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Rival Petitions Want Russia, U.S. Branded 'Sponsors of Terrorism'

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U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel at the Pentagon in Washington.

Two rival petitions urging the U.S. government to designate either Russia or the U.S. as a "state sponsor of terrorism" for their respective policies in Ukraine are vying for signatures on the White House website, with the anti-Russian one enjoying a strong lead so far.

The petition targeting Russia had a one-week head start, having been posted on the "We the People" section of the website on April 23, and had garnered more than 53,300 signatures by Monday afternoon.

"In its unannounced war against Ukraine, Russia relies on covert operations which fall squarely within the definition of 'international terrorism'" under U.S. law, the petition said. The appeal needs to gather at least 100,000 signatures by May 23 to require the White House to respond.

The rival appeal, which uses the same language except for replacing "Russia" with "USA," showed up on April 30. It had slightly more than 500 signatures by Monday.

Both petitions blamed the violence in Ukraine on "armed operatives" saying that the respective foreign forces "acting under disguise, attempt to influence the policy of Ukrainian government by intimidation or coercion."

The anti-American petition then added its own line, complete with spelling errors, to comment on the supposed U.S. operatives: "Luckily, they have disappeared by now."

Currently, the U.S. designates four countries as state sponsors of terrorism — Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said during ABC television's "This Week" program on Sunday that a more appropriate expression to describe Russia would be an "adversary in Ukraine."

Hagel also criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin's statements that Moscow had pulled back its troops from the Ukrainian border.

"Well, they're not leaving, as far as we can tell," he said. "You have to ask President Putin as to why he says they're leaving and when, in fact, they're not leaving."

Moscow denied accusations by Ukrainian and Western officials that its troops are engaged in the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, and instead accused the U.S. and European governments of having fostered the conflict.

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