

**Testimony to the US Helsinki Commission  
“Countering Oligarchs, Enablers, and Lawfare”**

**by William Browder,  
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My name is Bill Browder. Thank you for this opportunity to share my experiences of being persecuted by the Russian government and its Western enablers.

I am the Head of the Global Magnitsky Justice campaign, the CEO of Hermitage Capital Management, and author of two books describing my experience of standing up to Russian corruption—Red Notice and the forthcoming Freezing Order.

Many of you already know me from the work we’ve done together passing the Magnitsky Act in 2012 and the Global Magnitsky Act in 2016. However, you may not be fully aware of the personal price I have paid for advocating for these two laws and publicly opposing Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Following the passage of the Magnitsky Act in 2012, Putin made repealing the Magnitsky Act his single most important foreign policy objective. In conjunction with this, he ordered his government and its proxies to destroy me in any way possible. This has involved death threats, kidnapping threats, extradition attempts, and lawsuits all around the world.

The Putin regime didn’t even bother to cover up their involvement in these threats.

In 2013, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Russian prime minister Dmitri Medvedev was asked by a group of journalists about the murder of Sergei Magnitsky. His response was that “it’s a shame that Sergei Magnitsky died and that Bill Browder is still running free and alive.”

In 2018, following a failed attempt by the Russian government to use Interpol to arrest me while I was traveling in Europe, Russian general prosecutor Yuri Chaika said, “We will redouble our efforts to get Bill Browder . . . He should not sleep peacefully at night.”

Later in 2018, at the Helsinki Summit between President Trump and President Putin, when Putin was asked if he would allow the United States to question 12 GRU agents who had just been indicted by the Department of Justice, he agreed. But there was a condition: Putin said that the Department of Justice would be able to talk to these agents if the United States handed over “Mr. Browder.”

These public statements were on top of countless death threats I’ve received by email, text message, social media, and concerned informants over the years.

Between 2013 and 2018, the Russian government has also used Interpol arrest notices eight times to try to bring me back to Russia, where I have been sentenced in absentia to 18 years in prison on trumped up charges. If I were ever returned to Russia and put in prison, it’s certain that I would be killed, just like Sergei.

All of the above is disturbing, but it's to be expected. This is the price one pays for opposing Vladimir Putin.

What has been unexpected is how Putin and the Russian government have been able to enlist the services of various Western enablers to pursue their criminal persecution of me.

One emblematic example of this occurred as we traced the \$230 million stolen from the Russian Treasury – the crime that Sergei had exposed and was killed over. The \$230 million was the amount of taxes paid by the Russian companies of the Hermitage Fund which I advised, and which was stolen by corrupt Russian officials and their associates.

In 2012, we discovered that some of this money flowed to a Cyprus-registered company named Prevezon. This company was owned by a Russian man named Denis Katsyv, whose father, Piotr Katsyv, was a prominent Russian government official. Prevezon held assets in New York in the form of bank deposits and luxury real estate in Manhattan. One of the American lawyers who had originally helped us to trace the stolen money was John Moscow, a former New York prosecutor who worked at the law firm BakerHostetler.

In 2012, I filed a complaint in New York detailing Prevezon's receipt of some of the money connected to the \$230 million crime. In 2013, the Department of Justice opened a money laundering and forfeiture case against Prevezon, freezing approximately \$20 million worth of New York-based assets. I became the main witness for the US government.

Shortly after the government froze the money, I learned that John Moscow had switched sides and was now the lead counsel for Prevezon, an action that is explicitly forbidden by the New York Bar. He and his firm had been hired by Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, a Kremlin-connected lawyer who worked directly, and secretly, with General Prosecutor Yuri Chaika in Moscow. Veselnitskaya also hired Mark Cymrot, a partner at BakerHostetler based in Washington, D.C.

The first thing John Moscow and Mark Cymrot did on behalf of their Russian clients was to subpoena all information that would help the Russian government harm me, my colleagues, and our partners living in Russia. They wanted my personal security details; copies of my passports and visas for the previous 20 years; all of my communications with Interpol and the European Union; all of our communications with investigative journalists; all of our correspondence with whistleblowers and politicians; and all of our confidential discussions with any law enforcement agency investigating the money that Sergei had been killed over.

I knew that once John Moscow and Mark Cymrot received this information, they would pass it to Veselnitskaya, who would in turn pass it to Yuri Chaika, Putin's chief law enforcement officer.

The gravity of these subpoenas became even more pronounced in 2015 when I received a message from a federal prosecutor working on the Prevezon case informing me that, "we've received intelligence that some individuals are soliciting funds to hire a team to locate you and bring you back to Russia."

In order to execute the subpoenas, BakerHostetler and Veselnitskaya hired a former journalist named Glenn Simpson, partner at the private investigation firm Fusion GPS. Simpson used a network of Americans to identify my location in the United States, which I had deliberately kept secret due to security threats. On two occasions, these agents found me, once in Aspen,

Colorado, and the other time in New York City. I'm certain that my location details were promptly passed to the Russian government.

