

WASHINGTON, D.C. January 4, 2008

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Edward B. Robin, Chairman;
Lesley Israel, NCSJ President;
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

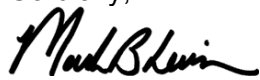
In Brief: Georgians go to the Polls; Congressional Human Rights Champion to Retire

Dear Friends,

This weekend the citizens of the small but strategically significant country of Georgia will go to the polls to elect a new president. Mikhail Saakashvili, who resigned as president after agreeing to new elections, is the prohibitive favorite. Saakashvili remains a controversial figure, and has been fighting accusations that the government has unfairly intervened in the election process. One of his main opponents faces charges of trying to bribe government officials prior to the election. We have included two background stories in this week's update about the Georgian election, and we will provide additional information next week, after the results are tabulated.

Also, there are two stories on the announcement by Representative Tom Lantos of his upcoming retirement from Congress. Mr. Lantos has been in the forefront of the struggle for international human rights since first being elected to Congress. We wish him only the best in his battle against esophageal cancer, and know that our community will greatly miss his passion and commitment.

Cordially,



Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. January 4, 2008

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#1

Election Test for Georgian Democracy

By Maria Danilova

AP, December 31, 2007

TBILISI, Georgia — Young, energetic and friendly to the West, Mikhail Saakashvili became a symbol of democratic reform in the former Soviet Union in 2003 for leading street rallies that ousted a graying veteran of the Communist era and catapulted him into power.

Now the 40-year-old president's own commitment to democracy is being tested in a presidential election Saturday in which he is accused of silencing critics and restricting independent media.

Despite sinking approval ratings, the U.S.-educated hero of Georgia's Rose Revolution stands a good chance of winning a second term against a fragmented opposition.

But Saakashvili's reformist credentials have been weakened by charges that his supporters are pressuring people to vote for the president and leaning on businesses to help fund his campaign.

There is concern that Georgia could follow other former Soviet nations, including Russia, in abandoning or weakening democratic reforms.

"Georgia's Western allies are viewing the election as a test for Saakashvili's commitment to democracy," said Ana Jelenkovic, a Georgia analyst at Eurasia Group, a U.S.-based firm that advises on geopolitical risks.

"The U.S., in particular, is in a position in which it cannot overlook massive electoral fraud should it occur."

Opposition leaders are vowing to take to the streets if they judge the vote unfair.

Georgia, a South Carolina-sized country of 5 million people on the Black Sea, is important to the West. It's close to Iran, and a pipeline runs through it carrying oil from the Caspian Sea to Turkey.

Saakashvili was once an overwhelmingly popular figure, winning the January 2004 election with more than 96 percent of the vote. He still tops the seven candidates in opinion polls, but now he gets only about 20 percent in polls, according to one study. If no candidate tops 50 percent, a runoff becomes necessary.

Georgians praise Saakashvili for seeking to integrate Georgia into the European Union and NATO, and for striving to break out of Moscow's orbit.

But Saakashvili's popularity has been dented by his inability to defeat corruption and widespread poverty; the average monthly salary in Georgia is a meager \$225.

He has also failed to make progress in bringing two separatist provinces back under Georgian control and returning tens of thousands of refugees to their homes.

Many who supported Saakashvili in street demonstrations four years ago felt betrayed when police used tear gas, rubber bullets and truncheons to break up protests in Tbilisi, the capital, in November.

The images brought condemnation from Western capitals, and Saakashvili called the early vote to defuse the crisis.

The government also silenced a leading independent television channel for more than a month, denying the opposition a key platform in the midst of the brief election campaign. Saakashvili dominates TV coverage of the election.

He has focused on the economy, greatly increasing social spending and raising monthly pensions from \$24 to \$35 in recent weeks with a promise to bring them up to \$100 over the next two years.

The opposition, on the other hand, seems to lack a coherent message of its own.

One opposition contender is Levan Gachechiladze, a 43-year-old legislator whose business is winemaking. Another is Badri Patarkatsishvili, a 52-year-old billionaire. He is accused of plotting to overthrow the government and has campaigned from outside the country, fearing arrest.

Many government-paid workers, including doctors and teachers, say their bosses have told them they could be fired if they don't vote for Saakashvili. Marina Gelashvili, a Tbilisi language teacher, said the principal told the faculty that they should "give their vote to the person who promised to raise your salaries" or look for another job.

Some business owners say members of the president's party have pressured them to fund Saakashvili's campaign.

Election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the campaign has been soured by allegations Saakashvili has used budgetary funds, unequal campaign conditions, intimidation and vote-buying. The OSCE mission said it "has received information and firsthand accounts, which indicate some of these claims are credible."

#2

Georgia's Ex-Leader Puts In Final Spurt On Comeback Trail

By Tara Bahrapour

Washington Post, January 2, 2007

TELAVI, Georgia -- Before his helicopter touches down, Mikheil Saakashvili already has his hand on the door handle. A bodyguard leans forward but can't restrain him long; within seconds, Misha, as Georgia's former president and now campaigning candidate is informally known, has jumped out, ducked into a black SUV, and is barreling at top speed through the countryside.

In Telavi, the capital of Georgia's wine region, he unfolds his broad 6-foot-3-inch frame from the car and grabs a microphone. "I live for you," he booms to a crowd in the street. "You can't imagine what it means when you smile for me." Then he's off to a local university; by the end of the afternoon he has hit a church, a theater, a vineyard and a farmhouse, chased after by out-of-breath assistants, bodyguards and TV crews.

Saakashvili, 40, has spent every day of the past month like this, on an intensive, often frantic, 41-day presidential campaign that culminates when voters go to the polls Saturday. "I love campaigns," he says with a grin as the helicopter lifts off again. "It's like a boxing championship; you go up and up and up, until the last one."

But this campaign, meant to be his last, wasn't supposed to happen this way.

His term as president was slated to last through 2008. But he cut it short in November to defuse a crisis that began when he sent out baton-swinging riot police after five days of peaceful anti-government demonstrations, accusing the protesters of being stooges of Georgia's rival, Russia. Police also raided and violently shut down a popular opposition TV station.

The tactics angered many Georgians and shocked allies of this former Soviet republic; the United States had praised Georgia under Saakashvili as a successful new democracy.

Western governments and human rights organizations condemned the police attacks, saying Saakashvili had taken a troubling authoritarian turn, and some analysts said the country could fall into military rule or civil war. But the next day Saakashvili had a surprise response: He moved the presidential election ahead to Jan. 5, which required him to step down and run again. Georgians, he declared, would show with their ballots whether they supported him.

A former member of parliament and justice minister, Saakashvili came to power in 2004 by leading the bloodless Rose Revolution, which swept out the corrupt government of President Eduard Shevardnadze. Shortly afterward, he was elected with 97 percent of the vote, in an election that monitors ruled essentially clean despite his enormous tally.

In Washington, the charismatic, American-educated leader became a golden boy. A Columbia- and George Washington University-educated lawyer, he set about trying to reform a collapsing bureaucracy at the same breakneck speed he seems to use in everything. He encouraged foreign investment, repaired roads, replaced a corrupt police force, and brought reliable gas and electricity service. He pushed for membership in the European Union and NATO, reined in a rebellious autonomous region and moved to win back two breakaway regions along the Russian border.

He became known for scheduling state business after midnight, treating visitors to impromptu rides on Ferris wheels and showing up in unexpected places, such as a conflict zone where he confronted Russian soldiers (an event captured on film and replayed repeatedly on television).

The United States helped train the Georgian military and selected the country for a \$300 million Millennium Challenge grant. President Bush called Georgia a "beacon of democracy," and Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) nominated Saakashvili for the Nobel Peace Prize.

