



WASHINGTON, D.C. July 3, 2008

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: Fourth of July, A Focus on Freedoms

Dear Friend,

I love the Fourth of July. It is a joyous tradition of family, friends, fireworks and, yes, freedom. As we prepare to celebrate the 232nd anniversary of the independence of the United States, it is important to remember and cherish the many freedoms we enjoy as American citizens. These freedoms should never be taken lightly, particularly when so many others around the world do not have them.

It has been a privilege to work at NCSJ, with so many dedicated volunteers and professionals, to promote and secure the rights of millions of former Soviet Jews – those who now live in Israel, the United States and elsewhere, and those who still live in the Russia and the Soviet successor states. However, our work is far from finished. Advancing democratic values and ideals in this region, let alone religious and minority rights, continues to be a challenging and difficult task. Some of our brethren are fortunate to live under democratic systems, while others confront autocratic ones. In the long term, promoting and protecting the rights of Jews in the former Soviet Union is linked to the expansion of democratic rights in all countries of the region.

In this week's update, we continue to include analysis on the first two months of the Medvedev-Putin transition. Previous articles have argued there is little change in direction and focus of the Russian government. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger writes on his recent visit to Moscow and why he believes a real transition is occurring. Also, the Russian government is increasing its efforts to combat extremism by charging several people with incitement of ethnic hatred, as opposed to the catch-all of "hooliganism." Hopefully, this will become the normal procedure in dealing with those who engage in anti-Semitic, xenophobic behavior.

Unfortunately, there seems to be several difficult situations developing in Ukraine. Concern over who will control the Babi Yar memorial, an anti-Semitic desecration in Lviv, and the construction of a building on a Jewish religious site are a few of the stories highlighted in this week's update.

Also, we have included a story about a meeting between Lithuania's Prime Minister and several Jewish organizations, including NCSJ. We discussed a number of troubling and unresolved issues with the Prime Minister, including the war crimes investigation being conducted against Yitzhak Arad by Lithuania's Prosecutor General, the lack of legislation dealing with the return of communal property and the anemic government response to a series of anti-Semitic incidents. It was, in diplomatic terms, a full and frank discussion without concrete conclusions.

In addition, there are several stories in the update about the just-concluded OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan will assume the chair of the OSCE in 2010. The U.S. delegation was led by Helsinki Commission Chairman Rep. Alcee Hastings and Co-Chairman Sen. Ben Cardin, who met with the Chief Rabbi of Kazakhstan during their stay.

Once again, have an enjoyable Fourth of July.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark B. Levin'.

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. July 3, 2008

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#1
Lithuanian Prime Minister Urged to Resolve Holocaust Property Issues
B'nai B'rith, Other Jewish Leaders, Urge PM to Resolve Holocaust-era Property Restitution
B'nai B'rith International, June 30, 2008

B'nai B'rith International Executive Vice President Daniel S. Mariaschin, along with leaders of other Jewish organizations, met with Lithuanian Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas on June 30 to urge the prime minister and his government to pass legislation that will finally resolve the matter of Jewish communal property restitution. Mariaschin has long been active in Holocaust education and restitution issues and played an active role in the negotiation for the return of hundreds of historic Torah scrolls that belonged to the Lithuanian Jewish community to Jewish institutions world wide. More than 90 percent of the Lithuanian Jewish community was killed during the Holocaust.

Negotiations on restitution issues have gone on for more than six years, but Lithuania has still not settled the issue. Mariaschin and the other Jewish leaders expressed deep frustration with the slow time frame. The October Lithuania elections might lead to further delays. Every effort must be made now to adopt the required legislation and to educate the Lithuanian population.

The 90-minute meeting at American Jewish Committee (AJC) headquarters in New York also focused on Yitzhak Arad, a Lithuanian Jewish partisan, revered as a Holocaust-era hero, who has been under investigation for two years by the Lithuanian prosecutor-general for alleged "war crimes." At the meeting, the prime minister's delegation was reminded that the charges against Arad are baseless, and urged the Lithuanian government to end the harassment of Arad.

The meeting with Kirkilas came against the backdrop of the European Union decision to designate Vilnius as the 2009 Cultural Capital of Europe. "Lithuania has fallen far behind other governments in Central and Eastern Europe in restoring properties seized from Jewish communities by the Nazi and communist regimes," Mariaschin said. "We were able to discuss with the prime minister Lithuania's indifference toward some of the most pressing concerns of the country's surviving Jewish community."

