

This week, Vladimir Putin was again inaugurated for a third term as president of Russia after previously serving in that position from 2000-2008. This is especially noteworthy because of the questionable process Putin initiated in 2008 to maintain a prominent leadership role and put him in prime position to reoccupy the office this year. It is also significant because the recent presidential election was marred by charges of fraud and concerns that Russian police used excessive force against citizens protesting the results.

The policies of Putin and his predecessor are even more troubling. Russia helped Iran build its [nuclear program](#) and has consistently blocked or weakened international sanctions against the Iranian regime. It is currently providing the Syrian government with weapons to fend off a democratic uprising that has already left over 9,000 protestors dead. The Russian government has also seized major private sector businesses, and is opposed to U.S. efforts to strengthen our missile defense capabilities. In response to their long held objections, President Obama in 2009 [abandoned](#) plans to boost our missile defense in eastern Europe, and just a few weeks ago he was overheard whispering to Russia's former president that he would have "more flexibility" after his potential reelection to negotiate further changes to our missile defense program.

Russia also has a poor human rights record. In its most recent report, the U.S. State Department [recounted](#) numerous human rights violations at the hands of Russian officials, including government interference in elections, politically motivated imprisonments, government control of media outlets, and the infringement of the freedom of speech. In a particularly disturbing case, Russian officials imprisoned, abused, and ultimately killed Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who exposed a massive tax fraud scheme perpetrated by Russian authorities. I recently cosponsored [H.R. 4405](#), which would prohibit those responsible for Magnitsky's death from coming to our nation and freeze any assets they have here. More broadly, the measure would impose these sanctions against *any* Russian official who commits similar human rights atrocities against individuals seeking to expose corruption in that country.

While it is in our national security interests to have a stable relationship with Russia, I believe we must boldly speak out against Russia's troubling policies and approach their leaders with a realistic understanding of their ambitions. Unfortunately, I am concerned that President Obama is more interested in appeasing Russia rather than holding them accountable. We cannot force Russia to support policies in our interests or to protect human rights, but we can make it clear that Russia will not become a respected international power unless they commit to democratic

reforms and stand against countries such as Iran that threaten world peace and stability.