

**Foreign Policy and National Security Community Support for
S. 158 Countering Russian and Other Overseas Kleptocracy (“CROOK”) Act**

The Honorable Bob Menendez
Chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James E. Risch
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
438 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

June 16, 2021

Re: S. 158, Countering Russian and Other Overseas Kleptocracy (“CROOK”) Act

Dear Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Risch,

We write as members of the U.S. foreign policy and national security community in support of U.S. efforts targeting foreign corruption and kleptocracy. In particular, we believe it is important to build capacity for rapid deployment of U.S. support for anti-corruption initiatives in emerging economies besieged by bribery schemes from authoritarian governments, in partner countries during democratic transitions, and during other moments of historic opportunity and consequence.

This is particularly important as we learn more about the extent to which authoritarian regimes and their proxies now routinely engage in opportunistic corrupt practices and fuelling illicit economies, both in order to protect their own interests and to advance their political and commercial objectives worldwide. In particular, China’s Belt and Road Initiative has significantly increased corruption risks in vulnerable recipient countries throughout the developing world. For example, Patrick Ho was convicted of bribing the leaders of Chad and Uganda on behalf of a state-linked Chinese energy conglomerate in order to obtain lucrative oil deals and other business opportunities. In Malaysia, Chinese officials offered to help conceal the siphoning of \$4.5 billion from the 1MDB development fund in exchange for stakes in lucrative infrastructure projects.

At the same time, countries as diverse as Benin, El Salvador, Malaysia, and Ukraine have all rejected corrupt political leaders only to experience democratic backsliding as a result of entrenched corrupt interests, sometimes abetted externally by powerful authoritarian regimes. Their experience shows that swift action to support rule of law is a prerequisite for preserving and strengthening democratic institutions in vulnerable countries that should be reliable U.S. partners.

From the Arab Spring to protests in Baghdad, Caracas, Moscow, and many other capital cities today, populations suffering under kleptocratic regimes could not have been clearer that corruption is their primary concern. The United States must be better prepared to move swiftly in supporting their democratic aspirations through anti-corruption initiatives. Doing so can counteract the further spread of malign authoritarian influence, re-engage disillusioned populations in the democratic process, and ultimately make the world a safer place for all.

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In particular, the Countering Russian and Other Overseas Kleptocracy Act would create a permanent “Anti-corruption Action Fund” at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, would establish an interagency anti-corruption task force led by the U.S. Secretary of State to disburse these funds strategically, and would designate trained anti-corruption specialists at U.S. embassies worldwide. These are relatively simple steps that could nevertheless significantly improve the United States’ capacity to respond rapidly at critical moments, and thus make a real difference at the front lines of the fight against corruption. For example, prominent advocates and politicians in both Chad and Uganda have called on the U.S. to help promote civic rights and accountability in government, and targeted support for strengthening anti-corruption legal and institutional frameworks and for effectively pursuing cases of grand corruption, respectively, could help ensure more robust civic spaces and more competitive business climates in these countries.

We hope you will consider these and other measures to strengthen U.S. global leadership in turning the tide against rising corruption and kleptocracy worldwide.

Please note that this letter is signed in individual capacity. Affiliations are stated for reference only and do not imply institutional endorsement.

Sincerely,

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