But critics accused him of creeping authoritarianism and infringements on free speech and the rule of law. He promoted big business and international investment at the expense of ordinary people, they said, and some charged that his bluster was unnecessarily escalating tensions with Russia over trade, energy and border disputes.

Saakashvili dismissed the critics as Soviet retrogrades and during the protest crisis accused opposition leaders of being part of a pro-Russian intended coup.

Now, however, the special forces are nowhere in sight and Saakashvili is presenting himself as a compromiser. He has pledged to bring new figures into his cabinet and to focus on poverty and unemployment. In one TV ad, as he listens to a war refugee describe his hard life, a tear rolls down his cheek -- which he insists was real. "Of course I was crying," he said. "If not for the health insurance that we gave them three months ago he would have been dead by now, that's what they told me."

Jonathan Kulick, director of studies at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in Tbilisi, said Saakashvili's approach has changed. "He became more avuncular," he said, adding that his style now is more like "chatting with the waitress in the diner in New Hampshire or talking to the farmer in Iowa about the price of soybeans."

But George Arveladze, one of several state ministers who have temporarily left their posts to work on Saakashvili's campaign, said the only difference is he now has more time for constituents. "Misha is the same old Misha as he used to be," he said. "He's doing what he loves to do the most -- being with people."

If Saakashvili does not win more than 50 percent on Saturday, there will be a runoff. His wife, Dutch-born Sandra Roelofs, says that in his mind, losing is not an option. "He simply cannot imagine that people don't understand the essentials of this election, that there is so much at stake. It is really a choice between black and white, between prosperity and [falling] back into chaos and uncertainty."

Whether Georgians believe in his sincerity may not be the key for Saakashvili to win. Many who criticize him say they fear the other candidates could be worse. These include a legislator/wine entrepreneur, supported by nine opposition parties, who has pledged to step down in favor of a parliamentary republic; a former Enron consultant who has cited his good looks among his qualifications; and a wealthy businessman with a white handlebar mustache who along with his campaign manager was caught last week on sting videos offering a state official \$100 million to encourage post-election protests. He has since said he will withdraw from the race.

Opposition leaders have vowed to protest if they deem the elections unfair. After the airing of the videotaped conversations, which the businessman, Badri Patarkatsishvili, subsequently confirmed, government officials have been saying it will be hard to believe that any post-election protesters have not been paid.

Patarkatsishvili had sworn to spend every penny he had to defeat Saakashvili, but he had little popular support. He is part owner of Imedi, the opposition television station that was closed down in November. Following domestic and international pressure, the station was reopened. After the release of the videos, however, many of its journalists resigned in protest, and last week it suspended broadcasts again, silencing the only nationwide opposition station.

The fairness of the elections is widely seen as a test of whether Georgia can retain its favored status in the West. Organizations such as Transparency International and the National Democratic Institute already have accused the government of voter intimidation, misuse of funds and including untraceable voters on the rolls.

Saakashvili dismisses such reports, calling them biased.

In his campaign, as he did in his presidency, Saakashvili skates between holding up the West as a model and rejecting it as a parent figure. He has hired an American public relations firm, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, but is dismissive of one of the most common American candidate activities: the televised debate. A U.S.-style debate scheduled by a Washington-based elections organization was canceled after he said he would not attend.

Some analysts have warned that if elections are not perceived as fair, U.S. aid could cool. Saakashvili agrees the elections should be seen as fair, but he shrugs off the idea that U.S. support is crucial to his country's future, saying it has been "important psychologically, but economically wise, this is very insignificant."

Since the November unrest, foreign investment has slowed, pending the election results. Arveladze, whose regular job is minister of economic development, said, "We are still open, and Georgia is still as attractive as ever."

But perhaps not the same as ever. The rose-tinted view of Saakashvili's Georgia has faded, and many people -- including Saakashvili himself -- say that might not be bad.

"I believe that this will make Georgian democracy more mature," he said. "Beacon of democracy? It's not about being a beacon of democracy; we want to be normal. And you know, being normal in this region is in itself quite something."

#3a

Russia Denies It Will Sell Iran Air Defense System

By C.J. Chivers

NY Times, December 28, 2007

MOSCOW — A Russian government agency disputed reports that it had signed a contract to sell a sophisticated air-defense system to Iran, saying it had no such plans.

Earlier this week, the Iranian defense minister said that a contract had been signed previously and that Russia would equip Iran with S-300 missiles, which are used to shoot down planes and missiles.

In a statement posted on its Web site, the Federal Military and Technical Cooperation Service flatly denied the Iranian claim.

“The issue of supplying Iran with S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems, raised by mass media, is not on the agenda, is not being considered and is not being discussed with the Iranian side at the moment,” the statement said.

#3b

Call to murder Jews distributed in Ukraine churches

JTA Brief, December 31, 2007

A unknown group is using Russian Orthodox churches in Ukraine to spread a call to murder Jews.

The group, which calls itself the “Orthodox public organization of Odessa,” distributed anti-Semitic pamphlets last week at some Russian Orthodox churches in Odessa calling for pogroms and the murder of Jews and expressing regret at the collapse of the Russian Empire.

Berl Kapulkin, a spokesperson for Odessa's Jewish community, told JTA that, according to preliminary information, the pamphlets were distributed by representatives of United Fatherland and the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine, both pro-Russian groups.

Rabbi Avraham Wolf, chief rabbi of Odessa and Southern Ukraine, called on Ukraine's authorities to end the incitement in the Orthodox churches against Jews. Wolf said he hopes Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko will keep his promise to combat interethnic hatred in the country.

At its session last week, the assembly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate declared activities of the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine as “anti-church.”

#3c

Ukrainian rabbis seen as 'powerful foreigners'

JTA Brief, January 2, 2008

A Kiev weekly magazine cited two prominent Ukrainian rabbis among the most “powerful foreigners” in the country.

Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, one of the chief rabbis of Kiev and Ukraine, and Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky, the chief rabbi of the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community and region, made the Russian-language weekly magazine Focus list of 15 “powerful foreigners.”

The rabbis, who were named along with the U.S. and Russian ambassadors, were said to seriously influence developments in Ukraine.

#4

The Candidates on U.S. Policy toward Russia By the Council on Foreign Relations Washington Post, December 28, 2007

As 2007 drew to a close, U.S.-Russian relations remained troubled on a number of fronts, especially policy toward Iran, the expansion of NATO, and Kosovo's status.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has firmly opposed President Bush's plan to build a missile defense shield in the Czech Republic and Poland and has signaled changes to an important post-Soviet arms pact. Russia has also been critical of U.S. attempts to ratchet up pressure on Iran to halt its nuclear program; in October 2007 Putin likened the Bush administration's posture toward Iran to "a madman with a razor blade" (al-Jazeera). Putin's increasingly anti-democratic moves have also raised alarm among both Republican and Democratic policymakers in Washington. At the same time, top officials and candidates from both parties have stressed the importance of engaging Russia on matters of strategic importance, in particular securing Russia's vast stocks of nuclear materials, to avoid proliferation to rogue states or other groups.

Democratic Candidates on U.S. Policy toward Russia

Hillary Clinton

Sen. Clinton (D-NY), like most of her fellow Democrats, favors diplomacy toward Russia with the goal of promoting democracy there and reducing nuclear stockpiles. In a November 2007 Foreign Affairs article, Clinton pledged to "negotiate an accord that substantially and verifiably reduces the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals."

She also called for engagement with Russia on "issues of high national importance," including Iran, loose nuclear weapons, and the status of the Serbian province of Kosovo. She said Washington's "ability to view Russia as a genuine partner depends on whether Russia chooses to strengthen democracy or return to authoritarianism and regional interference."

Still, she told the Boston Globe in October 2007, "I'm interested in what Russia does outside its borders first. I don't think I can, as the president of the United States, wave my hand and tell the Russian people they should have a different government."