Other participants in the meeting included Rabbi Andrew Baker, AJC's director of International Jewish affairs; David A. Harris, AJC executive director; Michael Schneider, secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress; Mark Levin, executive director of the NCSJ; and Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Conference on Material Claims Against Germany.

#2

Tensions Mount Over Lithuanian Probe

By Lana Gersten and Marc Perelman

Forward, July 2, 2008

A meeting between Jewish communal officials and Lithuania's prime minister did not dispel increasing tension over Lithuania's investigation into alleged war crimes committed by Jewish partisans during World War II.

During a visit to New York, Lithuanian Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas made stops at both the American Jewish Committee and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. At both places, he was grilled on a current judicial probe in which three Jewish partisans, all of whom fought with the Red Army's anti-Nazi resistance movement, are being questioned.

The three people being questioned, including a former chairman of the Yad Vashem museum and two women who give tours of the Vilnius (also known to Jews as Vilna) ghetto, have denied the allegations. While no charges have been pressed, and the details of the probe remain cloaked in secrecy, it is known that Lithuanian authorities are looking to interrogate the Jewish suspects about their role in a January 1944 massacre in the village of Koniuchy (now Kaniūkai, Lithuania).

Given that only three Lithuanians have ever been tried for wartime crimes against Jews - nearly 200,000 of whom were murdered - the ongoing investigation of Jews has not gone over well outside Lithuania. There had been rumblings before Kirkilas's trip that the probes may be dropped, but the prime minister's visit with Jewish communal officials only heightened tensions.

"There was a fair degree of frustration and disappointment because there was nothing really forthcoming, nothing new, no commitments, no promises," said Andrew Baker, director of international Jewish affairs at the AJCommittee. "We are all puzzled at why the investigation isn't closed."

Lithuania was once home to one of the world's most vibrant Jewish communities and was a hub of Jewish scholarship. YIVO, the organization that Kirkilas visited in New York, was based in the Lithuanian capital before World War II. During the war, it is estimated that more than 90% of Lithuanian Jews were killed, one of the highest rates in Europe. More recently, antisemitism has been a continuing problem in the country.

Kirkilas was in the United States for a series of meetings in New York and Washington with government officials. His office initially contacted YIVO in order to request a tour of its library collection. More recently, the executive director of YIVO, Carl Rheins, asked to add the probe of the Jewish partisans to the agenda.

The probe appears to focus on Yitzhak Arad, former chairman of Yad Vashem. Arad was appointed in 2005 by Lithuania's president to a high-level commission examining past war crimes. As a part of his work, Arad drew the ire of right-wing groups when he publicly asked that the country address the role of Lithuanians in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. After a number of attacks on Arad in right-wing Lithuanian newspapers, Lithuania's chief prosecutor opened a pretrial investigation of Arad's wartime actions in Kaniūkai. A Polish institute had earlier found that 38 people in the town were killed in 1944 by a Soviet anti-Nazi unit consisting of 120 to 150 people, including both Jews and non-Jews.

In June 2007, Israel was formally asked to question Arad - a request that Israel declined. Since then, Lithuanian authorities also have questioned two other women: Fania Branstovsky, a former partisan and now a librarian at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute, and Rachel Margolis, who wrote a memoir about her experiences in the resistance.

"The murderers are now becoming national heroes," Arad told the Forward, "and we, the few surviving victims who took up arms and fought the murderers, are being under investigation as criminals."

Before his visit to the United States, Kirkilas met with Branstovsky in an apparent gesture of good will, though he did not give any indications that the investigation would be shelved.

At his meetings in New York, Jewish communal officials say that Kirkilas was "shocked" by the probe of Arad but declined to condemn it or to promise any changes. After the meeting, an official at the Lithuanian Consulate in New York told the Forward that "the prime minister expressed his personal sorrow that such cases as Arad's are going on; however, justice must prevail, and everybody has to face justice."

Rheins says that he told Kirkilas how much the incident was damaging Lithuania's reputation abroad.

"These are absurd charges," Rheins said. "It's an outrage that these charges are being leveled. Even seeking these people as witnesses is obscene."

#3

Europe's Shameful Honoring of Vilnius

By Andrew Baker

Forward, June 26, 2008

The European Union has designated Vilnius as the "European Capital of Culture" for 2009. It is a recognition Lithuania does not deserve.

Vilnius, with its beautiful old town and venerable history, is without a doubt charming. Workers are busy restoring churches and palaces, and the first-time visitor is likely to be smitten by the postcard-perfect scenes.

