Ambassador, I want to congratulate Georgia on the progress that you’re making in the rule of law and independent judiciary, and all of the things that we look for in countries that we’d like to join the Western alliance.

We’re not going to forget you. We’re going to continue speaking out about this. And we’re going to be guided by the testimony of all three of these outstanding witnesses today. So, with that, unless there’s anything further, we’ll adjourn this hearing with the thanks of the Commission.

[Whereupon, at 12:43 p.m., the hearing ended.]