



WASHINGTON, D.C. February 1, 2008

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: New Year; Old Problems

Dear Friend,

Unfortunately, 2008 began with Russian and Ukrainian Jews confronting increased numbers of anti-Semitic incidents. In Russia alone, there have been three serious acts of violence, in Nizhny Novgorod, Ulyanovsk and Volgograd; two synagogues and a Holocaust Memorial were desecrated and a security guard beaten. NCSJ has called on the Russian government to do more in combating xenophobia, ultra-nationalism and anti-Semitism. In addition, we have urged the Russians to prosecute those responsible for these heinous crimes. (See attached press release.) Russian Jewish organizations, including the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, have also expressed concern about this increase.

In Ukraine, a Kyiv synagogue was vandalized and a rabbi was beaten in Dnepropetrovsk. NCSJ was in contact with the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington, D.C. to urge a swift government response. A new Ukrainian security department has apprehended an individual believed to be responsible for the synagogue desecration. We urge the Ukrainian government to utilize the hate crimes statute, and not the less severe charge of hooliganism, for prosecuting the perpetrators.

There has been much attention paid to what is described as the “new anti-Semitism” in Israel and the Diaspora. However, our community cannot forget that traditional anti-Semitism remains throughout the former Soviet Union. NCSJ actively monitors these developments and is in regular contact with community leadership, but our biggest challenge remains getting the FSU governments to pro-actively fight anti-Semitism through strong laws and educational outreach. Pluralism, tolerance and respect for religious and ethnic minority rights need to be better integrated throughout the countries of the region.

Next week, NCSJ and several of our member agencies will testify on the state of anti-Semitism before the U.S. Congressional Helsinki Commission, which oversees American participation in the Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This will provide an opportunity to review the current situation as well as make recommendations on how governments and NGOs can counter both the old and new forms of anti-Semitism.

In this week's update are several stories about the current political situation in Russia leading up to next month's presidential election. We continue to focus on the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. One interesting story notes the maiden voyage of a new Azeri oil tanker bringing oil from Azerbaijan to the United States from the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. The organized American Jewish community strongly supported the construction of the BTC pipeline as a new alternative source of energy for the West.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark B. Levin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" being particularly prominent.

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. February 1, 2008

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#1

**NCSJ Condemns Anti-Semitic Attacks in Russia; Urges Increased Vigilance
February 1, 2008**

NCSJ condemns the rash of anti-Semitic attacks this past month in Russia. Communities in Volgograd, Ulyanovsk and Nizhny Novgorod have been victimized by vandals and subject to physical assault.

On January 29, a Jewish community center in Ulyanovsk was attacked by more than ten ultra-nationalists, who plastered the building with anti-Semitic graffiti, while shouting racist slogans.

On January 23, four teens beat a guard and vandalized a synagogue in Nizhny Novgorod, and on January 27, unknown assailants desecrated a Holocaust memorial in Volgograd.

Suspects have been arrested in both the Ulyanovsk and Nizhny Novgorod assaults.

“Russian national authorities must work with regional and local governments immediately to prosecute these hate crimes, and punish the perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law,” said Ed Robin, NCSJ Chairman. “Authorities should take additional steps to ensure the safety and security of its Jewish citizens in Russia.”

NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia, founded in 1971, represents the organized American Jewish community in monitoring and advocating on behalf of the estimated 1.5 million Jews living in the 15 successor states of the former Soviet Union.

#2

Wave of Attacks on Jews in Russia Associated Press, January 31, 2008

Russia's Jewish community on Thursday reported three attacks in the last two weeks, including a raid on a synagogue and desecration of a memorial to Holocaust victims.

In Ulyanovsk, a group of about a dozen young men painted swastikas Tuesday on the walls of a synagogue and cursed at members inside, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia said.

In Volgograd, anti-Semitic slogans were scrawled on a memorial to Holocaust victims Sunday, the group said.

Last week, several young men burst into a synagogue in Nizhny Novgorod, throwing religious books out a window and beating up a security guard, it said. All three cities are in western Russia.

The federation said it was concerned about the rise in attacks targeting Jews, calling it part of "a recent surge in anti-Semitic manifestations" in Russia.

In 2007, 67 people were killed and more than 550 injured in ethnically motivated attacks, according to the SOVA rights center, which monitors hate crimes.

In a report issued Tuesday, SOVA said hate crimes in Russia have grown increasingly brutal and deadly. Authorities are doing little to combat xenophobia, it said.

According to varying estimates, between 300,000 and 1.5 million Jews live in the nation of 142 million. After an exodus in the years before and after 1991 Soviet collapse, the Jewish community is experiencing a moderate revival, with new synagogues, schools and cultural centers being built across the country.

During the Soviet era, thousands of Jews were imprisoned or executed as part of nationwide purges, and many more were forced to conceal their Jewish identity.

#3

Ukraine Jews on guard
By Matt Siegel
JTA, January 31, 2008

Rabbi Nochum Tamarin doesn't like to talk about what happened to him last year on a street in Ukraine. Enough has been written about the Zhitomir attack, he says, and besides, last year already is long gone.

Pressed, however, Tamarin opens up a bit, and it is apparent that the incident, in which he and his wife were set upon and beaten by thugs, still affects him and his family.

"I'm not afraid," he says, "but my wife is."

The attack on Tamarin, a Chabad emissary, was one of a string of anti-Semitic attacks in Ukraine late last year that shook local Jewish communities.

To some, the violent episodes in Sevastopol, Odessa and Uzhgorod, where a local Chabad rabbi's house was burned, made it seem as though anti-Semitism was aggressively on the march in the birthplace of the pogrom. Theories differ about the violence, however.

The Eurasian Jewish Congress, which runs the most respected program monitoring anti-Semitism in Ukraine, says that anti-Semitic attacks did not spike in 2007. The Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine says the statistics it has been keeping as part of a new program show an increase.

Whether or not the attacks constituted a surge in violence, it is clear they left Jews in Ukraine -- particularly its most visible members, the Orthodox -- more concerned about their safety than at any other time in recent years.

"I've met people in Odessa, Jews that are very established and feel comfortable, and they are afraid," said Mayer Stambler, the chairman of Chabad's federation. "The situation over there is very serious."

The Eurasian Jewish Congress' report on anti-Semitism in Ukraine in 2007 details the incidents that have led to a sense of anxiety and siege among Ukraine's Orthodox Jews. The incidents range from the distribution of anti-Semitic leaflets by MAUP, a notoriously anti-Semitic publishing house and business school, to the beating of a rabbi in Sevastopol.

But Eurasian Jewish Congress program director Vyacheslav Likhachev was careful to note that the report showed no more attacks in 2007 than in 2006 or 2005.

"There was a kind of informal [violent] campaign that was in Ukraine last August, but real statistics were not higher than the previous two years and maybe a little bit less than the previous two years," Likhachev said.

"We are the ones who really feel the attacks," Stambler countered, "and the rabbis feel uncomfortable walking outside."

One major reason for the disagreement over the numbers stems from the difficulty in collecting accurate data on hate crimes in Ukraine.

According to the 2007 country-by-country Hate Crime Report Card published by Human Rights First, Ukraine collects no data on hate crimes. Not a single person has been convicted under the country's hate crimes statute in its post-Soviet history.

After Ukraine's president, Victor Yushenko, was criticized last fall for his government's lackluster response to the attacks, he met with Jewish leaders and said he ordered the Ukrainian Security Service to establish a special department to combat hate crimes. He also proposed a bill to criminalize the denial of the Holocaust and Ukraine's famine of 1932-33, known as Holodomor.

But with a Ukraine beset by domestic crises that have toppled three governments in three years, Jewish observers say they are not optimistic about action.

Despite public moves like the appointment of a hate crimes ombudsman, the government seems either unwilling or unable to combat anti-Semitism and xenophobia, Jewish observers said.

"I would like to see them do more to fulfill the commitments they've made," said Mark Levin, executive director of NCSJ, which advocates for Jews in former Soviet republics.

After meeting with government representatives in Kiev in the wake of the attacks, Levin issued a tepid assessment of the government's response.

"We appreciate the present commitment to counter the rise in extremism, but we'd also like to see concrete steps taken," he told JTA.

Yelena Vasiliyevna Mamontova, the head of the information department of Ukraine's new Committee of Nationality and Religion, disputes the claims of rising anti-Semitism in the country. She says that Ukraine, like all countries, struggles with anti-Semitism, but that claims of rampant anti-Semitism are exaggerated.

"This kind of thing exists in every country, and it's not worth making a big deal about it," Mamontova told JTA. "There is no official discrimination against Jews whatsoever -- there are no cases of Jews not being employed or accepted into university or allowed to enter politics. That doesn't exist."