Ultimately, after three years of working on the case, John Moscow, Mark Cymrot, and BakerHostetler were disqualified by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals for violating conflict of interest rules. The three-judge panel said the circumstances of our case "truly are extraordinary" and acknowledged that I was in real danger from the Russian government.

That didn't deter BakerHostetler, though. They defied the court order, continuing to provide secret legal advice to Prevezon right up until the moment Prevezon paid a \$5.9 million settlement to the Department of Justice in 2017. I estimate that BakerHostetler received in excess of \$15 million for their representation of Prevezon, which helps explain the financial incentives behind these lawyers' willingness to violate laws, morals, and professional ethics.

Part of these legal fees weren't even directly related to the Prevezon case. In addition to organizing Prevezon's legal defense, Veselnitskaya also spearheaded a sprawling disinformation campaign in Washington, D.C. with the involvement of Mark Cymrot. In 2016, Cymrot spent time lobbying members of Congress to impugn me. This effort was assisted by Glenn Simpson of Fusion GPS and Chris Cooper, from the US PR firm Potomac Square Strategies. The ultimate goal of this disinformation campaign was to prevent the passage of the Global Magnitsky Act.

In 2016, BakerHostetler also provided legal services to Veselnitskaya as she set up a fake NGO in Delaware called the Human Rights Global Accountability Global Initiative (HRAGI). This NGO's purported mission was to restore an adoption program between Russia and the United States, but its real mission was to repeal the Magnitsky Act.

One of the founding members of HRAGI was an American citizen named Rinat Akhmetshin, who had been born in the Soviet Union and had emigrated to the United States. On June 9, 2016, Akhmetshin and Veselnitskaya went to Trump Tower to meet with Donald Trump, Jr., Jared Kushner, and Paul Manafort. They were there to try to convince the attendees that, should Donald Trump win election, he should repeal the Magnitsky Act.

Akhmetshin's attendance at this meeting was revealed by the NBC News and Associated Press in 2017. In the articles, they cited his background as a former Soviet military intelligence agent. I tweeted these articles, and in 2018 Akhmetshin sued me for libel in federal court in Washington, D.C. Conspicuously, he did not sue NBC News, AP or any of the dozens of other media outlets that reported this story. The case was dismissed, but he threw money at an appeal. This appeal has been ongoing ever since.

None of the American citizens involved in this Russian disinformation campaign—Simpson, Cooper, Cymrot, or Akhmetshin—ever registered with the Department of Justice under FARA statutes for their work representing the Russian government. This is a criminal violation according to US Code. These violations have never been prosecuted or enforced.

These examples represent a small portion of the Russian government's use of lawfare and Western enablers to persecute me in the West. I have also been targeted in Cyprus, Switzerland, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Russia's efforts in the UK, where I am a citizen and reside, have been especially egregious and spurious. I was sued for libel by Maj. Pavel Karpov of the Russian Interior Ministry for

exposing his involvement in the \$230 million crime. Karpov had an annual salary of approximately \$15,000, yet he was able to hire Geraldine Proudler of the law firm Olswang, who charges approximately \$900 per hour. He also hired Andrew Caldecott QC, considered to be one of the top libel barristers in the UK, who charged approximately \$1300 per hour.

Neither Proudler nor Caldecott appeared to have any trouble receiving money from a former Russian official who clearly could not afford to pay their fees on his official salary. It was obvious to me that this was a Russian government project. I can't imagine it was not obvious to them. In the end, the case was dismissed as an abuse of process and the court ordered Karpov to pay my costs, but he disappeared. Karpov has never paid and an arrest warrant has been issued for him in the UK. Nearly \$900,000 of my costs are still outstanding. I am certain that Ms. Proudler and Mr. Caldecott received their fees in full.

Other high-cost lawyers and firms in the UK who have assisted the Russians over the years include: an investigation agency called Grayson Pender Wordsworth, chaired by Andrew Fulton, a former senior UK diplomat; the law firm Debevoise & Plimpton, which employed a former UK attorney general named Lord Peter Goldsmith and Robin Loof, who recently joined Fountain Chambers in London as a barrister.

Most recently, a lawyer named Carolyn Lamm from the firm White & Case in Washington has been hired by Russian government affiliated entities to try to convince US law enforcement agencies to open criminal cases against me.

While my tale is horrifying, I'm actually lucky. These assaults have taken an enormous toll on me, my family, and my colleagues, and have cost millions of dollars to defend, but I've been able to successfully fight back. Almost anyone else faced with similar challenges has been destroyed physically, financially, and emotionally. This is what lawfare does to regular people.

I urge the US Congress to take the following steps to ensure that the Russian government and other authoritarian regimes can never use these tactics again:

1. To create and maintain a list of law firms, PR firms and private investigation firms involved in enabling dictatorships and oligarchs to persecute journalists, activists and political opposition figures and to prohibit the US government from doing any business with these firms going forward;
2. Cancel the visas of foreign enablers who are involved in persecuting journalists, activists and political opposition figures on behalf of dictatorships;
3. FARA should be properly enforced;
4. The Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty with Russia should be suspended.
5. Anti-SLAPP provisions should apply to all courts to allow publicly important information on corruption and human rights abuses of foreign government officials and their agents to be freely disseminated without fear of reprisal.