But behind Vilnius's picturesque facade is something far less appealing to behold: Lithuania's record of systematically ignoring a major element of its cultural heritage. Jews have lived in Lithuania for a millennium. Vilnius - or Vilna, as it was also known - was a major center of Jewish life and scholarship, boasting so many yeshivas and prominent rabbis in the 18th century that it was known as "the Jerusalem of Lithuania." By the 20th century one-third of the city's population was Jewish. It was a world center of Yiddish culture and scholarship.

That ended with the Holocaust. The Nazis, with the assistance of Lithuanian collaborators, murdered 200,000 Jews, more than 90% of the country's Jewish population.

Today, six decades later, the small, reviving Jewish community is seeking the return of former Jewish communal property as a means of restoring and preserving Jewish heritage sites and supporting its own limited religious and cultural needs. The Lithuanian Jewish community seeks to follow the paths taken by Jewish communities in neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, where community property restitution was implemented years ago.

In Prague the restored Jewish quarter, with its eight synagogues, is again the center of Jewish activity in the Czech Republic and a magnet for tourists. The Krakow neighborhood known as Kazimierz hosts an annual Jewish Cultural Festival that brings 25,000 people together for a week of concerts, films and lectures that display Poland's rich Jewish legacy. In Slovakia a government-endowed foundation, created as a partial settlement for looted Jewish assets during the Holocaust, aids the elderly and restores cemeteries and synagogues.

None of this is happening in Lithuania. Instead, the Lithuanian government, for more than six years, has continually delayed an agreement on communal property restitution. Meanwhile, former Jewish properties have been privatized and the community lacks the most basic support for education and welfare.

Vilna's historic Jewish cemetery, for example, was hundreds of years old, but in the mid-19th century tsarist Russia built a military fort on the site, and in the 1950s the Soviets replaced it with a sports arena. The pattern of disrespect continued under Lithuania's post-Communist leadership. Despite promises that no graves would be desecrated under their watch, the land was privatized, sold to developers and, ignoring regulations to the contrary, city permits were issued to allow the construction of luxury apartments. Lithuania's president promised in September 2007 to stop construction, but it has yet to be halted.

Holocaust knowledge also is wanting in Lithuania. The country was annexed by the Soviet Union before World War II ended, leaving no possibility of any critical, objective examination of Lithuania's Holocaust history until it regained its freedom in 1991. A presidential decree created an international historical commission in 1998 to report on both the Nazi and Soviet occupations. Among its prominent members was Yitzak Arad, the founding director of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Arad was born in Lithuania. The Nazis killed his family, and as a teenager he fled and joined the Soviet Partisans. When the war ended he left for Palestine. Sixty years later a Lithuanian newspaper translated excerpts from his diary, describing the Partisans' battles with Germans and Lithuanian collaborators. Last year Lithuania's general prosecutor decided this was prima facie evidence that Arad might be guilty of war crimes and opened an investigation. The historical commission has published several scholarly works that detail the role of Lithuanians in the Holocaust. But the actions of the general prosecutor now make a mockery of these findings.

In March, when Lithuania celebrated its independence from the Soviet Union, several hundred neo-Nazis and skinheads paraded along Gedimino Avenue in central Vilnius, walking past the Parliament and the prime minister's office, waving flags with a Lithuanian swastika and shouting "Juden Raus."

This was not the first neo-Nazi rally in Eastern Europe. Last November a similar group organized a march in Prague with the provocative goal of walking through the city's Jewish quarter. But in the Czech capital the neo-Nazis were greeted by thousands of vocal counter-demonstrators and nearly all the country's political leaders. In Vilnius, where incitement to ethnic hatred is a crime, police made no arrests while providing the marchers with an escort. Lithuania's president, to be fair, did voice criticism - 10 days after the event.

Twisting Holocaust memory, desecrating cemeteries, ignoring antisemitism and refusing to return communal property - surely this is not the best cultural capital Europe can offer. The E.U. should reconsider the honor accorded Vilnius.

Rabbi Andrew Baker is director of international Jewish affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

#4

Lithuania Has Earned Its Place in Europe Letters

Forward, July 2, 2008

Regarding Rabbi Andrew Baker's July 4 opinion article "Europe's Shameful Honoring of Vilnius," I am amazed by the persistence of efforts to deny Lithuania its European identity.

Through the centuries, my countrymen have struggled to stay in Europe and remain Lithuanians. History was brutal to us. Wars, occupations and totalitarian regimes have taken their enormous toll. It's a miracle Lithuania survived at all.