John Edwards

Edwards co-chaired the Council on Foreign Relations' Russia Task Force in 2006, which urged U.S. cooperation with Russia, but said the United States must pressure Russia to maintain democracy. The report from the Task Force recommended Russian accession into the World Trade Organization, which, it said, would "promote further liberalization of the Russian economy and should signify full Russian acceptance of a rules-based international trading system." Edwards has been critical of Putin for his anti-democratic tendencies, but says Russia should remain a member of the G-8. In an April 2007 Democratic debate, Edwards expressed concern about Russia's political direction. "They've moved from being a democracy under Yeltsin to being a complete autocracy under Putin," he said.

Barack Obama

Sen. Obama (D-IL) has said Russia is "neither our enemy nor close ally," and said the United States "shouldn't shy away from pushing for more democracy, transparency, and accountability" there. He has focused much of his discussion of Russia on diminishing the possibility of nuclear weapons use. In a July 2007 Foreign Affairs article, Obama said the United States and Russia should collaborate to "update and scale back our dangerously outdated Cold War nuclear postures and de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons." In an October 2007 speech in Chicago, Obama said if elected he would work to "take U.S. and

Russian ballistic missiles off hair-trigger alert, and to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material." He said he would seek a "global ban on the production of fissile material for weapons" and an expansion of "the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles."

In 2005, Obama traveled with Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) to nuclear and biological weapons destruction sites in Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan. Obama and Lugar then introduced legislation to eliminate nuclear stockpiles throughout the former Soviet Union. That law was enacted in 2007.

Bill Richardson

New Mexico Gov. Richardson has said the United States should use diplomatic pressure to get Russia to "control some of the loose nuclear weapons in their domain." In an April 2007 Democratic debate, Richardson also said Russia should be "more humane in dealing with Chechnya." He views Russia as a potential "stable source of energy" for the United States. He also said Russian leaders should increase democracy promotion "in their own nation."

In an October 2007 Democratic debate, Richardson said Russia 's relationship with Iran is "not healthy."

Republican Candidates on U.S. Policy toward Russia

Rudolph Giuliani

Giuliani advocates commercial engagement with Russia, but has also expressed support for the planned missile defense shield in Eastern Europe. In an October 2007 Republican debate, Giuliani also called for an increase in military spending to "send a heck of a signal" to Russia.

In November 2001, Giuliani accompanied Putin on a visit to Ground Zero. Giuliani told news media at the time that the attacks of September 11, 2001 would bring the United States and Russia closer together. In 2004, Giuliani traveled to Moscow to promote U.S.-Russian business relations.

Mike Huckabee

Huckabee seems optimistic about the U.S.-Russian relationship. "Things will be better than during the Cold War because, much as we do not want another 9/11, Putin does not want another terrorist attack like the 2004 school siege in Beslan," he wrote in a January 2008 Foreign Affairs essay. Still, he is critical of Putin, whom he calls "a staunch nationalist in a country that has no democratic tradition."

John McCain

Sen. McCain (R-AZ) has strongly criticized Putin, whom he has called "a dangerous person." In an October 2007 Republican debate, McCain expressed support for President Bush's plan to build a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe. "I don't care what [Putin's] objections are to it," he said.

In a November 2007 Foreign Affairs article, McCain called for a new approach to what he called a "revanchist" Russia. In that piece, he advocated Russian exclusion from the G-8, and said the West should send a message to Russia that NATO "is indivisible and that the organization's doors remain open to all democracies committed to the defense of freedom." He also said the United States should promote democracy in Russia.

Ron Paul

Rep. Paul (R-TX) advocates a "strong national defense and a policy of non-intervention abroad" to ensure a Russia policy that "seeks our national interest."

In January 2007, Paul cosponsored a resolution to suspend the antidumping duty orders on imports of solid urea -- a substance used in fertilizers, plastics, and animal feed -- from Russia and Ukraine. That bill failed.

Paul was the only member of the House to vote against a 2007 resolution "noting the disturbing pattern of killings of numerous independent journalists in Russia since 2000, and urging Russian President Vladimir Putin to authorize cooperation with outside investigators in solving those murders."

Mitt Romney

Romney advocates "a lot of cooperation" with Russia, as well as "frank and open discussions" about the state of democracy there. He also said in an April 2007 speech that the United States should work to secure "the vast amount of highly enriched nuclear material in their country."

Romney supports the planned National Missile Defense program of the Bush administration.

Fred Thompson

Thompson is skeptical of the Russian government, which he has said is "apparently run by ex-KGB agents" (National Review Online).

"Oppose the Russian leadership, and you could trip and fall off a tall building or stumble into the path of a bullet," writes Thompson, whose studies focused on Russia, among other national security topics, at the American Enterprise Institute.

Thompson has not yet specified a plan for U.S. policy toward Russia.

#5

Russia goes its own way [re. Iran]

By Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev

International Herald Tribune, January 1, 2008

If the deadlock in the UN Security Council over the final status of Kosovo signals any future trends, it is that Russia has finally dispensed with any lingering beliefs that it should work with the United States to set the global agenda.

One of the legacies that Vladimir Putin bequeaths to his successor is Russia's changed position in the world. Moscow no longer has any interest in making minor modifications to a policy largely predetermined in Washington. And the principal beneficiary of this changed perception may be Iran.

Because the revelations in December of the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate have all but eliminated the military option in dealing with Iran's nuclear intransigence, the Bush administration has refocused on exerting diplomatic and economic pressure on the recalcitrant theocracy. It is hoped that an escalating series of Security Council resolutions would press Iran toward the suspension of the critical enrichment component of its nuclear program. The reliance on the Security Council as the principal platform for dealing with Iran is surprisingly acceptable to both Moscow and Tehran.

Despite Washington's professions that the Security Council's rebukes reflect international solidarity against Tehran, the Islamic Republic has largely adjusted to the UN process. At first, Iran was concerned about the Iraq precedent, whereby the U.S. employed the UN to isolate and sanction Iraq for much of the 1990s, and then used Baghdad's lack of compliance as the basis of its military intervention. Iran tried hard to prevent the transfer of its nuclear file to the UN, and even suspended its program from 2003 to 2005 in order to forestall that development.

Moreover, Russia's acquiescence to America's requests did create tension in its relations with Iran, leading some to conclude that Putin was prepared to jeopardize the strategic and economic ties between the two countries.

Russia does share one principal U.S. concern: Moscow has no desire to see Iran possess nuclear weapons. The problem is that Russia has a far narrower definition of the term than the U.S., which sees Iran's entire nuclear infrastructure as constituting a weapons program. So Russia has no difficulty going along with UN measures designed to target a specific Iranian program to produce operational warheads, one which the National Intelligence Estimate says has been inactive since 2003. At the same time, Russia

is moving to establish itself as a Middle East power independent of the West, and thus, can ill-afford to antagonize Iran.

Tehran has found value in Moscow's clever strategy of endorsing watered-down resolutions while deepening its relations with Iran. On the one hand, Russian diplomats are in active negotiations with their American counterparts for a third UN resolution against Iran. Yet, Moscow is willing to provide fuel for Iran's light-water reactor in Bushehr.

The incongruity of providing sensitive nuclear resources to a country that is actively sanctioned for its nuclear malfeasance is not lost on Iran's clerical elite. A similar pattern is continuing in other areas, whereby Russia's complaints about Iran's nuclear activities has not deter it from signing additional commercial contracts with Iran.

