

WORLD

Allies fear loss of U.S. moral authority

PARIS

BY ALISSA J. RUBIN

When the State Department released its annual human rights report this month, it contained many of the usual tough American judgments of other countries. Iran was criticized for restricting freedom of religion and the media; Russia for discriminating against minorities; Eritrea for using torture; Bulgaria for violence against migrants and asylum seekers. The list went on.

What was notably missing this year was the usual fanfare around the report and a news conference promoting it by the secretary of state, as Democratic and Republican administrations have almost always done.

The State Department under President Trump dismissed criticism of the absence of the new secretary, Rex W. Tillerson, which came even from some Republicans. But for observers of American foreign policy, it was hard not to interpret the low-key rollout as another step by the Trump administration away from America's traditional role as a moral authority on the world stage that tries to shape and promote democratic norms, both for their intrinsic value and to create a more secure world.

Interviews with more than a dozen professors, human rights advocates, international politicians and former diplomats, both abroad and in the United States, suggested that the United States under President Trump was poised to cede not only this global role, but also its ability to lead by example.

Many pointed out that America's own actions over the years have already eroded its moral standing — Guantánamo Bay, the use of torture on suspected terrorists and the civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, to name a few.

But Mr. Trump's administration stands alone, many experts said, for the divisiveness of its tone toward minorities and the media at home and toward Muslims and migrants abroad, its disparagement of NATO and the European Union and its praise of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, which have blurred distinctions between allies and enemies.

Mr. Trump himself recently put the United States on the same moral plane as Russia, when the Fox News talk show host Bill O'Reilly protested during an interview that Mr. Putin was a killer.

"There are a lot of killers," Mr. Trump quickly responded. "We've got a lot of killers. What, do you think our country's so innocent?"

The comment alarmed many because it underscored an approach by Mr. Trump, like the rejection of migrants from certain predominantly Muslim countries, that has stripped much of the moral component from American for-



American soldiers in 2008 in Iraq, where civilian deaths have eroded the United States' standing. Critics say that President Trump does not seem to expect the country to lead the world by example.

eign relations and left him being lectured by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and others about his duties under international law.

Her foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, has gone one step further, reminding America of its moral duty as the most powerful Western country and one founded by Christian refugees.

"The United States is a country where Christian traditions have an important meaning. Loving your neighbor is a major Christian value, and that includes helping people," he said recently. "This is what unites us in the West and this is what we want to make clear to the Americans."

Behind the rhetoric is the idea that moral authority — as amorphous and

idealistic as that can sound — has imbued America with a special kind of clout in the world, with a power that is different from that wielded by autocrats and dictators or by big countries like Russia and China.

While the Soviet-era dominance across Eastern Europe undoubtedly was undermined by an expensive Cold War arms race with the United States, it was the Western democratic system and America that many people looked to emulate, former diplomats said.

"The Berlin Wall didn't come down because people were responding to American howitzers," said Joseph Nye, a former senior State Department official and now a professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. "It

came down under hammers and bulldozers wielded by people whose minds had been affected by the ideas of the West."

The acting State Department spokesman, Mark C. Toner, rejected any suggestion that the United States was walking away from its international obligations or that the administration's statements and policies to date had diminished America's standing. "We've signaled at every level our continued commitment to NATO," he said. "On Russia, Secretary of State Tillerson has been clear that we would cooperate with Russia wherever possible, but not at the expense of Ukraine or Syria."

"As for the new executive order," he added, "this administration isn't ignor-

ing the plight of refugees or discouraging people from visiting the U.S. It is simply making the security of the American people its No. 1 priority and instituting a temporary pause so that we can evaluate and ensure our vetting processes are as strong as they can possibly be. In short, American diplomacy plays an important role in American security, a security which promotes our prosperity."

Not all are so convinced. Though in its early stages, Mr. Trump's presidency has for many called into question what kind of role America aims to play in the world, and even whether it wants to remain an example for other countries. Abandoning that role will have consequences, some are warning.

If America no longer presents an image of religious tolerance — a core component of its moral standing — it undermines its ability to make needed alliances, several diplomats said.

"Even in the days of George W. Bush, there was no feeling that Bush was against Muslims," said Marwan Muasher, a former foreign minister of Jordan and now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he is vice president for studies and oversees research on the Middle East. "By contrast," he said, "Mr. Trump's administration has seemed almost to revel in its anti-Islamic sentiments. There is no effort on the administration's side to reverse that image. There's no empathy toward the region in any way."

Russian espionage piggybacks on hacking, F.B.I. says

RUSSIA, FROM PAGE 1

tary and intelligence information on infected computers in the United States, often consisting of searches for documents containing the words "top secret" or "Department of Defense."