We are in Europe, and we share Europe's history and destiny - with all the complexity that may entail. As a member of the European Union, Lithuania condemns both disastrous totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, Nazism and communism. All those who committed crimes against innocent civilians must face justice: Nazi collaborators, Soviet partisans, KGB interrogators, etc. There is no other way to repair the broken social fabric and heal the wounds.

With time, we will rebuild Lithuania and restore the well-being and dignity of our people - of all the peoples who once lived in Lithuania. Vilnius rightly deserves the title of the European Capital of Culture and is proud to have it.

*Audrius Bruzga, Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania, Washington, D.C.*

#5

Transparency is key item of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Astana Itar-Tass, June 29, 2008

ASTANA, Kazakhstan - The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is holding a session in Astana to discuss the organization's transparency.

More than 500 delegates from over 50 European, Asian and American states, international and parliamentary organizations are attending the session.

Assembly President Goran Lennmarker said they were holding the session in the very heart of Eurasia and must use the chance for strengthening relations inside the OSCE.

The organization should give more attention to Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, while the latter should mount their contribution to democratic development and prosperity, Lennmarker said.

The Assembly had its latest sessions in Edinburgh in 2004, in Washington in 2005, in Brussels in 2006, and in Kiev in 2007.

#6

US delegation urges Kazakh reform By Peter Leonard Associated Press, July 1, 2008

ASTANA, Kazakhstan - Kazakhstan has not yet fulfilled its commitments on democratic reforms ahead of taking up the chairmanship of an international security and democracy group in 2010, a U.S. congressional delegation said Tuesday.

Kazakhstan, which will become the first former Soviet state to chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation, has promised to reform its election laws and take steps to increase media freedom by the end of 2008.

"Progress was to be made in 2008, but in order to meet those commitments far more progress needs to be made," Sen. Benjamin Cardin said. He said he remained confident the required changes will eventually be implemented.

The OSCE criticized the conduct and outcome of the parliamentary election in Kazakhstan last year, which resulted in a lower chamber occupied solely by candidates from the pro-presidential Nur Otan party.

The congressional delegation, headed by Cardin and Rep. Alcee Hastings, has held talks with President Nursultan Nazarbayev as well as a number of prominent human rights activists and opposition groups.

Cardin said he spoke with Nazarbayev about his hopes that Kazakh authorities will carry out reforms in a timely fashion.

"His response to me was friendly and candid, but we will wait to see what results will come forward with regards to his government," Cardin said.

The American delegation is visiting Kazakhstan for the annual session of lawmakers from OSCE member states being held this year in the oil-rich Central Asian nation's capital, Astana.

The lawmakers also met with minority faith groups, which complain they have been unfairly targeted by proposed changes to Kazakh legislation.

Kazakhstan's Parliament last month gave preliminary approval to a bill aimed at increasing government control over religious associations. The bill has drawn protests from rights groups.

Cardin expressed concern about provisions contained in the bill and urged Kazakh authorities to consult with the OSCE.

#7

Reporting Among Gangsters

By Jeffrey Gedmin

Washington Post, July 2, 2008

PRAGUE -- Last fall, Alisher Saipov, a human rights reporter for Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), was denounced by Uzbekistan's state-controlled media. Not long afterward, the 26-year-old journalist was fatally shot in front of his office in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Human rights groups believe that Saipov, an ethnic Uzbek who was born in Kyrgyzstan and lived there, was killed by the ruthless security services of neighboring Uzbekistan.

Last month, the Uzbek media were again stirring up trouble. State television smeared the entire Uzbek service of RFE/RL, denouncing its journalists as criminals and airing broadcasters' photographs as well as private information about their family members, including home addresses. The television service has rebroadcast this program at least three times in recent days. Saipov had received death threats, and the first death threat against a colleague at RFE/RL headquarters in Prague came last month. It's an ominous pattern.

Also last month, Solijon Abdurahmanov, one of the few independent journalists working inside Uzbekistan, was arrested after police officers claimed to have found narcotics in his possession. This seems to be a favorite trick. Previously, the cousin of an RFE/RL Uzbek journalist was sentenced to 10 years in prison for drug possession -- shortly after authorities became aware of his intention to defect.

Such is the gangster-like world of Central Asia today. This deplorable human rights situation poses a familiar quandary for policymakers. The next U.S. president will struggle daily to balance our security interests with our commitment to democracy and human rights. And the stakes in Central Asia are high.

Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, countries rich in oil and gas, both have repressive regimes. Both are also courted by Russia and China. Uzbekistan, which the organization Freedom House ranks as on par with North Korea in terms of political rights and civil liberties, has military bases that U.S. and NATO forces use to stage operations in Afghanistan. In May 2005, Uzbek security forces opened fire on an anti-government rally in the eastern city of Andijon, killing as many as 1,000 demonstrators; when the Bush administration criticized the regime's response, Uzbek authorities ejected U.S. forces from the country. The government also closed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's bureau in the capital, Tashkent, after RFE/RL journalists sought to investigate the massacre.

RFE/RL relations with the Uzbek government have remained frosty since then. Officials see our independent reporting on health and social issues, culture, human rights, and politics as a threat.

Since Andijon, the United States and the European Union have worked to rebuild their relations with Tashkent. The Uzbek government is not making détente easy. Last year, a senior E.U. official described the human rights situation in Uzbekistan as "miserable." The European Union sought to co-host a media conference in Tashkent in June, but as the government's manipulations of the event became clear, the Europeans felt obliged to withdraw. A senior State Department official traveled to Uzbekistan recently and praised improvements in human rights conditions. There was, indeed, a token release of a few political prisoners. But the vicious attacks on RFE/RL journalists by Uzbek state television immediately followed these releases. Just yesterday, the government began distributing nationwide a video further denouncing RFE/RL journalists.

A Freedom House report last month confirmed the miserable status of human rights in Uzbekistan. The situation of independent media, the report found, is "absolutely dire." Obviously, it's not easy to balance the values that Western governments espouse and their day-to-day security and economic interests. The "stans" of Central Asia, a group of largely poor countries, also have an image problem: Their names sound remote to Western ears, and their issues will never spark the interest or controversy of Iran or Tibet. Without the celebrity of a Dalai Lama, Westerners are simply unlikely to pay attention.

Yet we must.

Last week, a teacher who has frequently appeared on RFE/RL programs in Turkmenistan was arrested, taken to a psychiatric clinic and threatened. When he refused to sign a statement vowing to sever contact with RFE/RL, he was incarcerated. One RFE/RL Kazakh colleague has lost two brothers who are widely believed to have been killed by the Kazakh equivalent of the KGB. Uzbek colleagues in our Prague headquarters worry about their relatives back home. "They won't shoot my mother today," one has said. "They'll have her killed in a car accident six months from now, when nobody's looking." That should mean one thing: We have to continue looking -- and they have to know it.

The writer is president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. The congressionally funded broadcaster provides independent news and information to 21 countries from Russia to Central Asia to the Middle East.

#8 Chief Rabbi insists on canceling the Jackson-Vanik amendment applied to Kazakhstan Interfax, July 3, 2008

Astana - Chief Rabbi of Kazakhstan Yeshaya Kogen believes that the US Parliament should cancel the Jackson-Vanik amendment regarding Kazakhstan.

"In due time, this amendment was passed to protect Jews of the USSR, however, Kazakhstan does not need such protection today," Rabbi said at the meeting with members of the US Parliament, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and clergy who visited Beit Rachel - Habad Lubavich Synagogue in Astana.

According to Kogen, it is quite evident that the amendment will be cancelled "any way". "But now, I, as a member of the Jewish community, feel ashamed that someone is trying to protect me from a non-existent danger," Rabbi said.

He asked Senator Benjamin Cardin who was present at the meeting what the US Parliament thought about canceling the Jackson-Venik amendment regarding Kazakhstan.

The Senator answered that canceling this amendment in relation to Kazakhstan was only a matter of procedural and bureaucratic issue and had nothing to do with politics. He also promised to address this issue as soon as he returned home.

During the meeting Benjamin Cardin wished to render "any help" to the Jewish community of Kazakhstan.

In his turn, Kogen said that "Jews in Kazakhstan feel themselves a part of one whole Kazakhstan people and do not need any specific help." He also noted that any support to Kazakhstan would be "highly appreciated by the Jewish community."

The Jackson-Vanik amendment was passed in 1974 in relation to the USSR and provided restrictions on trade relations of the USA with foreign countries. This amendment was passed as an answer to restrictions of Jewish emigration imposed by the Soviet Union.

#9a

Ukrainian Jews protest construction

JTA Brief, June 29, 2008

A Ukrainian city issued a permit to build on the site of an old Jewish synagogue.