Despite Yuschenko's rhetoric this fall, the government has taken no further actions on anti-Semitism, observers say.

Experts now are warning of a growing xenophobia problem as serious as it is in Russia, which has struggled with extremism for more than a decade but does a better job of monitoring and prosecuting hate crimes.

"In 2007, I registered about 65 to 70 cases of racial violence in Ukraine and there were about five or six cases of murder," Likhachev said. "We can see that in general, the level of xenophobia is growing very quickly with a very serious tendency."

However, he noted, hate crimes against Jews have either stayed the same or declined even as they have risen against other minority groups, including blacks, Asians and Arabs.

Russia has experienced the opposite, with overall violence against Jews slightly up in 2006, though anti-Semitic vandalism was down, according to Alexander Verkhovsky, director of the Sova Informational and Analytic Center in Moscow.

While 2007 saw a slight increase in recorded anti-Semitic violence in Russia -- there were nine attacks on 13 people -- Verkhovsky said it is difficult to extrapolate a trend. In previous years, he explained, many Jewish communities chose not to report attacks, which could account for the increase.

Statistics aside, the feelings of fear and frustration in Ukraine remain.

"We live here, we're part of the community and we think it does damage to Ukraine," Stambler said.

#4

**Participants in anti-Semitic action arrested in Ulyanovsk
Interfax Politics, January 31, 2008**

A dozen young men held an anti-Semitic action near the Jewish community center in Ulyanovsk, Andrei Glotzer, the press secretary of the Russian chief rabbi, told Interfax on Wednesday.

"The action took place on Tuesday afternoon. The young men painted swastikas on the center's walls, chanted anti-Semitic slogans and tossed around brochures of the Russian National Union," he said.

They broke into the center and continued chanting the slogans, he noted.

Officers of the local department on organized crime, who happened to pass by, detained four assailants. The others escaped. In the words of Glotzer, the detainees are 14 or 15 years old.

The case is being investigated. No one was hurt, and there was no property damage, Glotzer said.

#5

Synagogue vandalized in Nizhny Novgorod Interfax-Religion, January 28, 2008

Moscow, January 28, Interfax - Three attackers, presumably ice hockey fans, vandalized a synagogue in Nizhny Novgorod.

"Three young men, aged 18-19, broke into the synagogue, tore down the table cloth and began throwing religious books out the windows. The unruly assailants overwhelmed the security guard and beat him up," the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia told Interfax.

The assailants were detained on the same day, a spokesman said.

"All of them are fans of an ice hockey club, whose team played in the city," he said.

The attack is being investigated.

The prompt reaction of law enforcement indicates that the authorities are becoming more attentive to such crimes, the Federation said.

"Another new plus in the work of the Russian law enforcement system is that punishment is becoming increasingly a reality in such occurrences. This is undoubtedly a positive development and evidence that the authorities are showing resolve in fighting xenophobia and anti-Semitism," the spokesman said.

#6

Rabbi beaten in Ukraine JTA Brief, January 27, 2008

A rabbi and teacher was severely beaten on a main street in the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk.

Rabbi Dov-Ber Baitman, a teacher at the Jewish educational center Shiurey Torah, was assaulted and severely beaten by four men after evening classes on Jan. 24.

The assailants have not been identified and no arrests have been reported.

Leaders of the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community say the assault is connected to other anti-Semitic incidents in the region and appealed to the Ukrainian Secret Service to conduct a thorough investigation.

#7

Kiev synagogue vandal detained JTA Brief, January 28, 2008

A special Ukrainian Secret Service unit reportedly detained a man who attempted to vandalize Kiev's main synagogue.

The incident reportedly took place overnight Saturday, when the vandal was caught by a field investigator for the Secret Service unit on the counteraction of xenophobia and intolerance as he attempted to paint anti-Semitic graffiti on the synagogue walls.

According to the Secret Service press service, the arrested man attempted to escape and resisted arrest.

During an interrogation that day, the would-be vandal reportedly confessed that someone had offered him money to vandalize what used to be known as the Brodsky Synagogue.

The Secret Service turned over the case to local authorities; it was unclear what charges the vandal would face. Ukrainian courts often prosecute cases of ethnic violence as hooliganism to avoid Ukraine's hate crimes statute, which carries more stringent penalties.

The chief of the Secret Service's special department and its press secretary refused comment when contacted by JTA.

Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, one of Ukraine's chief rabbis, told JTA that the incident "is a provocation" to the Jewish community.

#8

Nine adolescents arrested for drawing swastikas on Jewish centre in Russia AFP and EJP, January 30, 2008

Nine adolescents were arrested for drawing swastikas on a Jewish cultural centre in Ulyanovsk -- in the Volga region -- announced Russia's Jewish community Wednesday.

On Tuesday "youths gathered in front of the centre drew swastikas and shouted anti-Semitic slogans", said Andrei Glotser, representative of Russia's Chief Rabbi Berl Lazar, according to the Interfax agency.

The nine arrested are aged 14 and 15, he said.

An investigation is set to be opened.

"Unfortunately, such incidents are not isolated. A few days ago in Nizhny Novgorod, four youths went into a synagogue and threw prayer books out the window," Zinovy Kogan, another representative from the Jewish community, told AFP.

"One of them was called in for questioning," he said.

The attacks against the synagogues and the desecration of Jewish cemeteries are frequent in Russia and most often carried out by small neo-Nazi groups.

Alexander Boroda, chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FJC), has called on the Russian administration to respond to the information about a surge in hate crimes over the past few years provided by the Interior Ministry.

"Of course, the fact that the Interior Ministry is reporting a dramatic increase in hate crimes in Russia over the past four years raises concerns about the spiritual state of our society," Boroda said Tuesday.

A special department of the Federation of Jewish Communities, which registers incidents of anti-Semitism nature in Russia, last year noted a decrease in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2007 as compared with 2006, said Boroda.

However, that "does not mean a decrease in xenophobic tendencies as such," he said.

#9

"HEYDAR ALIYEV" OIL TANKER DEPARTS FOR USA

Azer Tac Brief, January 9, 2008

Palmali's "Heydar Aliyev" tanker loaded with Azerbaijani oil today was sent from the Heydar Aliyev Ceyhan terminal to the United States of America.

The tanker built in Korea is 274 meters in length and 50 meters in width. Its carrying capacity is 165,000 tons.

A ceremony to mark the occasion started with laying flowers at the memorial plaque to the Azerbaijani nationwide leader at the terminal.

Speaking at the ceremony, Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Abid Sharifov, President of Palmali Group of Companies Mubariz Mansimov and Turkish Public Works and Housing Minister Faruk Ozak praised Heydar Aliyev's role in implementing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project.

They stressed energy and transport projects initiated by Azerbaijan have been contributing to strengthening peace and stability in the region.

The ceremony participants also familiarized themselves with the tanker and viewed the Heydar Aliyev Museum here.

#10

OSCE Criticizes Observer Restrictions

The Associated Press Brief, January 30, 2008

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said Tuesday that Russia has placed severe limits on the work it can carry out during its March presidential election.

"The invitation that we received has serious restrictions both in terms of the number of observers and time they are allowed to observe," said Curtis Budden, spokesman for the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE's Warsaw-based elections watchdog.

He said Moscow would allow the monitors to enter Russia on Feb. 28, which would not give them enough time to prepare to observe the March 2 vote.

Central Elections Commission chief Vladimir Churov announced Monday that the country has invited only 400 international monitors to observe the presidential election -- half the number that participated four years ago.

#11

U.S. hearing addresses anti-Semitism

JTA Brief, January 30, 2008

The U.S. Helsinki Commission held a hearing on anti-Semitism, part of a recent congressional blitz on the topic.

The hearing Tuesday addressed difficulties in tracking anti-Semitism in Europe and heard from two officials from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a 55-member body that in recent years has focused on combating bias crimes in Europe.

Gert Weisskirchen, the top OSCE official on anti-Semitism, said he often had been obstructed in his attempts to assess whether OSCE member states were meeting commitments to combat anti-Semitism or even to track its occurrence. One problem, he said, was a lack of coordination.

On Feb. 5, the commission will hear from witnesses on anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union and in the United States.

Helsinki Commissions are parliamentary bodies in nations that track compliance with human rights agreements.

The U.S. commission is now chaired by Democrats -- U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings of Florida and U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland -- and the two hearings are part of a recent push by both Democrats and Republicans to assume the mantle of combating anti-Semitism.

Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.), the chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Middle East Subcommittee, convened a hearing last week addressing censorship in the Arab world and how it spurs anti-Semitism. On the Republican side, Rep. Ileana Ros Lehtinen (R-Fla.) introduced a resolution last week calling for the United Nations to take steps to prevent the expression of anti-Semitism at U.N. events.

On Tuesday, Reps. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Ron Klein (D-Fla.) introduced legislation aimed at assisting Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in tamping down anti-Semitic violence.

#12

US Congress gets bill excluding 2 CIS countries from trade restrictions

Itar-Tass Brief, January 30, 2008

Influential senator Richard Lugar has submitted to the U.S. Congress a bill excluding Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan from the effects of the infamous Jackson-Vanik amendment /JVA/.

Once passed into law, the bill will allow the two former Soviet republics to get the status of most favored nations, meaning that they will enjoy normal trade relations with the U.S.

At the moment, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are still on the list of post-Soviet countries, against which the JVA stays in effect.

The amendment was passed in 1974 and forbade full-scale trade with the countries restricting emigration of their citizens.

Senator Lugar explained for his move by saying Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan gave the citizens the right to and opportunities for emigrate after the end of the Cold War, and the lifting of the JVA will facilitate the two countries' further advance towards democracy, promote stability in the region and lubricate their trade with the U.S.

#13

Ukraine commemorates the Holocaust

JTA Brief, January 27, 2008

Jewish communities in Ukraine lit candles and observed a minute of silence to honor the 6 million Jewish Holocaust victims.

Sunday's moment of silence culminated four days of events to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day and remember the 1.5 million Jews killed in Ukraine.

The Jewish Foundation of Ukraine and the All-Ukrainian Association of Jews -- made up of concentration camp and ghetto survivors -- co-hosted a concert requiem, a requiem ballet, exhibitions and theatrical performances in Kiev.

Their audiences featured Holocaust survivors and religious leaders with government and diplomatic officials, as well as the general public.

#14

U.N. Holocaust discussion in Ukraine JTA Brief, January 30, 2008

The United Nations in Ukraine hosted a public discussion on the Holocaust.

Researchers, teachers, government authorities and representatives of the international community met Monday in Kiev for a program aimed at encouraging discussion on Holocaust education and remembrance in Ukraine.

"Memory of the Holocaust and Ukrainian Society: Educational Perspective" also addressed the problem of how the Holocaust is taught in the republic's schools and universities.

The event was organized by the United Nations in Ukraine in partnership with the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

"The Holocaust will forever be a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, racism and prejudice," said Francis O'Donnell, the U.N. resident coordinator in Ukraine.

O'Donnell hoped that Ukraine would join the 25 member countries of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

"The total extermination of Jewry during the Nazi rule in Ukraine must be considered not just as a part of Jewish history but also as an integral part of the history of Ukraine, and that is why this tragedy must be studied and commemorated in Ukrainian society," said Anatoly Podolsky, the director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies.

#15

Iran receives final Russian nuclear delivery JTA Brief, January 31, 2008

Iran has received its final shipment of uranium from Russia, according to Iranian state news.

The receipt of the final five tons of enriched uranium, received on Monday morning, marks an important step in the process of bringing the Bushehr nuclear reactor on line.

"With the arrival of the final shipment, all 82 tons of initial fuel needed for the power plant, together with peripheral equipment, has been shipped from Russia to Iran," the news agency said.

The Bushehr reactor is at the center of a dispute between Iran, which claims to be developing the reactor for civilian energy use, and a coalition of Western countries that believe it to be part of a clandestine weapons program.

According to a New York Times report, Iran hopes to have the reactor operating at half capacity by this summer, but a representative from Atomstroyexport, the Russian firm handling the deal, urged caution in that assessment.

"It will be necessary to conduct complex work related to preparations for the launch," said Atomstroyexport spokeswoman Yelena Yesipova, "with security being the top priority."

#16

MPs to meet Putin for antisemitism talks

By Bernard Josephs

The Jewish Chronicle, January 28, 2008

British MPs plan to discuss the outcome of last year's Westminster inquiry into antisemitism with Russia's President Vladimir Putin in Moscow later this year.

The delegation due to go in April is to be led by Tory MP Tim Boswell, vice-chair of the all-party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism (PGAA), which sponsored the inquiry whose recommendation have been taken up by the British government.

"We will be having discussions with Russian MPs and, hopefully, in the Kremlin with President Putin," said a spokesman for the group.

The Department for Local Government and Communities has awarded the PGAA £20,000 to encourage legislatures abroad to carry out such inquiries, and the visit to Moscow is likely to be the high point of its efforts.

PGAA chairman, Labour MP John Mann, said that considerable success had already been achieved.

#17

Russia: Gazprom's Advance Into Europe Continues

By Brian Whitmore

RFE/RL, January 25, 2008

Advantage, Russia.

Moscow has taken a giant leap toward solidifying its role as Europe's dominant energy supplier by securing two key pipeline deals over the past two weeks.

On January 18, Bulgaria signed a deal with Russia's state-controlled natural-gas monopoly Gazprom to join its South Stream pipeline project, which would transport gas from Russia deep into the heart of Europe. And now, in an ornate Kremlin signing ceremony a week later, Serbia joined the project as well.

"With the signing of these agreements Serbia becomes a key transit junction in the emerging system providing energy supplies from Russia...to the whole European continent," Russian President Vladimir Putin said after the signing ceremony.

At one level, the South Stream pipeline project is designed to get Russian gas to Europe while bypassing former Soviet transit countries like Ukraine and Belarus.

But more importantly, analysts say it is part of an ongoing Russian effort to stifle the European Union's efforts to diversify its energy supplies and lessen dependence on Moscow. In the process, the Kremlin and Gazprom are using Russia's energy might to establish a strategic foothold in Europe and expand Moscow's influence on the continent.

"This is part of a larger strategy," says Fyodor Lukyanov, editor in chief of the Moscow-based journal "Russia in Global Affairs." "Wherever possible, it is necessary to increase Russia's presence in Europe, either inside the EU or in countries that have a chance to join."

The fear is that this could leave Europe vulnerable to energy blackmail.

"There is the possibility that Russia could start using energy as a political tool in parts of Central Europe, like it has done in the East with Ukraine," says Mark Hester, editor of the U.K.-based journal "Oil and Energy Trends."

Gazprom cut off gas supplies to Ukraine for several days in January 2006 after a price dispute. The cutoff followed Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, which brought a pro-Western government to power, causing many to suspect Russia of using energy as a political weapon.

So does this mean that Russia -- which has been in an increasingly anti-Western mood -- will soon be in position to halt Europe's heating supply in the dead of some future winter?

Hester says it's "not quite that scary yet" but that such a "worst-case scenario...is the way we ought to look at it."

Requiem For Nabucco?

Gazprom's South Stream project, which officials say would begin deliveries in 2013, would pump 30 billion cubic meters of gas a year under the Black Sea to Bulgaria. The pipeline would then branch off in two directions: north to Austria and south to Italy.

Energy analysts say it is aimed at undermining the Nabucco pipeline, an EU-backed project that would circumvent Russia by transporting gas from the Caspian and Central Asian regions to Europe via Turkey and the Balkans.

In May, Moscow dealt a major blow to Nabucco when it signed an agreement with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to build a pipeline along the Caspian Sea coast to transport their natural gas to Europe -- via Russia. In June, Gazprom and Italy's Eni further undermined Nabucco by signing the initial deal to build South Stream.

Now, many observers fear that with Bulgaria and Serbia joining South Stream, Nabucco could be on its death bed.

"Nabucco is not dead, but it is a patient that risks dying," says Federico Bordonaro, a Rome-based energy analyst with the "Power and Interest News Report." "The simple fact that the South Stream is the project that everyone is discussing and it is the project that has been successfully approved, is not per se a reason to say that Nabucco is dead. But the economic viability of Nabucco now comes into question."

Russia is pushing hard to assure that gas from Turkmenistan will be delivered to Europe via Russia and South Stream -- not via Nabucco. Analysts say it is doubtful that there is enough gas in the Caspian region for both pipelines.

Gazprom's foray into Europe is not confined to pipelines. The company is also busily acquiring energy infrastructure throughout the continent. As part of the South Stream deal with Serbia, for example, it also acquired the country's largest oil company, NIS.

Austro-Hungarian Waltz

Gazprom also made a deal last year with Austrian energy major OMV to buy a 50 percent stake in the company's Baumgarten gas-storage and -distribution center near Vienna. Gazprom is negotiating agreements to build other gas-storage facilities in Belgium, Hungary, and Austria.

But the Baumgarten deal with OMV is particularly important: the Baumgarten facility was the planned termination point for the Nabucco pipeline.