The Russian government has plenty of its own cyberspace tools for gathering intelligence. But the piggybacking on Mr. Bogachev's activities offers some clues to the breadth and creativity of Russia's espionage efforts at a time when the United States and Europe are scrambling to counter increasingly sophisticated attacks capable of destroying critical infrastructure, disrupting bank operations, stealing government secrets and undermining democratic elections.

This relationship is illustrated by the improbable mix of characters targeted with the sanctions announced by the Obama administration. Four were senior officers with Russia's powerful military intelligence agency, the G.R.U. Two were suspected cyberthieves on the F.B.I.'s most wanted list: an ethnic Russian from Latvia named Alexey Belan with a red-tinted Justin Bieber haircut, and Mr. Bogachev, whose F.B.I. file includes a photograph of him holding his spotted Bengal cat while wearing a matching set of leopard-print pajamas.

FROM THIEF TO RUSSIAN ASSET?

His involvement with Russian intelligence may help explain why Mr. Bogachev, 33, is hardly a man on the run. F.B.I. officials say he lives openly in Anapa, a run-down resort town on the Black Sea in southern Russia. He has a large apartment near the shore and possibly another in Moscow, officials say, as well as a collection of luxury cars, though he seems to favor driving his Jeep Grand Cherokee. American investigators say he enjoys sailing and owns a yacht.

Running the criminal scheme was hard work. Mr. Bogachev often complained of being exhausted and "of having too little time for his family," said Aleksandr Panin, a Russian hacker, now in a federal prison in Kentucky for bank fraud, who used to communicate with Mr. Bogachev online. "He mentioned a wife and two kids as far as I remember," Mr. Panin wrote in an email.

Beyond that, little is known about Mr. Bogachev, who preferred to operate anonymously behind various screen names: slavik, lucky12345, pollingsoon.

Even close business associates never met him in person or knew his real name.

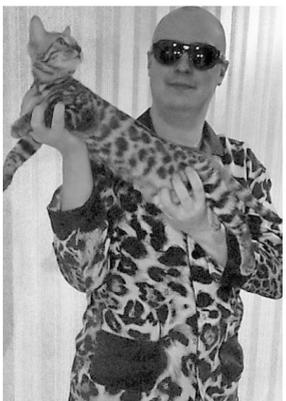
"He was very, very paranoid," said J. Keith Mularski, an F.B.I. supervisor in Pittsburgh whose investigation of Mr. Bogachev led to an indictment in 2014. "He didn't trust anybody."

Russia does not have an extradition treaty with the United States, and Russian officials say that so long as Mr. Bogachev has not committed a crime on Russian territory, there are no grounds to arrest him.

Attempts to reach Mr. Bogachev for this article were unsuccessful. In response to questions, his lawyer in Anapa, Aleksei Stotskii, said, "The fact that he is wanted by the F.B.I. prevents me morally from saying anything."

A line in Mr. Bogachev's file at the Ukrainian Interior Ministry, which has helped the F.B.I. track his movements, describes him as "working under the supervision of a special unit of the F.S.B.," referring to Russia's main intelligence agency. The F.S.B. did not respond to a request for comment.

That Mr. Bogachev remains at large "is the most powerful argument" that he is an asset of the Russian government, said Austin Berglas, who was an assistant special agent in charge of cyberinvestigations at the F.B.I.'s New York field office until 2015. Hackers like Mr. Bogachev are "moonlighters," Mr. Ber-



The United States has offered \$3 million for the capture of Mr. Bogachev.

glas said, "doing the bidding of Russian intelligence services, whether economic espionage or straight-up espionage."

Such an arrangement offers the Kremlin a convenient cover story and an easy opportunity to take a peek into the extensive networks of computers infected by Russian hackers, security experts say. Russian intelligence agencies also appear to occasionally employ malware tools developed for criminal purposes, including the popular BlackEnergy, to attack the computers of enemy governments.

It also hints at a struggle to recruit top talent. A job with the Russian intelligence agencies does not command the prestige it did in the Soviet era. The Russian state has to compete against the dream of six-figure salaries and stock options in Silicon Valley. A recruiting pitch from a few years ago for the Defense Ministry's cyberwarfare brigade offered college graduates the rank of lieutenant and a bed in a room with four other people.

And so the Kremlin at times turns to the "dark web" or Russian-language forums devoted to cyberfraud and spam. Mr. Bogachev, according to court papers from his criminal case, used to sell malicious software on a site called Carding World, where thieves buy and sell stolen credit card numbers and hacking kits, according to the F.B.I. One recent posting offered to sell American credit card information with CVV security numbers for \$5. A user named Mr. RaiX was selling a malware supposedly designed to pilfer passwords from programs like Google Chrome and Outlook Express.