Authorities of the western Ukrainian city of Lvov will allow a private construction firm to erect a high-rise hotel on the site of an old synagogue complex that is under UNESCO protection.

Meylakh Sheykhet, the director of the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union in Ukraine, told JTA that representatives of the local Jewish community expressed their concern in letters to city and national leaders as well as to the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine.

Local Jewish activists and Sheykhet say workers are building a hotel for the Euro-2012 soccer tournament on the site of the 16th century synagogue Ture Zahav, or Golden Rose, which was burned down by the Nazis in 1942 but is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. A mikveh remains on the site; another building was recently demolished.

Local leaders say they believe that national authorities will stop the illegal destruction of the remainder of the Jewish complex in Lvov.

#9b

Ukrainian Jews reject Babi Yar transfer

JTA Brief, June 29, 2008

Ukrainian Jewish leaders are disputing the government's decision to transfer control of the Babi Yar Memorial Complex to a state institute.

The Ukraine Cabinet of Ministers voted June 25 to transfer control of the complex of memorials at the Babi Yar ravine outside Kiev to the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. The memorials commemorate victims of World War II and political repression.

"Transferring the complex under the control of that Ukrainian institution is an incorrect decision because it does not have enough experience in the field of commemoration of Holocaust victims," lawmaker Aleksandr Feldman, the head of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, told JTA.

The Institute of National Memory was created in 2006 to examine and memorialize the crimes of the former communist regime, including the Holodomor, or Great Famine, and Hitler's genocide.

In March 2007, the Ukrainian government had decreed that the complex was to become the State Historical and Cultural Preserve Babi Yar under the aegis of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

From 2005 to 2007, the construction of a memorial to Holocaust victims, including a synagogue, yeshiva and Jewish museum, split the Jewish community in Ukraine.

Nearly 34,000 Jews were massacred at Babi Yar on Sept. 29-30, 1941. More than 100,000 people, mostly Jews, were killed at the ravine during World War II.

#9c

Bobruisk Jews mark 500 years JTA Brief, June 30, 2008

Belarusian Jews celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Bobruisk Jewish community.

The head of the Bobruisk community, Leonid Rubinstein, marked the celebration by writing a musical about its history that was performed by local children and adults.

"Jews have lived in Belarus for a long time, and three other towns' Jewish communities have celebrated their 500th anniversaries in recent years," the head of the Belarusian Jewish community, Leonid Levin, told JTA .

Bobruisk, a city of 227,700 located 81 miles southeast of Minsk, now has a Jewish population of approximately 1,350. Some 20,000 Bobruisk Jews were shot by the Nazis during World War II and buried in mass graves. Most of the remaining Jews were killed in ghetto and labor camps established in the town.

Levin said historical documents note the 500-year presence of Jews in Bobruisk. He added that the Mogilev community would celebrate the same anniversary in 2020.

#9d

Russian cemetery vandals sent to jail JTA Brief, July 1, 2008

A Russian judge sent three of four teenagers who vandalized a Jewish cemetery in Siberia to prison.

Cemetery vandals in Russia typically are charged with hooliganism, but the teens were convicted on the more serious charge of "damaging a cemetery motivated by ethnic hatred" and thus received the stiffer sentences. Authorities said they were drunk when they damaged 61 gravestones in Krasnoyarsk last October.

At last week's sentencing, three teens were handed prison sentences of 2 to 2 1/2 years, according to the Russian newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda. The remaining teen was ordered confined to a psychiatric institution. The teens also were ordered to pay fines.

On Monday, three members of a Russian anti-Semitic group in Blagoveshchensk, a small town on Russia's border with China, received no prison time after being convicted of inciting ethnic hatred.

Prosecutors collected video clips, extremist literature and eyewitness accounts proving members of the local branch of the Union of Russian People planned to "take action" against Jews, according to a report from the Sova monitoring group. The group members also were convicted of forming an extremist group.

The group's name comes from an organization that murdered Jews at the beginning of the 20th century.

In Ukraine, a vandal who painted swastikas and neo-Nazi slogans on the mausoleum of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, a famed Berdichev rabbi who died in 1810, was sentenced to a year and a half in prison, Jewish.ru reported.

The 20-year-old vandal was charged with desecrating a cemetery, but it was not labeled a hate crime.

#9e

St. Petersburg JCC wins architecture prize JTA Brief, July 1, 2008

The city of St. Petersburg recognized Russia's newest Jewish community center for preserving the unique appearance of the city.

The \$10 million Yesod building was erected in 2005 by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee with funds raised from North American Jewish federations and donors.

