

Chairman Cardin, Co-chairman Cohen, and the rest of the members of the Commission,

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important hearing at such a crucial moment in history.

I also want to thank Paul Massaro for organizing this hearing and for his incredible efforts in the fight against corruption.

Journalists and anti-corruption activists around the world today are facing an unprecedented volley of threats. An emerging weapon of choice used by Russian oligarchs and their enablers is the power of the legal system to not only punish journalists for critical reporting but also threaten and intimidate us into silence.

Over the last 18 months, I have lived the increasingly-too-common life of an investigative journalist who splits his time between researching and writing articles and tending to a lawsuit.

I report on issues of national security, financial crime, and corruption, so I closely followed the investigation conducted by the Senate's Intelligence Committee into foreign interference in the 2016 election.

During that investigation, *Politico* reported that the investigators in the Senate were interested in interviewing Walter Soriano, a man who was initially described as a "*mysterious security consultant*."

Over the course of the following year, I produced six reports and a podcast on Mr. Soriano along with my colleagues at my media startup *Forensic News* - Eric Levai, Jess Coleman, and Robert DeNault.

We unraveled Mr. Soriano's business relationships with power brokers in both Russia and Israel. The articles, keeping in line with the mission of *Forensic News*, were largely based on hard evidence - corporate records, court documents, foreign media reports.

Well-placed sources in multiple countries supplemented this evidence.

Here's what was established: Walter Soriano is an enabler of the oligarchy.

Mr. Soriano, a former Israeli intelligence officer, has worked closely, albeit covertly, for multiple Russian oligarchs, namely Oleg Deripaska, a sanctioned Russian billionaire

described by the Senate as “*one of the Kremlin's most significant malign influence operatives.*”

We also established that Mr. Soriano has been in business with former senior leaders of Israel's state intelligence agencies.

With these unique, powerful connections, Mr. Soriano has acted as a key intermediary between the Russian oligarchs, including Mr. Deripaska and Dmitry Rybolovlev, and intelligence and surveillance companies mostly based in Israel.

Prior to our last report being published, Tom Clare, a top defamation lawyer representing Mr. Deripaska wrote to me and threatened legal action while also demanding, “*you must provide him with your sources and any documentation (public or otherwise) ...*”

Mr. Soriano's UK lawyer Shlomo Rechtschaffen emailed and asked a question attempting to identify my father.

More recently, Mr. Soriano's US litigation counsel Andrew Brettler wrote to me threatening yet more legal action if I did not pay a UK Court of Appeals order for more money than I've ever had in a bank account. Mr. Brettler said, “*should you ignore this demand, you will be proceeding at your own peril.*”

This is what lawfare looks like. It is designed to suppress, scare, and stall critical coverage of the Russian elite and their enablers.

Soon after our last article, Mr. Soriano filed an expansive lawsuit in London against the corporate entity of *Forensic News* and all of the contributors to the articles and podcast.

For over a year, we contested the jurisdiction of the lawsuit. I have never stepped foot in the United Kingdom. *Forensic News* has no corporate presence in the UK and the vast majority of my readers are in the US.

Perhaps more importantly: I am an American citizen. I went to great public schools my entire life and I started and incorporated my business in California, where I live. I expect the First Amendment to apply to me.

But with a landmark ruling handed down by the England and Wales Court of Appeals, I am now forced to continue fighting this lawsuit from a man who has made millions from the Russian oligarchy.

Let us study Walter Soriano as he represents the enabler class that Russian oligarchs continue to hire to spread their influence to the West.

The very core of our rights as Americans and freedom-lovers everywhere is the ability for journalists, the truth seekers of our societies, to operate without fear of intimidation or retaliation.

Don't let the oligarchy shoot the messenger.

Thank you again for inviting me, and I look forward to your questions.