Under the Nabucco plan, it was to have its storage capacity expanded and would be fitted with pipeline links to carry Caspian gas to other European countries. Since Gazprom itself wants to supply these countries, its control of the facility would throw the plans for Nabucco into disarray.

According to media reports, Gazprom has also been enticing OMV with a pledge to make it the leading distributor of natural gas in Europe.

Moreover, OMV has been buying up shares in Hungary's energy major MOL in an attempt at a hostile takeover. Media reports and energy analysts say the move has Gazprom's tacit support.

"Austria's gas-transit and -storage network will be more integrated with Gazprom's network," Bordonaro says. "If Austria enters Gazprom's orbit, and then if the Austrian major [OMV] takes over the Hungarian major [MOL], then it is like you scored two goals with only one strike. Then, via Austria, you also control Hungary."

European Disunion

Gazprom has very skillfully exploited divisions among EU member states by striking bilateral deals that undermine Brussels' efforts to forge a common energy policy.

"Russia knows very well that Europe lacks real political unity. It is always possible to use bilateral agreements in order to advance Gazprom's interests," Bordonaro says. "The Europeans need the gas, the Russians can provide this gas, and because of the political and economic decision-making structure, Russia is much faster than the European Union in making key decisions."

In an interview with RFE/RL in Brussels, EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs said legislation is in the works to prevent Gazprom from gaining control of strategic energy assets within the European Union. Most importantly, he is proposing "unbundling" -- or separating -- energy suppliers from distribution networks.

"I believe strongly that network infrastructure should be separated from upstream activities [and] downstream activities. I think that is the crucial issue," Piebalgs said. "It's not only [important] from the security point of view, but also from the normal market point of view."

Piebalgs said he hoped the legislation would be passed before 2009. Will that be enough to stop the Gazprom juggernaut from dominating the continent's energy market? Hestert, for one, thinks the EU needs to come up with a comprehensive strategy before it is too late.

"In terms of reaching the worst-case scenario, it really depends on how the U.S., the European governments, and the EU actually react," Hestert said. "If they haven't got a strategy in place, an expectation that this is going to happen, then they really need to start thinking of one."

#18

AZERBAIJAN: US TRYING TO SHORE UP ITS DIPLOMATIC POSITION IN CASPIAN BASIN

By, Rovshan Ismayilov

Eurasianet, January 25, 2008

The United States is reinforcing its diplomatic standing in Azerbaijan in hopes of making a "spring offensive" in the Caspian Basin.

Over the past several years, the United States has seen its geopolitical influence in the Caspian Basin shrink significantly. The US loss has been primarily Russia's gain, as Moscow has moved aggressively to establish a dominant position in the energy-export sphere.

Despite being bogged down by the Iraq war, Washington shows no intention of ceding the Caspian Basin great game over energy resources to the Kremlin. Signs have emerged in recent months that the United

States would like to retake some of the territory it has lost to Russia, in the hopes of breaking Moscow's near-energy monopoly in the region.

Underscored by a January 24 visit to Uzbekistan by Adm. William Fallon, head of the US Central Command, Washington has been working assiduously since late 2007 to re-establish a working relationship with Uzbekistan. Perhaps the key point in the US Caspian riposte strategy is Turkmenistan, a state long known for diplomatic fickleness and domestic repression.

In particular, Washington is keen to secure Ashgabat's participation in the long-planned Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP), a route that would circumvent Russia. Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has expressed interest in the project, but has yet to make any firm commitment. To help raise the odds of American success, US elected officials have been diplomatically dotting on Azerbaijan, Washington's lone reliable ally in the region, as well as the country that stands to be connected to Turkmenistan via the TCP.

Since the start of 2008, three high-profile US delegations have visited the Azerbaijani capital Baku. The most influential visitor was US Senator Richard Lugar, Republican from Indiana and a major force in the US foreign policy establishment. During his January 13-14 stopover in Baku, Lugar met with President Ilham Aliyev, members of parliament, leaders of opposition parties, along with heads of the State Oil Company and the State Oil Fund.

Following the meeting with Aliyev, Lugar called on the Bush administration to appoint a diplomatic troubleshooter for Caspian Basin Energy Issues. "The appointment of special representative will be a signal that U.S. regards this region as a priority," Lugar said.

Baku was the final stop for Lugar on a tour that also took him to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. While in Azerbaijan, Lugar noted that both Kazakh and Turkmen leaders stressed a desire to keep their energy options open. "These countries want to diversify routes of their energy resources' export and this mean they do not want to depend on Russia," Lugar said. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey have the same position. "Moscow should consider these opinions," Lugar added.

Preceding Lugar in Azerbaijan were two congressional delegations, one led by California Democrat Robert Wexler, head of the House Subcommittee on Europe, and the other comprising four Republican members of the House of Representatives.

Rasim Musabekov, an independent Baku-based political analyst, said the visits indicated that the Bush administration felt a sense of urgency to achieve diplomatic results in the Caspian Basin during the first part of 2008, due to the approach of the US presidential vote in November. In its remaining time in power, the Bush administration wants to fulfill goals not only in the energy sphere, but also in other areas, including thwarting Iran's nuclear program and the stabilization of Iraq.

"They [Bush administration officials] want to do much during the time they have left. It is possible that some plans concerning our region in regards of Iran have changed recently. Therefore, these visits aimed to sound Azerbaijan's position and to see what the United States could count upon here," Musabekov said.

Ilgar Mammadov, another Baku-based expert, believes the US interest in Azerbaijan has something to do with the recent elections in Georgia. "The post-election situation in Georgia is becoming clear. The referendum on Georgia's integration into NATO and the European Union showed clear support of Georgians of this process. It means Georgia will accelerate the pace of its NATO integration now," Mammadov said in an interview with EurasiaNet.

Mammadov said Azerbaijan always had lagged behind Georgia on the NATO integration issue. But given the Georgian referendum, Baku may come under pressure to accelerate its own integration pace, something that could easily stoke tension with its northern and southern neighbors, Russia and Iran. "These visits pursued two purposes – to check Baku's willingness for real NATO integration, and, if yes, to encourage this choice."

NATO integration, according to Mammadov, would facilitate Western efforts to promote the reduction of Europe's present dependency on Russian energy supplies. "Therefore it is clear that energy issues were the focus of the talks in Baku," he said.

#19

Tajik president, U.S. commander discuss Afghanistan Interfax-Politics, January 22, 2008

The United States is grateful to Tajikistan for supporting coalition troops in Afghanistan and hopes for further fruitful cooperation, Commander of the U.S. Central Command William J. Fallon told journalists after meeting with the country's president Emomali Rakhmon.

I have expressed our gratefulness to the president and the people of Tajikistan for supporting the U.S. in its efforts in Afghanistan, Fallon said.

The French Air Force contingent, which is part of the anti-terrorist coalition, has been deployed at the air base in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, since 2001.

We discussed issues concerning the improvement of security at the border with Afghanistan, the Commander said.

Tajikistan has agreed to train several Afghan citizens at the cadet officer school in Dushanbe, he said.

I believe this training course for young Afghan servicemen, starting this month, is a very good initiative that will help the Afghan people improve security in their country, Fallon said.

The U.S. is the main donor of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan. In 2007, it provided 63.6% of all the humanitarian assistance received by Tajikistan. Total amount of aid received by the country in 2007 is \$56.9 million. kk md

#20

A Cold War Redux is Seen on the Horizon By Paul Richter Los Angeles Times, January 29, 2008

Growing friction between the United States and Russia over Iran is only part of an increasingly difficult relationship that many diplomats and experts consider to be in its worst shape since the end of the Cold War, and at risk of further deterioration.

Although U.S. officials are publicly playing down the rising tension, a series of conflicts has prompted some within the Bush administration to conclude that, for domestic and geopolitical reasons, Russia is now more comfortable with the U.S. as an enemy than an ally.

The government of Russian President Vladimir V. Putin, flush with petrodollars and increasingly aggressive on foreign policy, has challenged the Bush administration on a wide range of issues just in the last few months. While U.S. officials badly need Russian help in the Middle East and elsewhere, Moscow has bucked Washington on Iran, Kosovo, missile defense, NATO expansion, arms treaties, and governance in its own country.

The acrimonious rhetoric between the two countries is likely to get louder, and some foreign diplomats and analysts fear that in places such as Kosovo and Georgia, the collision of interests could result in violence.

"The trajectory of the relationship has been steadily downward," said Michael McFaul, a Stanford University political science professor and expert on post-Soviet countries. After peaking just after the Sept. 11 attacks, "it's now the worst it's been in 20 years."

On Iran, the Russians at a gathering in Berlin last week resisted U.S. efforts to impose more painful sanctions against Tehran, forcing the Bush administration to settle for much less than what it had been seeking.