There are strong economic motives guiding the Russian designs, as Moscow and Tehran together control roughly 20 percent of world's oil reserves and close to half of the world's gas reserves. The two powers could do much to dilute their respective leverage over the global energy markets. Moreover, in addition to atomic power projects, Iran's oil and gas sector offer many opportunities to Russian firms looking for new investments. Keeping Iranian energy from becoming attractive for European consumers, while financing projects that will tie ever-hungrier South Asia and China into even greater dependence on Iran benefits a number of Russian objectives.

However, reducing this relationship to economic impulses obscures the equally compelling strategic rationale for improved ties between Moscow and Tehran. Despite its unsavory reputation in the West, Iran has acted responsibly in dealing with Muslim republics and populations of Central Asia. The United States may view Iran as a revolutionary power bent on upending the regional order. But for Russia, Iran is largely a status quo state whose continued cooperation is critical for stability in the Middle East and the projection of Russian influence in that region. The strategic alignment between the two nations only reinforces the economic interests.

The Bush administration, which has dedicated so much of its efforts to rebuilding ties with Europe, has utterly failed to bridge the gap with the Russian Federation. Having failed to stop the United States over Kosovo and Iraq, Moscow's stance on Iran demonstrates Russia's return as a major actor. For its part, Tehran has learned to love Russia's strategy of placating the United States with superficial gestures while enhancing its relations with Iran. In the coming months, there will be ample Russian and American pledges of cooperation against Iran's persistent nuclear violations. However, the strategic landscape has changed. And that does not bode well for America's attempt to rein in Iran.

Ray Takeyh, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of "Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic." Nikolas Gvosdev is editor of The National Interest.

#6
The man to push Putin aside
Dmitri Medvedev is no stooge, as everyone seems to think. In fact the world will see a new Russian when he becomes President
By Giles Whittell
The Times (UK), January 2, 2008

Eight years ago yesterday, the world took its first really good look at Vladimir Putin -- at his bashful smile, his thin fair hair and his peculiar swagger; a white man's pimp roll that seems to be trying to compensate for shortness with intimations of surprising upper-body strength.

January 1, 2000, was Mr Putin's first day in charge of Russia. I remember it well. Boris Yeltsin had resigned on New Year's Eve, forcing me and hundreds of others to see out the millennium scribbling furiously about his legacy, and in particular his heir. We had nothing useful to say. Mr Putin was a cipher. Until then he had

been merely Russia's fifth prime minister in five years, and the least experienced of the bunch. He had distinguished himself from the others by launching a war in Chechnya, but it was going badly. He had Yeltsin's backing, but Yeltsin was so unpopular that this could very easily have been political poison.

Eight years on, Mr Putin has crushed Chechnya, served two terms, reorganised Russia and anointed his own successor.

Dmitri Medvedev looks like someone who might sell you a flat-screen TV in John Lewis. He has no high-risk war on his hands, nor any need of one. On March 2 he will inherit Mr Putin's phenomenal popularity and win the presidency by a landslide. He will also inherit Mr Putin's human ring of steel -- his powerful Kremlin placemen drawn from the security forces -- and Mr Putin himself as Prime Minister.

The consensus inside and outside Moscow is that this will make Mr Medvedev a stooge, but it won't. Not necessarily. Mr Putin's legacy, much clearer than Yeltsin's, is to have created from the chaos of the 1990s a Soviet-style power structure in which the Duma is a rubber stamp and the "ruling" party is a massed cheerleading squad. The Cabinet exists to execute policy, not form it, and the 89 regional governors are all appointees. At the centre of this is the presidency, and Mr Medvedev, not Mr Putin, will be President.

This matters hugely. It is true that Mr Putin will lead the United Russia party, formed to promote his increasingly paranoid nationalism, but United Russia has nothing on the Soviet Communist Party as a potential locus of power separate from the Kremlin. It's also true that Mr Putin has made clear his intention to "continue our common efforts in the capacity of prime minister" (translation: "cling to as much power as I can"). But he has foresworn any constitutional tweaking to shift power formally from the Kremlin to the White House on the Moscow River to which Mr Putin will commute as Prime Minister. Without such tweaking, power would flow to the presidency even if its holder were a gerbil.

How much flows to Mr Medvedev remains to be seen, but this, at least, is clear: a real job is his for the taking. Contrary to the view that his anointing can only mean Putinism under new livery, real change in Russia's international role is entirely possible within the next two years.

I spent about an hour with Mr Medvedev in the Kremlin soon after he was summoned there by Mr Putin from St Petersburg as Deputy Prime Minister. He was cordial, on-message (no apologies for his boss's burning of Chechen villages or shutting down of independent TV stations) and largely unquotable. This is still his style. "It is necessary to transfer to fully fledged, complex decisions and actively use the accumulated experience for the modernisation of the corresponding sectors," he told the Council for Priority National Projects and Demographic Policy last week, rivetingly.

He is a lawyer-bureaucrat by training, and, like many lawyer-bureaucrats, is not above indulging expensive tastes. The next time I tried to reach him I was told he was travelling and unavailable. He was indeed. That weekend I bumped into him and his wife at Heathrow. They were boarding an Aeroflot plane back to Moscow, laden with Harrods hat boxes.

All of which may seem scant evidence on which to forecast a sea change in the style and substance of Russian governance. But even if Mr Medvedev is the cipher that Mr Putin once seemed to be himself, the fact of swapping jobs will create tensions on at least three fronts. Mr Putin hopes to keep control of most areas of domestic economic management but, as an ex-chairman of Gazprom, Mr Medvedev will at least feel qualified to interfere. Foreign policy Mr Putin has indicated he will leave largely to Mr Medvedev -- but as the architect of maverick positions on Iranian nuclear enrichment and Kosovan independence, Mr Putin is unlikely to stand by should his protégé try to steer back towards the land of reason.

Thirdly, Mr Medvedev will acquire instant and far-reaching powers of patronage. Most ministerial appointments are recommended by the prime minister, but the president has a veto over these and appoints the defence minister directly; likewise most senior security officials, the prosecutor-general and all regional governors, who in turn appoint half the members of the Upper House of parliament. Without their

support, the Lower House (the Duma) could not rewrite the Constitution even if Mr Putin wanted it to.

The dance of the nervous appointees has started. Putin loyalists are manoeuvring for Cabinet posts in the White House and some governors are scurrying to be renewed in office by Mr Putin before their terms expire, on the basis that his successor may actually have a mind of his own.

Beneath the mask of obedience, which is all any outsider has seen of Mr Medvedev so far, I think he does. He was never a Chekist -- never trained explicitly to lie -- and may actually be embarrassed by the phoney elections and Soviet nostalgia of the Putin years, the ridiculous jailing of Garry Kasparov and other opposition figures, the mawkish Putin personality cult and the latter-day Khrushchev that has become Putin's persona abroad. If he isn't embarrassed, he should be.

But if he is, you read it here: in Mr Medvedev's first term Mr Putin and his retro nationalism will be edged out of mainstream politics to the world of sport, where they belong. If he's lucky, Mr Putin will be the Tessa Jowell of the Sochi Winter Olympics.

#7

Russia: Moscow Bares Its Teeth, Signaling Tough Time For OSCE

By Claire Bigg

RFE/RL, January 4, 2008

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) looks to be in for a difficult year, with participant Russia at the center of many of the likely clashes.

Ties between Moscow and the OSCE have been rocky since the birth of that organization more than three decades ago, in the midst of the Cold War. But with Russia now eager to earn respect as a rising world power, its stance on the international democracy watchdog has become, at times, downright hostile.

Russia got a head start on setting the tone for 2008. On December 26, just days before the OSCE's annual change of chairmanship, Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko announced Russia's intent to reduce payments to the organization, which he accused, among other things, of turning its nose up at suggestions from Moscow.

Russia's contribution accounts for 6 percent of the OSCE's budget -- which totaled 168 million euros last year -- so even a sizable cut should not significantly affect the group's operations.

