

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 15, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 22202

The Honorable Avril Haines
Director of National Intelligence
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Blinken, Secretary Austin, and Director Haines:

In recent days, a video has circulated of an individual who claims to be an English-speaking spokesperson for the Ukrainian military. In the video, this individual, Sarah Ashton-Cirillo, looks directly into the camera and threatens physical violence to anyone who circulates “Russian propaganda.”

A number of reports purport to offer additional information, much of it unconfirmed, regarding Ashton-Cirillo. I’ve seen claims this individual is an American, a former intelligence operative in the United States, and an employee of the Ukrainian government. Others have argued Ashton-Cirillo is pulling an elaborate prank. If so, kudos for the delivery of high quality humor.

I write to request information on this individual. Specifically:

1. Is this individual employed by the Ukrainian military, and do we have reason to believe they are compensated using American resources?
2. Is this individual an American citizen? Did they ever serve, in any capacity, American intelligence services?
3. Do we have reason to believe Ukrainian forces or intelligence services are planning to commit acts of violence against those who engage in “Russian propaganda”?

I worry American resources could be supporting violence or the threat of violence against people for speaking their mind. Notably, any critic of America's incoherent policy in Ukraine has been slandered as a propagandist, including multiple presidential candidates and American journalists. While we can debate the merits of these accusations, engaging in protected speech should not invite threats of violence—otherwise, the First Amendment means nothing.

I offer my questions in that spirit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JD Vance', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

JD VANCE
United States Senator