The meeting was dominated by wrangling between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei V. Lavrov and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a specialist on Russian and Soviet affairs. It "was not always all that easy," Germany's foreign minister said afterward, describing the heated sessions with diplomatic understatement.

Underlying the mounting friction is Russia's shift in the last few years from a country that once strove for full integration with the West to one that now seeks to serve as an independent power center that can check what it views as the excessive influence of the United States. Russian leaders calculate that opposing an unpopular Bush administration will consolidate their domestic position while helping them gain leadership status abroad.

Bush administration officials say that Russian leaders believe the United States exploited their weak post-Cold War position in the early 1990s.

The Russian view is, "We were weak, stabbed in the back, betrayed. But now we're back -- we're strong," said a senior administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity when discussing internal assessments.

"They seem to relish fighting with us and accusing us of various things," said the administration official. "They like having an enemy."

In the view of many Russians, the U.S. posture in the world has changed for the worse over the years, and now requires a different response.

"America now reminds me of a person who enters a bar with a gun in his hand and says, 'Look, if you're not tolerant enough, I'll shoot you on the spot,' " said Mikhail G. Delyagin, the chairman of Moscow's Institute of Globalization Studies. "They perceive any sign of dissent as a manifestation of aggression against themselves."

Both sides have compared the other, at least obliquely, to Nazi Germany.

The complaint that the West took advantage of Russia's weakness is reminiscent of grievances "with a bad history in the 20th century," the senior Bush administration official said, referring to accusations made by the Nazis to build domestic support.

Putin laid down a tough line last February in Munich, Germany, when, without mentioning the United States by name, he complained of countries that were trying to expand their world power like the Nazis before World War II.

In public, top U.S. officials soft-pedal their conflicts with Russia, saying that they do not view Russia as an enemy, and pointing out that the two countries are working well on such issues as counter-terrorism and North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

They dismiss a new debate among foreign policy experts about "Who lost Russia?" that follows the lines of the "Who lost China?" debate in the mid-20th century.

"The recent talk about a new Cold War is hyperbolic nonsense," Rice insisted on Wednesday in a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"We don't define ourselves against Russia," Daniel Fried, the assistant secretary of State for Europe, said in an interview. "We're not an enemy. We're not out to weaken them."

But friction has become clearly visible.

Last month, Russia began shipping nuclear fuel for Iran's reactor at Bushehr, over U.S. objections. And Russia and China have forced a delay and dilution of the new round of U.N. sanctions against Iran sought by Washington.

On another issue, Russia has opposed proposals in the U.N. to give independence to the Serbian province of Kosovo. U.S. officials have indicated support for Kosovo's separation, but Russia has backed Serbia, a move that some analysts fear could encourage Belgrade to take military action if Kosovo declares independence next month, as expected.

Russian officials have hinted that if the United States publicly supports an independent Kosovo, they would respond by declaring support for the independence of the breakaway province of Abkhazia, against the U.S.-allied Georgia. Such a move could lead to a military confrontation between Georgia and Abkhazia, where Russian peacekeeping troops are based.

Elsewhere, the Russian government has threatened retaliatory steps against Poland and the Czech Republic if they take part in the U.S. missile defense project in Eastern Europe. In the face of that pressure, the new Polish government is reconsidering its commitment.

Russia last year "suspended" its participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, a Cold War-era pact aimed at limiting the deployment of conventional forces near the border regions. The move threw into doubt whether Moscow would stand by other arms control pacts.

Only this month, Russia appointed as envoy to NATO a nationalist gadfly, Dmitri Rogozin, who believes the Western coalition no longer has any legitimate purpose. The move was seen as a signal that Russia intends to oppose further North Atlantic Treaty Organization expansion, which Moscow views as a threat.

Russian analysts acknowledge that the Putin government is trying to exploit anti-Americanism for political purposes.

"It's very popular and relatively easy to use anti-Western and anti-American feelings as a declared political position," said Alexander Konovalov, president of Moscow's Institute for Strategic Assessment. "But if the public were not oriented to anti-Americanism, Putin would never have made a speech like the one he made in Germany."

Russian analysts argue that the United States bears as much or more responsibility for strained relations. The two countries have often clashed because of flawed foreign policy on the part of the United States, they say.

On Kosovo, for example, there is a widespread belief among Russians that America is underestimating how much the province's independence would destabilize Europe. Many Russians also fear that the United States' hard-line approach to Iran is counterproductive.

Moreover, Russia is deeply sensitive to U.S. involvement in former Soviet states such as Georgia, not to mention the missile defense plan. Analysts and officials talk about the sense, long felt by Russians, that they are being encroached upon by onetime adversaries.

"If Russia did the same thing in countries that border on the U.S.," said Delyagin, the chairman of Moscow's Institute of Globalization Studies, "I think the U.S. would go as far as declaring war on us."

McFaul, of Stanford, said Russia, unlike its Soviet predecessor, does not have the ability to prevent the United States from reaching national security objectives in many areas. For the most part, it can be a "spoiler," simply making goals much tougher to reach, he said.

But in a few cases, it has been able to override U.S. plans. In 2005, Russia successfully pressured the Uzbek government to close down a U.S. air base that was being used to supply the effort in Afghanistan. The U.S. had a "hard-core strategic interest in that base, and now we don't have it," McFaul said.

Conservatives within the Bush administration have periodically pushed for a harder line on Russia. In 2006, Vice President Dick Cheney delivered a speech in Vilnius, Lithuania, that accused Russia of backsliding on democracy and using its energy supply to gain unfair leverage over neighboring countries.

The speech was intended to draw a line not only for the Russians but also for Cheney's more moderate rivals within the administration, said McFaul. Yet, there was never an overhaul of the administration's Russia policy, he said.

The Bush administration "could be much more confrontational, but they've gone out of their way to tone down the rhetoric," said Charles A. Kupchan, director of Europe studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former National Security Council aide in the Clinton administration.

Even so, administration officials said they would continue speaking out on some issues, such as human rights and democracy in Russia, even at the cost of further fracturing the relationship. They also would be sensitive to any move by Moscow to exercise more influence over countries on its border, including Georgia and Ukraine.

The senior administration official said the Russians want what "they would call a relationship on more equal terms, and what I would say are requirements for the United States to accept a Russian sphere of influence over countries which are sovereign. And we're not going to do it."

If Moscow begins to feel it has lost its chance to fully integrate with the West, he said, "it's been their responsibility, not ours."

#21

THE IRANIAN-TURKMEN GAS ROW: AND THE WINNER IS ... RUSSIA

By Yigal Schleifer

Eurasianet, January 28, 2008

A natural gas-supply dispute between Turkmenistan and Iran has the potential to significantly alter the Caspian Basin's energy export calculus in Russia's favor.

Already, the dispute has had a trickle-down effect – disrupting exports along the line connecting the Caspian Basin to European markets. In the broader scheme, the Iranian-Turkmen wrangling could cause the European Union to rethink the notion of the Caspian Basin as an alternate to Russia as a source of energy. Ultimately, then, Moscow could end up the winner in the Ashgabat-Tehran gas quarrel.

Turkey could end up being a big loser. "Turkey has basically tried to present itself as the major transit route for oil and gas from the Caspian [Basin] and Middle East regions. This event implies that there will be questions asked regarding that. This whole episode is very problematic," says Jonathan Stern, director of gas research at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

Iran normally exports up to 30 million cubic meters (mcm) of natural gas to Turkey every day, while importing roughly 23 mcm daily from Turkmenistan. Although Iran possesses the world's second-largest gas

reserves after Russia, a lack of infrastructure has forced it to import gas in order to meet its domestic needs, especially in northern Iran near the Turkmen border. Under its current agreement with Turkmenistan, Tehran pays \$75 per thousand cubic meters (tcm), roughly half of what Russia pays for Turkmen gas.

The Iranian-Turkmen clash began January 1, when Turkmen gas supplies to Iran abruptly ceased. Originally, Turkmen officials attributed the disruption to technical difficulties, but it quickly became apparent that Ashgabat was disgruntled over the low price that Tehran was paying. The hard-line tactic backfired, however. Instead of rushing to the negotiating table, Iranian leaders responded to the Turkmen action by heaping invective upon Ashgabat, calling the behavior of President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov's administration "immoral."

The two countries remain at an impasse, with Turkmenistan keeping the taps shut, and Iran refusing to negotiate until after the resumption of exports. The impact of the cut-off has been felt as far away as the EU. To try to compensate for the Turkmen cut-off, Iran severed its own exports to Turkey, which, in turn, found it difficult to meet its supply obligations to Greece.

