



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

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

Thursday, September 12, 2019

10:15 a.m.

Room 210, Cannon House Office Building

Opening Statement of Senator Ben Cardin, Ranking Member

I would like to thank Chairman Hastings and Co-Chairman Wicker for their leadership of the Helsinki Commission and for convening this hearing on a topic of tremendous importance to all of us who recognize the rule of law as a pillar of free, peaceful, and just democratic societies.

While so many Americans enjoy the freedom to speak and write freely – and critically – about their government, elsewhere in the world millions live in conditions under which voicing any public opposition to political forces is a life-threatening activity.

Autocrats often go to great lengths to stifle dissent. They shut down access to internet and communication channels, they ban free and independent media, employ

propaganda to prop up their cult of personality and nationalism, and to silence dissenting voices.

They often scapegoat and demonize vulnerable minorities, preying on the fears of the masses to build popular support. Autocrats also weaken the checks and balances on government power needed to preserve human rights and the rule of law, such as an independent judiciary. They often crack down on civil society groups and NGOs by limiting their ability to operate in their country.

As evidenced from the horrific crisis in Venezuela, to the targeting of indigenous environmental advocate Berta Caceras in Honduras, to the crackdown and deadly targeting of journalists from Brazil- to the Philippines- to India- to the Gambia, and indeed across the world, autocratic leaders will stop at nothing perpetuating their own power by any means necessary.

Nor do autocrats confine intimidation and violence against dissenters to their countries' borders; more and more we see regimes abusing the tools of international diplomacy and law enforcement to silence those who dare to speak against them.

Next month we will mark the one-year anniversary of the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. This politically motivated killing by a team of Saudi regime henchmen underscores the motivation that authoritarian governments have to silence their critics anywhere in the world and the difficulty we face in bringing the perpetrators and masterminds of such crimes to justice.

Khashoggi's killing revealed the confidence of senior Saudi officials who felt they could export Saudi-style repression to a European nation with impunity.

In response to Khashoggi's murder, I have called for steps to hold the regime accountable. Over the past year, I pressed the Trump Administration to apply Global Magnitsky sanctions to the masterminds of Khashoggi's murder—not just its implementers. Although I welcomed the sanctioning of 17 conspirators last year, I remain dismayed by the Administration's refusal to respond—as required by law—to Congressional inquiries concerning the complicity of senior Saudi officials, including Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman.

While Turkey has led international calls for Saudi accountability in the case of Jamal Khashoggi, President Erdogan has undertaken his own campaign against his political opponents overseas.

Just last month, Turkish officials confirmed that its intelligence forces abducted a suspected follower of Turkish religious leader Fethullah Gulen from Malaysia and rendered him to Turkey to face terrorism charges. Our witness this morning, Nate Schenkkan, has tracked this phenomenon closely, finding open source evidence of such abductions in at least three countries.

Describing the broader scale of Turkey's global dragnet in *Foreign Affairs* last year, Mr. Schenkkan wrote that “In at least 46 countries across four continents, Turkey has pursued an aggressive policy to silence its perceived enemies and has allegedly used Interpol as a political tool to target its opponents.”

Ahead of today's hearing, the Helsinki Commission received a harrowing statement from a victim of Turkey's abuse of INTERPOL: veteran Turkish journalist Ilhan Tanir. Mr. Chairman, I request that Mr. Tanir's statement be entered in the record.

I echo Co-Chairman Wicker's concerns about Russia's repeated targeting of Bill Browder using INTERPOL Diffusions, most recently earlier this year. How many times will Russia be allowed to drag Mr. Browder into a fight to clear his name?

Accountability and deterrence are our most potent tools in resisting the spread of authoritarian lawlessness across borders. This is why I led the fight for the original Magnitsky Act and championed its worldwide expansion under Global Magnitsky.

This November 16th marks the 10th anniversary of the suspicious death of Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow prison following 11 months in custody. Magnitsky, a tax attorney, drew attention to large-scale theft from the Russian state, and was jailed as a result. As Putin said dismissively of his death at the time: "Must we make a story out of each and every case?" To those who suffer under repressive efforts to silence their voices, we must. The law I sponsored bearing Magnitsky's name was passed in 2012, and its global counterpart was enacted in 2016. Since the ratification of these laws, we have made 113 designations worldwide based on allegations of corruption and gross human rights abuses. I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses about the scope of transnational repression and recommendations for how to improve U.S. policy responses to this growing threat.