But OSCE spokesman Martin Nesirky says the payments are about more than just money. "Every country's contribution, whether it's San Marino or the United States, is important, because it's proof of its commitment to the organization," Nesirky says. "The Russian Federation's contribution is important in monetary terms, of course, but symbolically, too."

Accusation Of Bias

Russia's decision to reduce its payments, in a sense, fits into the ongoing debate over the OSCE's budget for 2008, which has yet to be adopted due to a lack of consensus between the 56 participating states. Individual countries are also in separate negotiations over the size of their contribution to this year's budget.

But the Russian Foreign Ministry's latest note, in which it accuses the OSCE of bias toward certain member states, leaves little doubt about the issue's political undertones.

"This is connected chiefly with the OSCE's election-monitoring activities, both in Russia and other former Soviet countries," says Yevgeny Volk, a Russian political analyst. "By reducing its contribution, I think Russia is seeking to voice its opposition to the OSCE's activities and to exert pressure on the organization."

Russia in the past has blamed the OSCE's election-monitoring body, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), for helping to usher in pro-Western leaders in Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia and ODIHR clashed again in December, when the group announced it would not monitor Russia's parliamentary elections after Moscow allegedly barred its observers from obtaining visas. Russian President Vladimir Putin struck back by accusing Washington of asking ODIHR to abstain from sending observers to Russia. It is unclear whether ODIHR monitors will be on hand when Russia holds its presidential election in March.

Crowd-Pleaser?

OSCE spokesman Nesirky says Russia's criticism of the Vienna-based organization has grown especially sharp since Putin's Munich security conference speech in February 2007, when he accused the United States of forcefully imposing its will on the world.

"Right from February, there have been some quite strident comments about the work of the OSCE and ways to improve things," Nesirky says. "That in itself is part of the process. I think people also see it in the broader context of relations between Russia and other countries -- like the United States or the NATO member states -- and in the context of the domestic political scene, with a set of elections both in December and in March."

Russia has been at odds with the OSCE on a number of other issues, including the Kosovo dispute and Moscow's military campaign against separatist rebels in Chechnya.

It largely opposes the OSCE's role as a human rights and democracy watchdog across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which many in Moscow continue to regard as Russia's own sphere of influence.

Moscow also caused dismay within the OSCE last year by withdrawing from the adapted Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, which limits the deployment of heavy weaponry between the Atlantic Ocean and the Ural Mountains.

The OSCE's annual ministerial council in November, held in Madrid, also ended without a final declaration after Moscow blocked agreement on a number of issues.

With Russian presidential elections approaching and Kosovo's ethnic-Albanian leadership preparing to declare independence from Serbia, tensions between Russia and the OSCE are only likely to build up further this year.

Finland, which took over the OSCE's rotating chairmanship on January 1, has vowed to focus on the observance of existing commitments. Finland, which shares a border and a legacy of historic conflicts with Russia, may well influence the OSCE to adopt a tougher line on its unruly neighbor.

A journalist with the Finnish daily "Helsingin Sanomat," Kari Huhta, says Russia will certainly be high on his country's agenda throughout its OSCE chairmanship.

"On January 10, the Finnish Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva will travel to Vienna and outline at the Permanent Council the main points that he will want to emphasize for the Finnish chairmanship," Huhta says. "You don't have to be terribly well informed to guess that Russia will be quite high on the list in a number of ways."

He notes that "for Finland, Russia, of course, has a more immediate presence geographically, politically, and economically than it did for the previous chairman, Spain, which is on the other edge of Europe."

Belarus threatens to kick U.S. ambassador out over broader sanctions
Reuters/AP, December 30, 2007

MINSK, Belarus: The Bush administration, which has dubbed Belarus "the last dictatorship in Europe," has imposed a series of punitive measures against Belarus.

The Belarus government will expel the U.S. ambassador and ban trade in U.S. dollars if Washington broadens sanctions against the country, the country's president, Alexander Lukashenko, said Sunday.

The Bush administration, which has dubbed Belarus "the last dictatorship in Europe," has imposed a series of punitive measures against Belarus, including a ban on Lukashenko's visiting the United States. Washington has also prohibited Americans from doing business with the Belarussian oil refiner Belneftekhim and froze the assets the company has under U.S. jurisdiction.

In mid-December, the U.S. ambassador, Karen Stewart, said Washington might extend sanctions against state companies in Belarus that she said were controlled by people responsible for infringements of democracy. Lukashenko said Sunday that if new sanctions were broad, she would be expelled.

"As soon as substantial sanctions against our economy are imposed, we will retaliate in a toughest possible way on all fronts," the Belarussian state media quoted Lukashenko as saying. "The U.S. ambassador will be thrown out first."

Lukashenko also said Belarus might eliminate the use of U.S. dollars and switch to other currencies: "We can survive without the dollar," he said. "We are building up reserves in yen and yuan. We can switch to euros."

The U.S. Embassy had no immediate comment. Belarus depends almost solely on Russia for the crude oil that it refines. Belneftekhim controls two refineries and a potash plant and provides one-fifth of all foreign currency earnings. The United States and European Union accuse Lukashenko of harassing and jailing opponents, muzzling the media and rigging polls.

#9

With new building in Moscow, Reform gains steam in Russia

By Matt Siegel

JTA, December 31, 2007

MOSCOW -- Pacing the pale concrete floor of the construction site, his words ricocheting between bare concrete beams, Rabbi Alexander Lyskovoi is barely able to contain his excitement.

After nearly 15 years of activity but without a building of its own in Moscow, Russia's Reform Jewish community finally has secured a permanent home in the Russian capital. The new building constitutes a key benchmark in Reform Judaism's quest to expand in the former Soviet Union.

"It's a huge victory and a huge step for Russia," Lyskovoi says, a wide smile beaming from behind his closely cropped grey beard.

Although the space won't be open until renovations are completed in the fall of 2008, the building's purchase caps a year of significant growth for the World Union for Progressive Judaism. It may also be a sign that Reform, long considered an also-ran in the Jewish constellation of the former Soviet Union, is gaining steam in a country where religious Judaism is dominated by Orthodoxy.

The Moscow center is the second major purchase in Russia this year for OROSIR, the acronym by which Russia's Reform movement is known. In June, the first new Reform synagogue built in the former Soviet

Union was dedicated in St. Petersburg. A massive structure near the mooring of the famous battleship Aurora, the Sha'arei Shalom Synagogue has provided a significant boost to Reform morale here.

Reform's worldwide movement, the World Union for Progressive Judaism, is hoping the Moscow center will prove an even more salient symbol of Reform's surge in Russia.

"We are growing," Lyskovoi said. "We are more adult."

Purchased for some \$2.75 million, the space represents an enormous expenditure for the WUPJ, whose entire annual operational budget in Russia is under \$3 million. Another \$500,000 will be needed to complete construction before the space can be used. Two large private donations enabled the purchase.

Located on the third floor of an ultra-modern office building in the same Marina Roscha neighborhood that houses the sprawling headquarters of the Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, the fledgling space is still a blank slate, its walls and floors bare.

Plans for the center include a permanent synagogue, staff offices and facilities to house OROSIR's many clubs and youth programs, which now are scattered about the city. Lyskovoi and others hope that having a central location will greatly increase membership and activity among their constituents.

Still, located at least a 15-minute walk away from the nearest metro station in a neighborhood that's not quite downtown Moscow — though a recent WUPJ news release would beg to differ — the center is hardly the prime central location for which Russia's Reform leaders had been searching.

But given Moscow's soaring real estate market, the compromise location was the best the WUPJ could get, according to the president and CEO of Century 21 Real Estate in Russia, Nuri Katz, who was involved in the deal.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Reform Judaism has struggled in Russia while the Chabad-led federation has thrived, thanks in part to strong political connections and committed overseas donors.