On January 27, Iran resumed exports to Turkey, though only at a level roughly 10 percent of that which flowed before the start of the Iranian-Turkmen feud. Meanwhile, experts believe it unlikely that Berdimukhamedov will bend anytime soon in his effort to hike the price Iranians pay for gas.

Turkmenistan has succeeded in recent months in wringing higher prices for its gas out of both Russia and China, which on January 21 agreed to pay \$195/tcm -- a price that includes a premium of \$50/tcm to finance construction of a Chinese-Turkmen pipeline. Experts have long questioned whether Turkmenistan has sufficient reserves to meet all its export obligations. In mid-January, however, Ashgabat moved to remove all doubts about the country's reserves by announcing that international auditors will be invited in to provide an independent estimate.

For European observers, the Iranian-Turkmen dustup is raising concerns about the two countries' ability to play a role in the proposed Nabucco pipeline, which would bring Caspian gas to the European Union. "It makes a Nabucco that would take gas from Turkmenistan via Iran less likely," said Charles Esser, an energy analyst with the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based policy and research organization.

Although still struggling to get off the drawing board, the proposed pipeline is designed to diversify the EU's gas supply, in particular by bringing Turkmen gas online, either by funneling it to Azerbaijan and then to Turkey via a trans-Caspian pipeline, or to Turkey via Iran. In Turkey, while there is some understanding for Iran's predicament, questions are also being asked about Iran's reliability as an energy supplier, considering Tehran has cut gas supplies to Turkey on previous occasions.

"Even before this, Iran's reputation as a reliable deliverer of energy to Turkey has been questioned," says Gareth Winrow, an expert on energy politics at Bilgi University in Istanbul. "It puts into question again the whole nature of the Turkish-Iranian relationship as far as energy is concerned."

The Iranian-Turkmen dispute has enable Russia to reinforce its image as the most reliable source of energy for the EU. When Iran cut off its gas supplies to Turkey, Russia helped offset some of the decrease. And, at the same time that the dispute between Ashgabat and Tehran helped put question marks around the possibility of Caspian gas coming to Europe, Russia signed a major deal with Bulgaria, laying the groundwork for a pipeline running under the Black Sea which would bring more Russian gas to Europe.

"The message for me is that you can rely on the Russians to supply more gas and that all this talk about diversification is good in theory, but very hard to do in practice," says the Oxford Institute's Stern. "The reality of when things go wrong is that mostly Russia can be relied upon to supply more gas. That strengthens [Russia's] hand."

Uzbekistan: Rights Activists Decry Signs Of Western Rapprochement

By Gulnoza Saidazimova

RFE/RL, January 27, 2008

In recent weeks, the European Union has sent envoys to Tashkent and the secretary-general of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) has congratulated Karimov on his reelection last month -- despite the fact that the Vienna-based organization had called the poll undemocratic. And on January 24, Admiral William Fallon, who heads U.S. Central Command, was also in Tashkent.

Uzbek human rights activists and opposition figures say it's unlikely that these Western officials went to Tashkent for carpets. They are outraged at what they see as the West's hypocrisy and geopolitical games with one of Central Asia's most authoritarian rulers, and warn that a policy of appeasing him not only ill serves the Uzbek people -- but will lead to instability and blowback for the region and world.

Ismoil Dadajanov, an exiled Uzbek opposition activist, tells RFE/RL's Uzbek Service that the OSCE shouldn't have congratulated Karimov.

"It will lead to the strengthening of Uzbekistan's dictatorship and terrorist threats in the world in general because people will think: 'If Western democracies support Islam Karimov, it means democracy is alien to us,'" Dadajanov says. "And the Uzbek people will resort to other means [in order to change the current Uzbek regime]."

'Hundreds Killed'

It's all quite a change from May 2005. That's when Western relations with Uzbekistan -- up to then a key ally in the U.S.-led war on terror -- suffered a major blow after Uzbek troops fired on peaceful protesters in the eastern city of Andijon, reportedly killing hundreds.

U.S.-Uzbek relations were broken off following U.S. criticism of the Uzbek government's handling of those events. Karimov kicked out U.S. troops deployed at Uzbekistan's Karshi-Khanabad air base since shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. The base aided U.S. operations in Afghanistan.

Karimov also refused to let foreign experts conduct an independent probe into the events, saying it was a terrorist plot masterminded from abroad and aimed at overthrowing the government.

Now, however, memories of Andijon seem to be receding.

To be sure, there were already signs of a thaw in Western relations with Uzbekistan back in May, when the EU lifted a travel ban on senior Uzbek officials introduced following the Andijon events.

But Fallon's talks on January 24 with Karimov and other senior Uzbek officials are the first high-level U.S. attempt to reengage Uzbekistan since Andijon.

Prior to his visit to Tashkent, Fallon said he had not planned to discuss the air-base issue. But official Uzbek media reported that he met with Uzbekistan's defense and foreign ministers, the secretary of the National Security Council, and the commander of the Uzbek border troops.

Uzbek television reported that the two sides discussed terrorism, illegal drug trafficking, organized crime, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as regional security.

Fear Of Russia, China

So where's it all leading?

Abdummanob Polat, a Washington-based Uzbek political analyst, says recent rapprochement is based on the two sides' national interests and immediate security concerns.

"The U.S. administration wants to reestablish its relations with Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government is also interested in recovering its relations with the U.S. to some extent," Polat says. "Cooperation of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states with Russia and China goes against the interests of the U.S. and Western Europe."

Vladimir Mukhin, a Moscow-based military analyst, largely agrees. But he rules out the possibility that the United States could reopen the military base in Uzbekistan. He says Tashkent will be engaged in only a limited dialogue with Washington.

"Uzbekistan will try to open up. Karimov, who was reelected again, will seek more contacts with the West [and] the U.S., despite the West's criticism that the election was illegitimate and undemocratic," Mukhin says.

Analysts say the United States and the EU are trying mend fences with the energy-rich country in order to block Russian attempts to reestablish its hegemony and to stop China's growing influence in Central Asia.

Under German guidance, the EU has sought since May to improve relations with Tashkent. The EU's special representative for Central Asia, Pierre Morel, met with Karimov on January 17 -- a day after the Uzbek president's inauguration.

It all adds up to a depressing picture for Uzbek opposition and human rights activists, at a time when they had started to shine a light on some of the most egregious rights abuses in Uzbekistan, such as the use of child slavery in the cotton industry.

Nadejda Atayeva heads the Paris-based Association on Human Rights in Central Asia. She tells RFE/RL that rapprochement sends signals that geopolitical interests -- not human rights -- are the priority for the West in its relations with Tashkent.

"Congratulations from the United Nations secretary-general, the EU representatives, and the recent one from the OSCE send a signal of approval of Karimov's anticonstitutional usurpation of power," Atayeva says. "Karimov is not the choice of the majority of the Uzbek people. They do not want to live under an authoritarian regime. They want to live in a democratic society where their rights and their choice are respected."

#23

Putin's Balkan Mischief

By Morton Abramowitz

The Moscow Times, January 30, 2008

Russia is again on a tear. This time, the Kremlin has stuck its finger in the West's eye over the long and painful effort to bring Kosovo to formal independence. Unlike the fracas over a planned U.S. missile defense shield in Europe, this conflict shows no signs of blowing over, and threatens to damage further the rocky relationship between Russia and the West.

At every turn, Russia has challenged Western efforts to facilitate Kosovo's independence. After a year of negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin rejected the United Nation mediator's report recommending supervised independence, prevented the UN Security Council from accepting that report, and insisted on three additional months of negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo -- even after compromise became impossible.

Three weeks ago in the UN Security Council, Russia again insisted that any agreement required the approval of both Serbia and Kosovo and that further negotiations were necessary. Russia knows that such

negotiations will be fruitless but believes that another seemingly innocent appeal for more talks would strain European Union unity, which appears to be a vital goal for Putin. Further delay might also generate violence in Kosovo and undermine international support for independence.

Putin's hatred of the Boris Yeltsin-era "subservient" relations with the West fuels his opposition. But the West's delay in resolving Kosovo's status permitted that opposition to gain traction. Indeed, the West has consistently misread Russia's intentions on Kosovo. Many claimed that the Kremlin was delaying the inevitable but ultimately would not block independence. Now, at the eleventh hour, Russia is sticking to its obstructionist position, and its presidential election in March will likely reinforce anti-Western postures.

So what will Putin do when the United States and most EU members recognize an independent Kosovo in the coming months without a UN blessing, as they now plan?

It is unlikely that the Kremlin would attempt another military intervention in Kosovo (their effort in 1999 to land troops at Pristina Airport was a fiasco), but it has a range of options that must give the West pause.