The preservation of St. Petersburg's look through European facades and low-slung buildings is a point of community pride and the source of controversy in recent years as Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom has sought to build a towering headquarters on the banks of the Neva River.

While the Gazprom headquarters will go forward, the vice governor of the city, Alla Manilova, said that the cityscape should not be spoiled by "ridiculous buildings and dangerous skyscrapers."

The World Club of Petersburgers presented the award to the JCC's director, Irit Boguslavsky, for "modern architecture in the context of the historic city environment" in a ceremony late last month.

#9f

Mogilev Jews request Shoah memorial JTA Brief, July 2, 2008

Jews in the Belarusian city of Mogilev again have asked local authorities for permission to erect a Holocaust memorial.

Boris Golbinberg, the head of the Mogilev Jewish community, told JTA it was the fourth request in the past several years.

"In October, Belarus will mark the 65th anniversary of the annihilation of the Minsk ghetto," Golbinberg said. "We want the stone to be erected by this date."

The memorial would be placed on the site of Mogilev ghetto, where more than 10,000 Jews perished.

"Many people were killed there," Golbinberg said. "Even if it were just one victim, it would be proper to erect a monument."

He said the project would cost several thousand dollars and be financed by private donations.

The eastern Belarusian city at the turn of the 21st century had a Jewish population of about 1,700.

#9g

Holocaust plaque vandalized in Ukraine

JTA Brief, July 3, 2008

A Holocaust memorial in the western Ukrainian city of Lvov was vandalized.

Local Jewish activists said the plaque at the Kleparov train station that informs passers-by that the Nazis shipped 500,000 Jews through the station to the Belzetz death camps in Poland from 1941 to 1943 was defaced.

A group of Jewish tourists from France found the vandalized plaque with a hangman's noose and a Star of David painted on it.

It is still not clear if law enforcement agencies are investigating the case.

#10

Outgoing Georgian ambassador says concerned over Iranian nuclear program

By Dana Zimmerman

YNetNews, June 28, 2008

"Just like any other country, we too are concerned over Iran's nuclear program, and I hope there is still room for diplomacy," outgoing Georgian Ambassador to Israel Lasha Zhvania said this week in a special interview with Ynet.

Zhvania, 35, was elected in May to the Georgian parliament as the representative of Tbilisi's Chugureti district and will leave Israel on Sunday after just over three years.

"The Persian nation is an educated and wise one, and I am convinced they (Iranians) will find a positive solution to the (nuclear) crisis," he said.

"We vehemently oppose Iran's statements according to which Israel has no right to exist. These remarks are in violation of international law. No country should be allowed to issue threats or act on them."

Zhvania was appointed ambassador to Israel in 2005 after serving as deputy foreign minister. "I chose to go to Israel because I felt that I should serve in a country that I'm familiar with and am fond of. I'm very connected to Jerusalem," he said.

Why do the people of Georgia like Israel so much?

Georgia considers Israel to be one of its closest allies (in the Middle East). The (warm relations) between the countries have psychological, anthropological, religious and historic roots. Today Israel and Georgia have one important thing in common: They are both strategic partners of the United States. Georgia also strives to become the 'Israel of Caucasia'. Israel's economic success definitely serves as an example for us.

Ambassador Zhvania said that during his term "the friendship between Israel and Georgia was strengthened," adding that ties between the countries were specifically bolstered in fields of trade, communications and investments.

"When I arrived here there was one weekly flight from Tel Aviv to Tbilisi, and it was only half-full at best; today there are four flights a week, and they are jam packed," he said, "I hope that by next year we will see daily flights to Tbilisi."

#11

Russia trade vote in Congress won't be easy: Paulson

By David Lawder

Reuters, June 30, 2008

MOSCOW - A move for the United States to lift a Cold War-era restriction on trade with Russia when it joins the World Trade Organization (WTO) will face opposition in Congress, U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson said on Monday.

Russia, which started its bid to join the global trade watchdog in 1995, aims to finish work on a multilateral agreement opening the way for membership later this year. It has already struck a bilateral membership deal with Washington.

Russia's WTO membership would require Congress to establish permanent normal trade relations with Russia by removing it from the dwindling list of countries subject to trade restrictions under the so-called Jackson-Vanik amendment.

"It will not be easy. There will be opposition in the Congress (to removing the amendment) but I think it will be important to try," Paulson told the Ekho Moskvyy radio station during a visit to Russia.

The Jackson-Vanik amendment, 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.