Rather than shut down such sites, as the F.B.I. typically tries to do, Russian intelligence agents appear to have infiltrated them, security experts say.

Some of the forums state specifically that almost any type of criminality is allowed — bank fraud, counterfeiting documents, weapons sales. One of the few rules: no work in Russia or the former Soviet Union. In Carding World, and in many other forums, a violation results in a lifetime ban.

The F.B.I. has long been stymied in its efforts to get Russian cybercriminals. For a time, the bureau had high hopes that its agents and Russian investigators with the F.S.B. would work together to target Russian thieves who had made a specialty of stealing Americans' credit card information and breaking into their



A United States prosecutor, Leslie Caldwell, announcing criminal charges in 2014 in connection with GameOver Zeus, malware created by Evgeniy M. Bogachev.

bank accounts. "Here's to great investigations," F.B.I. and F.S.B. agents would toast each other at Manhattan steakhouses during periodic trust-building visits, Mr. Berglas said.

But help rarely materialized. After a while, agents began to worry that the Russian authorities were recruiting the

"It's highly likely they had computers belonging to U.S. government and foreign government employees."

very suspects that the F.B.I. was pursuing. The joke among Justice Department officials was the Russians were more likely to pin a medal on a suspected criminal hacker than help the F.B.I. nab him.

FISHING FOR TOP SECRETS

Mr. Bogachev's hacking career began well over a decade ago, leading to the creation of a malicious software program called GameOver Zeus, which he managed with the help of about a half-dozen close associates who called themselves the Business Club, according to the F.B.I. and security researchers. Working around the clock, his criminal gang infected an ever-growing network of computers. It was able to bypass the

most advanced banking security measures to quickly empty accounts and transfer the money abroad through a web of intermediaries called money mules. F.B.I. officials said it was the most sophisticated online larceny scheme they had encountered — and for years, it was impenetrable.

Mr. Bogachev became extremely wealthy. At one point, he owned two villas in France and kept a fleet of cars parked around Europe so he would never have to rent a vehicle while on vacation, according to a Ukrainian law enforcement official with knowledge of the Bogachev case, who requested anonymity to discuss the continuing investigation.

At the height of his operations, Mr. Bogachev had between 500,000 and a million computers under his control, American officials said. And there is evidence that the Russian government took an interest in knowing what was on them.

Beginning around 2011, according to an analysis by Fox-IT, computers under Mr. Bogachev's control started receiving requests for information — not about banking transactions, but for files relating to various geopolitical developments pulled from the headlines.

Around the time that former President Barack Obama publicly agreed to start sending small arms and ammunition to Syrian rebels, in 2013, Turkish

computers infected by Mr. Bogachev's network were hit with keyword searches that included the terms "weapon delivery" and "arms delivery."

Ahead of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, infected computers were searched for information about top-secret files from the country's main intelligence directorate, the S.B.U.

And at some point between March 2013 and February 2014, there were searches for English-language documents, which seemed to be fishing for American military and intelligence documents. The queries were for terms including "top secret" and "Department of Defense," said Brett Stone-Gross, a cybersecurity analyst involved in analyzing GameOver Zeus. "These were in English," he said. "That was different."

Cybersecurity experts who studied the case say there is no way to know who ordered the queries. But they were so disconnected from the larceny and fraud that drove Mr. Bogachev's operation that analysts say there can be no other motive but espionage.

Whether the searches turned up any classified document or sensitive government material is unknown.

"They had such a large number of infections, I would say it's highly likely they had computers belonging to U.S. government and foreign government employees," Mr. Stone-Gross said.

In the summer of 2014, the F.B.I., together with law enforcement agencies in over half a dozen countries, carried out Operation Tovar, a coordinated attack on Mr. Bogachev's criminal infrastructure that shut down his network and liberated computers infected with GameOver Zeus.

Prosecutors said they were in talks with the Russian government, trying to secure cooperation for the capture of Mr. Bogachev. But the only apparent legal trouble Mr. Bogachev has faced in Russia was a lawsuit filed against him by a real estate company in 2011 over payment of about \$75,000 on his apartment in Anapa, according to court papers there. And even that he managed to beat.

These days, officials believe Mr. Bogachev is living under his own name in Anapa and occasionally takes boat trips to Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula that Russia occupied in 2014. Mr. Mularski, the F.B.I. supervisor, said his agents were "still pursuing leads."