

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge you to immediately impose the legally-mandated second round of sanctions as required by the U.S. Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991 (“CBW Act”) to hold the Putin regime accountable for its continued use of chemical weapons and flagrant disregard for international norms and fundamental rights.

On March 2, 2021, the Secretary of State determined pursuant to the CBW Act that the Russian Government used a chemical weapon against one of its own nationals, leading Russian opposition member and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny. As a result, the Administration expanded existing sanctions first imposed on Russia after its 2018 chemical weapon attack against Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom.

However, the CBW Act mandates the Administration impose a second round of sanctions within three months of the aforementioned determination unless you certify in writing to Congress that the Putin regime is no longer using chemical weapons in violation of international law, has provided reliable assurances that it will not in the future engage in any such activities, and is willing to allow on-site inspections by internationally recognized, impartial observers. As of June 2, 2021, those three months have now passed. As Russia has taken none of these necessary steps, the Administration now must impose additional sanctions for the Putin regime’s use of chemical weapons.

We are concerned that the delay of the imposition of these mandatory sanctions appears to be part of a larger pattern to avoid confronting the Putin regime ahead of the U.S.-Russia summit on June 16, 2021 in Geneva, Switzerland. Along with waiving critical sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and your Administration’s muted response to Russia’s role in a series of recent significant cyberattacks on the United States, this delay, in contravention of U.S. law, serves as yet another unreciprocated concession that projects weakness.

Moreover, the delay of the imposition of these sanctions runs directly counter to your Administration’s stated goal of using the summit with President Putin to defend our democratic values in the face of Putin’s authoritarian rule. Not only does Mr. Navalny remain in poor health behind bars in Russia on politically motivated charges, but just days before the summit, the Putin regime designated as “extremist” three organizations affiliated with Mr. Navalny. This designation puts staff, volunteers, donors, and thousands of supporters across Russia at risk of criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Sadly, this is just the latest move in the Putin regime’s worsening crackdown on political opposition, civil society, and independent media in Russia. Forgoing this second round of U.S. sanctions, especially directly before your meeting with the Russian president,

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signals an unwillingness to stand up for the rule of law and democratic values and to truly hold the Putin regime accountable for its continued efforts to undermine them.

Further, Russia has deliberately and repeatedly broken the international norm against the use of chemical weapons, has violated its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and is actively working to erode the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons from the inside. In failing to impose these mandatory sanctions, your Administration is forfeiting the best opportunity to stand against Russia's violations, and to protect the norm against using chemical weapons.

We see no evidence that Vladimir Putin is inclined to work with your Administration to "build a stable and predictable relationship" as you have hoped. In the absence of clear consequences and credible pushback to Russian violations of international norms and aggression against U.S. allies and interests, Russia will continue its efforts to undermine the West and sow chaos and instability throughout the world. Therefore, we urge your Administration not to delay any longer the second round of sanctions pursuant to the CBW Act.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and we look forward to receiving your expeditious response.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
U.S. Senate