Kremlin support has made Serbia's nationalist intransigence over Kosovo effective. Russia has said it will not give Serbia a blank check, but it will likely support the Serbian government's efforts to isolate and destabilize an independent Kosovo.

While Serbia has resisted partition of Kosovo, Russia would also support a Serbian proposal to partition the Serb-populated north, an effort that would open up a Pandora's box of possible partition of Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia. Such a proposal could get some support in Europe and elsewhere as a seemingly appropriate compromise, even if it would destabilize the Balkans once more.

Russia will certainly continue its diplomatic efforts to persuade the world that negotiations are the only way to solve the problem and that it cannot be solved outside the UN. That will attract support among many UN members, including those that have major dissatisfied ethnic minorities.

Russia could also react beyond the Balkans, most obviously in the Caucasus, by recognizing other breakaway regions, particularly in Georgia. A declaration of independence by Kosovo would likely bring a similar declaration from Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia, which Russia could well recognize. If Georgia takes military steps to prevent that, Russia's military would likely react with force, creating a situation that could get out of control.

While the United States and the EU do not want to worsen relations with Russia, they cannot retreat in the face of Russian obduracy; security in Europe is at stake. But they must also continue to try to preempt confrontation with Russia on all fronts.

The West should make clear to Serbia that it will react vigorously against any efforts to promote violence or partition Kosovo. Dispatching additional NATO troops, in addition to the planned EU mission, to supervise Kosovo independence would be helpful.

Putin's Russia, which pays little attention to the rule of law, cloaks its diplomatic effort in the guise of adherence to international law, in particular UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which ended the 1999 Kosovo war. A long-overdue diplomatic offensive needs to be launched to undercut Russian arguments as well as remind the world of what happened in Kosovo.

Resolution 1244 does not state that Kosovo must remain under Serb sovereignty, as Russia and Serbia insist, nor does it preclude independence. Indeed, any reasonable reading of the resolution -- especially in the context of the conflict-ridden Balkans over the past two decades -- would acknowledge that independence would satisfy the resolution's intent and the purpose of sustaining UN supervision of the province for the past eight years.

In the case of Abkhazia, the West should reiterate the sui generis nature of Kosovo and highlight the tremendous efforts it has undertaken there since 1999. The world must make clear that Russian military involvement in Abkhazia is unacceptable, while also restraining Georgia's government from reacting militarily to any provocation.

How Russia reacts to Western support of Kosovo's coming declaration of independence will test how far we have progressed since the Cold War. Through careful management of Kosovo's independence process and attentiveness to opportunities to improve relations with Russia, the West might mitigate the worst consequences of this confrontation. Regardless, a new Cold War might just get a little colder.

#24

Successful Start to Ukraine's New Government

By Anders Aslund

The Moscow Times, January 30, 2008

After Ukraine's extraordinary parliamentary elections on Sept. 30, it took no less than 2 1/2 months to form a government, and it was confirmed by the slightest of parliamentary margins. The new coalition government headed by Yulia Tymoshenko, however, has started ambitiously and auspiciously.

The Ukrainian economy is in good shape with a growth rate of 7.3 percent last year. The stock market surged by no less than 120 percent last year, and it has barely fallen during the January turmoil.

The new government's biggest achievement is to make Ukraine ready to join the World Trade Organization at a February 5 meeting of the WTO General Council. One month after the parliament ratifies the accession, Ukraine will become a full-fledged member of the WTO. This could boost the country's growth by one percentage point a year.

Ukraine's WTO accession is a joint accomplishment of the four last governments. The very last obstacle was a European Union complaint about the country's export tariffs, primarily on steel scrap. It has been relegated to the negotiations about a free-trade agreement with the EU, which are likely to be concluded before the end of 2008.

As elsewhere in the region, the greatest economic concern is the high and rising inflation, as consumer prices rose by 16.6 percent last year. As a consequence, experienced Finance Minister Viktor Pynzenyk immediately tightened the budget by balancing it. Fortunately, no price controls or export controls are being discussed. Tymoshenko says that she has learned not to do so from her tenure in 2005.

Tymoshenko's most worrisome campaign promise was to compensate Ukrainians who lost their bank savings in the early 1990s because of hyperinflation and to do so in the course of two years. Fortunately, the government has capped this compensation program at \$1.2 billion, which is less than one percent of gross domestic product, and it has distributed the money swiftly and equally.

As in all democratic post-communist countries, corruption was the biggest concern during the election campaign. Wisely, Tymoshenko made it her key theme. In order to substantiate her promises to combat corruption, she has moved quickly on three fronts.

The most obnoxious and conspicuous corruption was the previous government's practice of selling value-added tax refunds for exporters at a "commission" of 20 percent to 30 percent. Tymoshenko has appointed a competent former economy minister, Valery Khoroshkovsky, to head the tax administration and to sort that problem out.

The customs problem, which Tymoshenko cleaned up in 2005, has again become one of her focal points of corruption, and she is set to repeat her prior success.

The most intricate corruption is persistently in gas trade, which Tymoshenko is very knowledgeable about from her old business. The intermediary RosUkrEnergo does not appear to have any reason to exist. Nor does its half-owned Ukrainian subsidiary, UkrGazEnergo. The apparent purpose of these two nontransparent joint ventures is to siphon off money to a number of prominent Russians and Ukrainians. The costs of this boondoggle are so large that the Ukrainian state oil and gas corporation, Naftogaz Ukrainy, is on the verge of bankruptcy.

We do not need to know the details to understand that something has to be done. Tymoshenko has moved to exclude these dysfunctional structures from Ukraine's gas trade. Fortunately, Gazprom chairman and Russia's president-in-waiting Dmitry Medvedev expresses the same view.

In the last two years, Ukraine has carried out minimal privatization. On Jan. 18, the new Ukrainian government published a list of 19 state-owned companies slated for privatization this year. The total value of the stakes to be sold is assessed at some \$5 billion. Sensibly, the new government has abandoned its predecessor's tactic of selling very small posts, instead offering large majority posts in three major companies, including Ukrtelecom, Ukraine's old fixed-line monopoly.

Year after year, Ukraine has prolonged a moratorium on the sale of private agricultural land, benefiting only large businessmen who have bought up tens of thousands of hectares. The new government has let this moratorium lapse, and it is intent on swiftly adopting the necessary legislation to facilitate land trade.

President Viktor Yushchenko, Tymoshenko and parliamentary Speaker Arseniy Yatseniuk have signed an application for a Membership Action Plan to NATO in advance of the alliance's summit in Bucharest in April. This was somewhat surprising because Tymoshenko has avoided the topic. Together with WTO membership and a free trade agreement with the EU, the MAP, which may or may not lead to NATO membership, defines Ukraine's firm Western-oriented foreign policy.

The worst policy that Tymoshenko pursued in 2005 was reprivatization, but she seems to have learned that lesson as well, so far staying away from such a destabilizing policy.

The new Ukrainian government has delivered a very impressive start, and there is strong hope that much more is to come. One outcome of the last parliamentary elections was that the three dominant parties share a broad market economic consensus. All three are democratic, center-right parties that are financed by big businessmen, most of whom are quickly gentrifying because the market values of their corporations surge with transparency and orderliness.

Several of the biggest Ukrainian businessmen have voluntarily abandoned transfer pricing and started paying taxes in full. They are also devoting large resources to charitable donations, mainly in education and health. Yet, as a consequence of scandals with big businessmen-cum-ministers, they are almost absent from the new Cabinet.

Ukraine has all along suffered from constitutional disorder. Although the constitution has not changed, improved practices are apparent. The dominant opposition party, the Party of the Regions, has set up a shadow government. The two coalition partners, the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc and Yushchenko's Our Ukraine, have divided the Cabinet posts so that Tymoshenko controls all economic appointments while Our Ukraine controls foreign policy, security and culture. An orderly balance of power between the president and the prime minister seems to be emerging out of their persistent power struggle.

Obviously, one month is far too early to pass any judgment on a government, but its start has been truly impressive.

Ukraine sets an illustrative example for how Russia could have evolved if it had developed its democracy and market economy through competition among the oligarchs instead of abandoning democracy. Because of its more radical, market-based economic reforms in the 1990s, Russia still benefits from better legislation.

Even so, property rights appear more secure in Ukraine now because of democracy's greater transparency and checks and balances.

#25

Congress may vote on Russia trade this year-USTR

By Doug Palmer, Editing by Cynthia Osterman

Reuters, January 29, 2008

U.S. lawmakers could face a vote on trade relations with Russia this election year if Moscow finally wraps up its bid to join the World Trade Organization, the top U.S. trade official said on Tuesday.

