

SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
OPENING STATEMENT
HEARING OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED
PROGRAMS
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- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Schatz for holding this critically important hearing and for your bipartisan leadership on this issue.

- By launching the most destructive war in Europe since the end of World War II, Vladimir Putin has sought to wipe Ukraine off the face of the map. But let me be clear: Putin's goals are not limited to the capture and annexation of Ukraine's territory. Instead, Putin seeks the complete and total annihilation of Ukraine's national identity. He wants to erase Ukraine from existence.

- I have traveled to Ukraine eight times since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, each one alongside my colleague, Senator Graham. Those visits have deepened my understanding of the staggering toll this war has taken on the Ukrainian people, especially its children. I want to take a moment to sincerely thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your unwavering leadership and moral clarity in ensuring this issue remains a priority before this committee.

- Together we have witnessed firsthand the courage of the Ukrainian people, the brutal toll of Putin's assault, and the heartbreaking absence left by these abducted children. These are not just numbers or headlines, these are real families torn apart.

- Take the case of 10 month-old Margaryta Prokopenko who was kidnapped by Russians under the false pretense of “medical examination and rehabilitation.” Margaryta’s name and citizenship were changed and her birth place was altered from Kherson, Ukraine to Podolsk, Russia.
- In another case, 16 year-old Artem was forcibly taken by Russian soldiers to an orphanage where he said he slept, (*quote*) “on sagging metal beds, no bedding—just blankets. Terrible sanitation. Every day, we ate barley, stew, strange compote, and crackers.”
- 9 year-old Illia lived with his mother in Mariupol when the war began. “I loved school and my friends,” he said. “We had a beautiful home.”
- Illia’s mother was sadly killed in a Russian missile strike. After burying her body in the yard, he was transferred to a hospital in Donetsk, where he underwent surgery without anesthesia and was told by Russian doctors that he shouldn’t say “Glory to Ukraine” anymore.
- These are but a few of the stories. Since the start of his invasion, more than 19,000 Ukrainian children – including babies only a few months old – have been forcibly kidnapped and relocated to Russia and Russian-controlled territories.
- Some of these children have been coercively adopted into Russian homes, while others have been forced into so-called “re-education programs,” where they are taught to speak Russian, not Ukrainian, and indoctrinated with pro-Russian

propaganda. Others have been conscripted as child-soldiers and trained to fight against their fellow Ukrainians on the front lines.

- Make no mistake: this is a systemic, deliberate effort to indoctrinate the children of Ukraine with pro-Russian ideologies and to delegitimize and deny their national identity.
- I met families that had their children taken. It is difficult to imagine or comprehend what it must be like for the parents of Ukrainian children who have been taken from them, cursed with the knowledge that they may never see, or even recognize, their sons or daughters ever again.
- I was proud to join you, Mr. Chairman, along with Senator Britt and Senator Klobuchar, in introducing legislation earlier this year that would designate Russia as a State Sponsor of Terrorism unless the Secretary of State certifies that all kidnapped, deported or displaced Ukrainian children have been safely reunited with their families or guardians.
- So I thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership and the moral clarity that you and Ranking Member Schatz are bringing to this issue, and I look forward to continuing our work together to ensure that every Ukrainian child is permitted to safely return home and to their rightful Ukrainian homeland.