A decade and a half ago, when the post-Soviet government was making the first wave of restitutions to religious communities, Rabbi Zinoviy Kogan, now a spokesman for the Orthodox umbrella group KEROOR, received the historic shul on Bolshaya Bronaya Street, in the heart of Moscow.

At the time, Bronaya was a Reform synagogue, but then Chabad emissaries from the United States and Israel arrived, and although the details remain murky, city authorities somehow shifted ownership of the shul to Chabad. Thus began Reform's struggle for a Moscow home.

Despite a sense that history finally seems to be turning in Reform's favor, Lyskovoi is cautious about suggesting his movement can compete with Chabad, which has been enormously successful in the former Soviet Union.

"We cannot compare our budgets. It's not a competition at all," Lyskovoi said. "We provide this building, these services, these activities for people who need it — that's all."

#10

Lantos lauded as human rights champion

By Ron Kampeas

JTA, January 2, 2008

WASHINGTON — In his 27 years in the U.S. Congress, Rep Tom Lantos had two constituencies -- California's 12th District, encompassing parts of San Francisco and its suburbs, and the ghosts of the Jews who perished in his native Europe.

Lantos (D-Calif.) announced his retirement Wednesday, citing a cancer diagnosis.

"Routine medical tests have revealed that I have cancer of the esophagus," he said. "In view of this development and the treatment it will require, I will not seek re-election."

Lantos, who turns 80 next month, said he would serve out his term, which ends at the end of this year. He is the chairman of the House of Representatives' powerful Foreign Affairs Committee and has long been seen as a go-to lawmaker on an array of Jewish issues.

In speeches, releases and statements, Lantos was as likely to mention his home district as he was his status as "the only Holocaust survivor elected to Congress."

That was the phrase Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the House speaker, appropriated in her statement, issued within minutes of Lantos' own.

"Tom Lantos is one of America's leading experts on foreign affairs and most effective advocates for human rights both at home and abroad," Pelosi said. "As the only Holocaust survivor ever elected to Congress, he has used his position to fight for those whose voices have been silenced by hatred and oppression."

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee described him as a ubiquitous presence in U.S.-Israel relations.

"There is not a single issue impacting the U.S.-Israel relationship that does not carry the imprint or leadership of Tom Lantos," said a joint statement by AIPAC's president, Howard Friedman, and its executive director, Howard Kohr.

"A living witness to a time in history when man's inhumanity was at its height, Congressman Lantos has dedicated his life and career to ensuring that America's humanity illuminates the dark places of our world. His leadership has left an indelible mark in service to his country and in improving the lives of countless people throughout the United States and across the globe. During the difficult time ahead for the congressman and his family, the pro-Israel community wishes him strength and a return to health."

Lantos most recently led the battle to substantially expand sanctions against Iran, a bill that passed overwhelmingly in the House and is under consideration in the Senate.

At the same time, he is a strong advocate of reaching out to rogue states, even Israel's most bitter enemies. Lantos played a role in swaying Libya to give up its own weapons of mass destruction program in 2003 and has said he is willing to meet Iran's leadership.

His pro-Israel credentials were critical in giving Pelosi the upper hand when she came under fire from the White House in April for visiting Syria and delivering a peace message from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"It's obvious the White House is desperate to find some phony criticism of the speaker's trip, even though it was a bipartisan trip," Lantos told JTA at the time. "I have nothing but contempt and disdain for the attempt to undermine this trip."

Lantos was 16 in 1944 when the Nazis invaded his native Hungary. He fought in the anti-Nazi underground and arrived in the United States in 1947 to study.

"It is only in the United States that a penniless survivor of the Holocaust and a fighter in the anti-Nazi underground could have received an education, raised a family, and had the privilege of serving the last three decades of his life as a member of Congress," he said in his statement. "I will never be able to express fully my profoundly felt gratitude to this great country."

His Holocaust experience suffused his politics. His congressional Web site features links not only to his biography but to his own account, titled "A Holocaust Survivor," and another reprinting his contribution to a book published by Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, "The Last Days."

Lantos was an economist and a consultant prior to his 1980 election to represent a San Francisco-area district, yet it soon became clear that human rights above all drove his congressional mission.

He and his wife, Annette, took the lead in the 1980s in meeting with Jews in the former Soviet Union and interceding on their behalf, said Mark Levin, the executive director of NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia.

"He was able to put the cause of human rights at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy," Levin said.

In 1983, Lantos helped found the congressional Human Rights Caucus.

"He always did what he thought was right, and didn't care who liked and didn't like it," said Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), who described Lantos as a mentor. "He always had a bit of a swagger to him."

His appeal crossed the political aisle. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), his committee's ranking minority member, called him "a man of enormous integrity, energy and substance."

His commitment to human rights did not bow to other loyalties.

The sultans of Silicon Valley, in his district, winced when he excoriated the bosses of Yahoo, Google, Microsoft and Cisco for cooperating with Internet censors in China. In a 2006 hearing with representatives of those companies, Lantos used the word "ashamed" nine times.

"We comply with legally binding orders whether it's here in the U.S. or China," the Microsoft representative said, to which Lantos responded: "Well, IBM complied with legal orders when they cooperated with Nazi Germany."

Lantos' "unique position as the only Holocaust survivor to serve in Congress gave him the moral authority to speak out on behalf of those who had no one to speak out for them," said William Daroff, the Washington director of United Jewish Communities, the federations' umbrella.

Lantos had the gentlemanly bearing of his central European upbringing, delivering blunt messages draped in velvet sarcasm.

It was a style that sometimes turned off others in the Jewish community who saw it as imperious. Some critics said Lantos practiced "with-me-or-against-me politics," cold-shouldering those who did not champion his favored causes -- including the New Hampshire political career of his daughter, Katrina Swett.

In September, Swett dropped her bid for the U.S. Senate while suggesting she would try again in 2010.

The conversion of his two daughters and wife, a fellow Hungarian Holocaust survivor, to Mormonism raised some eyebrows in the Jewish community. The couple has 17 grandchildren. Lantos continues to identify as a Jew.

Winning the chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Committee when the Democrats retook Congress in 2006 culminated years of hard work for Lantos, who had been the ranking Democrat under a succession of Republican chairmen.

"He really came into his own in his chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs Committee," said Ira Forman, the executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

The committee is packed with Jewish members, with four chairing subcommittees. Two Jewish members are expected to compete to succeed Lantos: Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), the committee's deputy chairman, and Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), the chairman of its Middle East subcommittee.

Lantos was critical not only in promoting U.S.-Israel ties but also a range of other issues championed by Jewish organizations, said Hadar Susskind, the Washington director for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

Lantos took the lead in pushing sanctions against Sudan for failing to stop the genocide in Darfur, where government-allied militias have killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, and shaping the international components to the Energy Act just signed by President Bush that seeks to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

On Darfur, Susskind said Lantos has "long been considered a voice of conscience there."

In October, his committee voted to declare as genocide the World War I massacre of as many as 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman forces.

Jewish organizations had lobbied against the genocide designation. Jewish members on the committee were torn between casting a vote they knew could damage strong Israel-Turkish ties and colluding with a fudging of language that some saw as having echoes of Holocaust denial.

Lantos joined the seven Jews who cast a vote for the genocide designation, saying he had "never been more proud" of the committee.

#11

Rep. Lantos, Leading Pro-Israel Voice, To Retire
by James D. Besser
NY Jewish Week, January 3, 2008

A leading pro-Israel lawmaker and the only Holocaust survivor in Congress will retire at the end of his current term.

In a statement on Wednesday Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), a 14-term veteran, revealed he is being treated for cancer of the esophagus.