"I'd say it's a possibility," U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab told reporters during a press conference on the Bush administration's 2008 legislative agenda. "I had a sense of momentum coming out of the meeting last week" with Russian Finance and Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Kudrin, Schwab said.

Schwab and Kudrin met in Davos, Switzerland to discuss Russia's roughly 14-year-old bid to join the WTO.

"It was very clear, first of all, that the scope of what needs to be done is a manageable scope ... (and) that the deputy prime minister ... has a real focus on getting this done," Schwab said.

The Bush administration is prepared to spend as much time and energy as needed this year to help Russia join the WTO, but ultimately "the pace of Russia's accession process is almost entirely in Russia's hands," Schwab said.

The United States and Russia have already reached a bilateral market access pact as part of the WTO membership talks.

However, Moscow is still negotiating a multilateral agreement with all WTO members covering certain other issues, including U.S. demands for stronger Russian government action to stop the piracy and counterfeiting of American goods.

If a deal is reached, "we will go to the Congress and do what we need to do in terms of Jackson-Vanik," Schwab said, referring to a Cold War-era trade provision that the United States would have to lift if Russia joins the WTO.

The measure, approved in 1974, tied normal trade relations with the Soviet Union and other centrally planned economies to the rights of Jews and other religious minorities to emigrate freely.

SCRUTINY

Russia has been in compliance since 1994, but U.S. lawmakers have insisted that Moscow finish negotiations on joining the WTO before voting to lift the measure.

As the upcoming November presidential election puts the parties' records under high scrutiny, lawmakers may find the Russia vote difficult because of concerns that Russia has been backsliding on democratic reforms.

Congress approved permanent normal trade relations with China in 2000, another election year, after a hard-fought battle. But many lawmakers now question that vote, which they blame for huge U.S. trade deficit with China.

Democratic leaders also are already resisting White House pressure to approve trade deals this year with Colombia and South Korea, which face stiff opposition from labor groups.

Congressional refusal to lift the Cold War measure would not block Russia from joining the WTO. But it would allow Moscow to legally deny U.S. companies from sharing in the market-opening concessions it has made to join the world trade body.

"The United States would not want to be in a position where Russia is a member of the WTO and we are not providing permanent normal trade relations. That would put us in a very awkward position in terms of Russia and the WTO," Schwab said.

#26

Something Is Very Wrong With Russia The Washington Post Editorial, January 30, 2008

First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev polled at 80 percent in a recent survey, compared with 1 percent for the only opposition candidate then in the running, former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov. But like the former Soviet regime it increasingly resembles, the Kremlin is leaving nothing to chance. On Sunday, Kasyanov was excluded from the presidential ballot on the pretext that thousands of the 2 million signatures he had gathered were fraudulent.

The next day Moscow announced ground rules for international election observers that limit their numbers to 70 and stipulate that they can arrive in Russia only after Feb. 27, which, according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, leaves too little time to monitor the election effectively. These limitations virtually ensure that the OSCE election watchdog organization will not be able to judge the fairness of the election.

Moreover, Medvedev announced yesterday that he would not participate in any election debates.

The most interesting aspect of this heavy-handed strategy is that it is entirely unnecessary. Thanks to the government's control of television, its relentless propaganda and the country's oil-fueled economic boom, a large majority of Russians are more than happy to vote for Medvedev or anyone else President Vladimir Putin might point to.

Putin could have permitted Kasyanov, former chess champion Garry Kasparov and other opposition figures to run, allowed in thousands of international observers and ordered Medvedev to participate in televised debates -- and still his candidate would have won handily. In that case, he could have claimed to have held a democratic election, and many around the world would have agreed.

Yet Putin insists on staging a Potemkin vote that no serious observer outside of Russia can regard as credible. He evidently prefers to incur the scorn of Western democrats than allow someone such as Kasyanov to speak freely even for a few minutes on Russian state television. Putin would rather have the OSCE boycott the election than hold a free and fair vote in which exact outcome could not be planned in advance.

Putin's embrace of the Soviet political model reveals his growing contempt for Western opinion and his lack of interest in maintaining cooperative relations with the European Union and the United States. It also shows that Russia's political system, as Kasyanov put it, "as in the U.S.S.R., will not respond to change either from inside, or from outside." No wonder that Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's last leader, felt moved to speak out. "Something wrong is happening with our elections," he told the Interfax agency.

But it's not only the elections that are wrong; the entire system that Gorbachev took apart is being meticulously reconstructed.

#27

Supporting Ukrainian Accession to NATO Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) Congressional Record, January 31, 2008

Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the NATO Membership Action Plan Endorsement Act of 2008. This resolution is intended to express strong Senate support for Administration leadership in ensuring that NATO extends Membership Action Plan, MAP, status to Georgia and Ukraine as soon as possible.

NATO has a long track record of support for continued enlargement of NATO to democracies that are able and willing to meet the responsibilities of membership. The leaders of Georgia and Ukraine have clearly stated their desire to join NATO and both have made remarkable progress towards meeting NATO standards.

The Membership Action Plan was launched in April 1999 to assist countries in preparations for possible NATO membership by providing advice, assistance, and practical support on all aspects of membership requirements. NATO has identified four main categories of cooperation and assistance through MAP. First, NATO assists in the development of a national program that covers political, economic, defense, resource security, and legal requirements for membership. Second, NATO experts provide focused and candid feedback and political and technical advice to the governments. Third, NATO provides an organizational structure to assist in the coordination of defense and security assistance received from NATO member states and other allies. Fourth, NATO provides assistance in the construction of an individual approach to defense planning to include force, personnel, and capability reforms.

MAP implementation is no longer simply an activity that focuses on military and security issues. Inter-ministerial meetings engage other governmental departments in a coordinated and systematic approach with the goal of government-wide reform and progress. These goals include settling international, ethnic or external territorial disputes by peaceful means; demonstrating a commitment to the rule of law and human rights; and promoting stability and prosperity through economic reform, social equality, and environmental responsibility. Each participant is free to choose the elements of MAP best suited to their own national priorities and circumstances. In other words, if approved at the NATO summit at Bucharest, Romania in April, Tbilisi and Kyiv will set their own objectives, targets, and work schedules.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been evolving to meet the new security needs of the 21st century. In this era, the threats to NATO members are transnational and far from its geographic borders. NATO's viability as an effective defense and security alliance depends on flexible, creative leadership, as well as the willingness of members to improve capabilities and address common threats.

If NATO is to continue to be the preeminent security Alliance and serve the defense interests of its membership, it must continue to evolve and that evolution must include enlargement. Potential NATO membership motivates emerging democracies to make important advances in areas such as the rule of law and civil society. A closer relationship with NATO will promote these values and contribute to our mutual security.

Three years ago, the U.S. Senate unanimously voted to invite 7 countries to join NATO. Today, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia are making significant contributions to NATO and are among our closest allies in the global war on terrorism. It is time again for the U.S. to take the lead in urging its allies to recognize the important efforts underway in Georgia and Ukraine, and to offer MAP to both countries this spring.

Both countries have significant amounts of work to accomplish before they can be offered NATO membership. Let me be clear, MAP participation does not guarantee future membership, nor does it consist of simply a checklist for aspiring NATO members to fulfill. It is a guide, not an endorsement to NATO membership.

I am confident that Presidents Saakashvilli and Yushchenko understand that NATO membership will not be possible without the support of their respective electorates. In Georgia the issue was put to a referendum earlier this month and 76.22 percent of voters supported NATO membership. Ukrainian leaders have identified the need for a national referendum on this important issue in the future. Alliance membership

requires commitment and sacrifice that must have the support of the local population if they are to be successfully implemented.

Last week, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Steven Pifer, outlined in the International Herald Tribune several compelling arguments for extending MAP to Ukraine. He said, in part: "Granting Ukraine a MAP at the Bucharest summit ... would enhance European security and stability ... [N]one of the arguments against the measure stand up to scrutiny ... Ukraine has made as much progress on democratic, economic, and military reform as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Albania when they received MAPs in 1999 ... Kyiv has demonstrated that it has serious military capabilities and the political will to use them. In recent years, the Ukrainian military has provided the alliance with strategic airlifts; participated, often side-by-side with NATO troops, in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and elsewhere; and made a significant contribution to coalition ground forces in Iraq during 2004-05. Ukraine would be a net contributor to Euro-Atlantic security."

Mr. President, I ask that my colleagues support this important resolution. It sends a strong message to the administration, our NATO allies, as well as to the people of Georgia and Ukraine that we are prepared to work closely with each to contribute to the strengthening of peace and security in Europe and Eurasia.