"In view of this development and the treatment it will require, I will not seek reelection," said the 79-year-old Lantos.

Lantos is currently chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, a post that has given him unusual clout in Israel-related policy. His likeliest successor as chair is Rep. Howard Berman, also a California Democrat and strong pro-Israel voice.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, Lantos was part of a partisan group fighting the Nazis - and attributed his survival to the refuge he found in a safe house established by Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. As a member of Congress, Lantos spearheaded the effort to make Wallenberg an honorary U.S. citizen and pressed the former Soviet Union to reveal long-classified information about the rescuer's fate.

Lantos has been in the forefront of congressional efforts to document and fight anti-Semitism. He also played a significant role in the creation of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

"I worked very closely with him on the Museum, where he was enormously helpful and wise," said Michael Berenbaum, a Holocaust scholar and one of the Museum's founders. "I also worked with him on the film 'The Last Days' (an award-winning documentary about Hungarian Holocaust survivors). He has been a towering moral voice, and he has always conducted himself with a profound respect for the Jewish experience."

Lantos was also a congressional leader on the issue of Soviet Jewry.

"Tom Lantos and his wife Annette were in the forefront of activism to free Soviet Jews in the 1980s," said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ, a Jewish human rights group that was a leader in the Soviet Jewry movement. "All of those who are concerned about the cause of human rights will miss his leadership and passion."

And Lantos' personality; with his retirement "there will be one less colorful personality in the House," Levin said.

"Tom Lantos is one of America's leading experts on foreign affairs and most effective advocates for human rights both at home and abroad," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Wednesday. "As the only Holocaust survivor ever elected to Congress, he has used his position to fight for those whose voices have been silenced by hatred and oppression. On the homefront, Tom Lantos is a champion for working families and a great advocate for protecting the environment."

Lantos has frequently said his experiences in Hungary gave rise to his activism on human rights and social justice.

"It is only in the United States that a penniless survivor of the Holocaust and a fighter in the anti-Nazi underground could have received an education, raised a family, and had the privilege of serving the last three decades of his life as a Member of Congress," Lantos said in announcing his retirement. "I will never be able to express fully my profoundly felt gratitude to this great country."

#12

Analysis: Xenophobia Increasing in Ukraine, Authorities in Denial OSC [US Open Source Center], January 2, 2008

Some media sources claim that xenophobic crime has been steadily increasing in Ukraine since the country gained its independence in 1991. A number of media reports suggest the Yushchenko administration has done little to combat xenophobic violence and high-level officials largely deny that it is a problem. One pro-Yushchenko source alleged that Russia, in attempts to sully Ukraine's image in the West, has orchestrated xenophobic incidents in Ukraine.

Some independent media have claimed that xenophobia is on the rise in Ukraine, using recent statistics to support their assertions. According to the daily Kiyevskiy Vedomosti, every month up to 100 racist incidents are officially registered across the country (29 November). The popular website Korrespondent.net alleged, "The race fight in Ukraine is starting to look like a war" (3 November).

A recent survey conducted by the State Institute for the Development of Family and Youth indicates that, since Ukrainian independence, there has been a considerable increase of xenophobic violence, especially among young people. Furthermore, according to the survey, 50 percent of youths want to prohibit foreigners from entering the country for work or study. Young people ages 14-35 put "gypsies, Muslims, Jews and other foreigners" in the same category as alcoholics and those infected with AIDS (Kiyevskiy Vedomosti, 29 November).

Studio One Plus One TV reported that, according to official statistics, over 1,051 foreigners have been crime victims since the beginning of 2007. The television station termed this a "worrying trend." The station

claimed that the number of websites run by xenophobic groups are "innumerable on the Ukrainian Internet" (13 November). Korrespondent.net asserted, "people are more and more often attacking others based on skin color. Organizations which are fighting for purity of race and nation function openly in the country" (3 November).

According to a study by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 45 percent of youths between 18 and 20 years of age do not want to see Jews living in Ukraine and 18 percent of the entire population of the country would prefer not to live next to "blacks" (Korrespondent.net, 3 November). Extremist Groups Increase in Number

Media reporting indicates that extremist organizations are gaining adherents as disaffected Ukrainian youths are increasingly drawn to their ranks. Business Ukraine Magazine commented, "Kyiv's skinhead community is growing, and the number of ultra-nationalistic, pseudo-political organizations that offer the shield of respectability to angry young men is also on the rise. Young Ukrainians with few personal prospects and a smoldering resentment at the perceived third-class status they are afforded in Western Europe make for enthusiastic recruits, while the highly uneven distribution of Ukraine's new-found wealth only adds to the resentment" (October 29).

Prominent website Ukrayinska Pravda citing the international Jewish agency Sokhnut, reported that there are currently 50,000 neo-Nazi activists in Russia and Ukraine and that a Sokhnut representative in Kyiv stated that anti-Semitism is continuing to increase despite official censorship (16 November). Officials Show Little Concern for Xenophobia

Some media observers have charged that the Ukrainian leadership does not take the problem of increasing racism very seriously and has no real plan to combat it. Kiyevskiye Vedomosti reported that, according to analysts, "the state has no strategy for dealing with xenophobia" and that the Interior Ministry classifies xenophobia "not as a manifestation of racism but as common hooliganism" (29 November).

According to Business Ukraine Magazine, "Ukrainian officials are loathe to admit that this rising tide of violence against foreigners is racially or nationalistically motivated, preferring to categorize all such attacks as common hooliganism" (29 October). Korrespondent.net asserted, "The situation in Ukraine is exacerbated by the fact the authorities and society do not see instances of xenophobia as anything really out of the ordinary" (3 November).

In fact, some high-level administration officials have said racism is not a serious problem. (1) Nonetheless, they have also asserted that measures are being taken to counteract xenophobia and racist crimes when they do occur.

Acting head of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) Valentyn Nalyvaychenko asserted that Ukraine had succeeded in preventing the emergence of extremist groups formed on the principles of racism and religious hatred (Agenstvo Voyennykh Novostey, 24 October).

SBU press secretary Marina Ostapenko announced that the SBU had been ordered by the president to set up a special unit for combating xenophobia and ethnic intolerance. Ostapenko declared, however, that the authorities have successfully managed to thwart the formation of permanent extremist groups formed on the principles of racism and religious hatred and that "incidences of xenophobia in Ukraine are not a mass phenomenon" (ITAR-TASS, 24 October; Korrespondent.net, 3 November). Deputy Interior Minister and police chief for public security Vasylyy Fatshutdynov asserted that violent racist attacks against foreigners had "decreased somewhat over the past five years." According to Fatshutdynov, in 2002 there were 1288 cases reported (837 were solved); in 2006 there were 1181 cases, and almost half were solved. He alleged that currently there are 1051 cases and 488 cases have been solved" (Kiyevskiye Vedomosti, 29 November).

While on a recent state visit to Israel, President Viktor Yushchenko stated, "anti-Semitism is not characteristic of everyday life in Ukraine" and asserted that Ukrainian authorities would continue "to react to every such incident" (UP, 16 November).

Despite these promises, there is much skepticism about the administration's ability to handle xenophobic crimes. Studio One Plus One TV reported that "the power-wielding agencies are just as helpless about dealing with neo-Nazis as they are about dealing with the Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP)," an institution which has been promulgating the dissemination of anti-Semitic publications for some time now. The TV station alleged that even though the SBU and the Interior Ministry have set up units to combat racially motivated crimes, ethnic minorities fear that the move may simply be a PR trick (13 November).

Russia Blamed For Xenophobic Incidents

One pro-Yushchenko publication charged that Russia was behind attempts to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of the West by orchestrating xenophobic incidents that commonly occurred on the eve of official visits of Yushchenko or top Ukrainian officials to Washington.

In an article entitled, "Attempts To Discredit Ukraine: Professional Anti-Semites and Russophobes at Work," the weekly Gazeta po-Kiyevskiy reported that there are "third party countries -- not Jewish organizations or Israel -- that try to discredit Ukraine foremost in the eyes of the US" and convince the international community (especially the US, the EU, and Israel) about the growing threat of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, thus the President and the Ukrainian government constantly have to justify that they are not xenophobes or anti-Semites. The paper alleged "if someone in Russia finds it useful, then Jewish schools in Kyiv are set on fire and the perpetrators are never found. Provocations are organized, especially marches by the Ukrainian extreme right, or the windows of prominent synagogues are busted and then the news splashed all over the press" (9 November).

Furthermore, some observers claim the authorities are willing to confront "skinhead" groups only when they promote a Eurasian ideology, because the government perceives such groups as "apologists for restoring the Russian empire" (Korrespondent.net, 3 November). One such group, the Eurasian Youth Union, run by Russian extremist Alexander Dugin, is banned in Ukraine. Appendix: Some Prominent Extremist Groups
Patriot Ukrayiny

#13

Putin Said Losing Control of Xenophobia He Helped Legitimize

By Paul Goble

Window on Eurasia, January 3, 2007

Vienna – President Vladimir Putin is rapidly losing control over the rising tide of Russian xenophobia and ethno-nationalism that almost a decade ago helped him become president and that in the years since he has helped to legitimize, according to one of Moscow's leading experts on these phenomena.

In a new book, a chapter of which is available online, Aleksandr Verkhovskiy argues that Putin and his regime no longer can hope to reverse this trend by their own actions and consequently are simply trying to redirect Russian anger away from domestic targets toward foreign ones

(www.polit.ru/research/12/28/verhovsky.html).

But while the Russian leader can certainly help whip up Russian anger toward the West with his use of what some have called "civilizational nationalism," the SOVA Analytic center expert says, there seems little chance that this will reduce the threat xenophobic ethno-nationalism represents for the future of the Russian Federation.

On the one hand, the SOVA Analytic Center specialist says, xenophobic attitudes increasingly infects Russian ethno-nationalism because Putin and other senior leaders have appeared to sanction growing hostility among many ethnic Russians toward many minorities, especially in the wake of the Kondopoga riots of a year ago.

And on the other, Russian ethno-nationalism itself now affects groups and parties across virtually the entire political spectrum, again including United Russia and others close to Putin, rather than being confined as they were for most of the 1990 to marginal individuals and groups with little or no chance of coming to power.

Consequently, and to a certain extent in ways that parallel his exploitation of xenophobic attitudes against Chechens, Putin is again serving as the midwife of a phenomenon which may mean future Russian leaders will have to defer to this trend even more than he has.

In the course of his 12,000-word article, Verkhovskiy covers the ideological evolution of Russian ethno-nationalism over the last 16 years. While he notes that his treatment of this topic is in many ways superficial, he touches on more topics than can be mentioned here.

Nonetheless, given the importance of this issue, Verkhovskiy's specific arguments deserve careful consideration, whether they have been made before and are largely common ground or they are something new and certain -- because they concern Putin and his policies -- to be controversial.

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, he writes, the ethno-nationalisms of minority groups within the Russian Federation played a far greater role in Russian political life than did the nationalism of ethnic Russian majority. But by 1995, the relative importance of the two had changed.

By that time, ethno-nationalism among minority groups had run its course, and members of most of these groups, with the obvious exception of the Chechens and a few others, shifted from efforts at national self-determination toward a concern with the defense of their rights as ethnic minorities.

And precisely because the Yeltsin regime was so hostile to Russian nationalism, many Russians came to feel that they were the truly "insulted and injured," a sense that helped power ethno-nationalism at the mass level and the articulation of various ethno-national agendas by a series of typically small marginal groups.

Verkhovskiy surveys the programs of six of these groups -- the Red Patriots, the Black Hundreds revivalists, the neo-Eurasians, the neo-Nazis, the White Power skinheads, and the Russian separatists -- in order to show that each was more concerned about ideological niceties than about winning support from the regime or the population.

But then, he continues, the rise of Putin changed the relationship among Russian nationalists, the Russian population more generally, and the Russian president.

If the Russian nationalists of the 1990s almost invariably viewed President Boris Yeltsin as the enemy, the Russian nationalists of the 2000s often view Putin not only as someone they can support but -- and this is even more important to many -- as a leader who intentionally or not has paved the way for them to come to power.

That in turn led some nationalists to soft-pedal their rhetoric in the hopes of gaining influence with both the people and the political parties that might contribute to their further rise. And that in turn has meant that as a group, they began to articulate a new national populism, one drawing on social as well as ethnic themes.

That shift made their programs less offensive to many both in Russia and outside -- after all, they now talking about addressing real social problems rather than attacking ethnic minorities there were increasingly interested in stressing Russia's differences with the West.

But it did not mean that everyone involved in this movement had become less xenophobic or even racist, Verkhovskiy insists, but it did mean that their new stance offered Putin and some of those around him with the hope that they could redirect and thus assume some measure of control over this set of attitudes by playing to this theme.

Three factors helped promote this process, Verkhovskiy says. First, "the increasing legitimization of nationalist ideals and xenophobic emotions characteristic for the political scene and the mass media in the new decade allowed [these groups] to broaden the circle of likeminded people" less concerned about ideology as such.

Second, because ethno-nationalism had infected virtually all political parties and groups, it became more an influence group or set of attitudes within most of them rather than a single party that could be isolated and controlled. Indeed, Kremlin efforts to set up such a party have repeatedly failed.

If there is today no single Russian nationalist party, however, there is a community of nationalists, many of whom passed through the marginal groups in the 1990s and now work to influence the parties, media outlets and government offices where they now sit, a network that the Kremlin has not been willing or perhaps able to destroy.

And third, the regime itself, from Putin down, has been infected by these ideas. After all, as Verkhovskiy notes, the president has appeared to legitimate many of them both in his often inflammatory statements about the Chechens and in his actions or non-actions concerning many other minorities.

But as other statements by the Russian president show, Putin appears to be concerned that for many Russian xenophobic nationalists, he has not been willing to go as far as they would like either to strike out at immigrants or promote the idea of a "Russia for the Russians."

Indeed, at least some of the more extreme xenophobic elements and ethno-nationalists among the Russians certainly view what Verkhovskiy describes as Putin's latest effort to refocus their anger away from the domestic minorities to foreign states as evidence of this.

This effort involves the promotion of a still amorphous set of ideas that another Moscow specialist on Russian xenophobia, Emil Pain, has labeled "civilizational nationalism," the view that Russia is a unique civilization very different from and necessarily at odds with the West.

Among the key elements of this concept are the following: Russia is not an ethnic whole or an empire but rather a civilization defined by its ideas. Its cultural and political traditions mean that it should not follow the West. And its ideological core is provided by Russian Orthodoxy.

Aleksandr Panarin, a neo-Eurasian in the past, is one of the chief articulators of this trend. In his writings, he openly opposes globalization, the West and "especially the United States" and seeks to promote a centralized and extremely authoritarian Russian state as a necessary step toward the formation of a new Orthodox Russian Empire.

As ideal types, Verkhovskiy says, imperial and ethnic nationalism contradict one another, but in practice, at least in the Russian case, they in fact interact and reinforce rather than undermine each other. But as he notes in conclusion, that observation begs another question: Can ethnic and "civilizational" nationalism co-exist?

Putin is clearly betting that they can, at least in his time. But his failure to anticipate the role that the monster of xenophobic Russian nationalism on which he rode to power would ultimately play suggests, Verkhovskiy concludes, that the current Russian president may be mistaken again.