Russia has been in compliance with the conditions set out in the Jackson-Vanik amendment since 1994.

But some lawmakers in the United States have tied lifting the Jackson-Vanik amendment to Russia improving its record on human rights.

U.S. lawmakers have insisted that Moscow finish negotiations on joining the WTO before they vote to lift the measure. Paulson said he did not know when the amendment would be lifted.

The United States is currently as large a trading partner for Russia as Finland, accounting for about six percent of Russian foreign trade in 2007. Both Moscow and Washington want to boost trade.

Paulson is in Moscow for talks with Russia's top leaders that some observers say could help shift the focus of a sometimes frosty U.S.-Russia relationship towards the more productive areas of trade and investment.

Congressional refusal to lift the amendment 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.

Paulson, who discussed the WTO entry negotiations with his Russian counterpart Alexei Kudrin on Sunday, said the talks were nearing their end.

"We are making progress on the last details of negotiations. I think it is important to finish this up," Paulson said.

(Reporting by David Lawder, Writing by Gleb Bryanski; Editing by Richard Balmforth)

#12

Enough Rope for Russia

By Jim Hoagland

Washington Post, June 29, 2008

MOSCOW - Vladimir Putin's switch from running Russia as its president to running Russia as its prime minister has changed traffic patterns here but little else.

Traffic jams knot into epic proportions as streets around the Kremlin are regularly shut down for the motorcades of Putin and his handpicked successor as president, Dmitry Medvedev. "It is natural," a Russian motorist said the other day. "We have two presidents now."

Since his May inaugural, Medvedev has put a softer face on Putin's fierce determination to show the world that Russia is back as a major power. Traveling to Berlin early this month on one of his first trips as president, Medvedev stressed the need for "a new world order."

Leaders call for the founding of a new world order only when they are convinced that their nation will dominate it. That was true for George H.W. Bush in 1991, and it is true today for Putin, Medvedev and others in Russia's reformulated leadership.

The term Bush popularized in the wake of his heady military triumph in Kuwait is increasingly used by Kremlin officials to demonstrate that the U.S. moment in world power has passed and that Russia's moment is fast arriving.

For a variety of reasons, Putin is likely to come up as short in reshaping the world as Bush did - if the next U.S. administration is smart about handling the challenges Russia intends to mount to America's lessening but still dominant role in European security and in international financial institutions.

In Berlin, Medvedev provided few details of Russian intentions. But Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in a June 20 speech and a follow-up conversation I had with him here, outlined an ambitious agenda of change in a new era of "multipolar cooperation . . . and collective leadership" in international affairs.

A "new world order" cannot be based on "an Anglo-Saxon pattern that some have tried to establish for the rest of the world," Lavrov said. It would involve doing away with "the Cold War architecture for the security of Europe."

He proposed a European Security Conference to bring together the United States, Russia, the European Union and other regional organizations, such as NATO, to establish new controls on armies and alliances in the "Euro-Atlantic space."

The idea as presented will not appeal to either the Bush administration or its successor. The unacknowledged intent is to reduce the importance of the United States and NATO in European security.

But it does reflect a realization by Russian leaders that they are now seen by the rest of the world as a "veto power" constantly saying no - to NATO expansion, Kosovo independence or greater international involvement in Darfur. They have concluded that under Medvedev, they need instead to start putting forward more positive-sounding proposals.

Medvedev's role so far involves presentation more than substance. He has not been able to name his own foreign policy adviser, while Putin is installing Yuri Ushakov, the outgoing and effective ambassador to Washington, as his deputy chief of staff and de facto diplomatic adviser.

Lavrov also fleshed out general criticisms that Medvedev had voiced of U.S. financial markets and their influence on the world economy. A new world economic order "must also be multipolar and must include a more balanced distribution of finances and national resources," Lavrov said.

Russia is reported to be considering an effort to bring other natural gas exporters into an international cartel similar to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. Venezuela and Iran are also said to be pushing the cartel idea for an October unveiling.

Energy exports have earned Russia massive foreign reserves. But the natural resources boom masks a general failure to develop other sectors of the economy.

Industry has stagnated, while annual inflation runs at 12 percent. Reforms launched in the 1990s under former prime minister Yegor Gaidar brought growth in Russia to 10 percent. Now it has fallen to about 7 percent under Putin and Medvedev.

In short, the Russian economy has feet of clay that will prevent the Kremlin from dominating a new world order for very long - if at all. The effort expended and the animosities incurred in trying to remake the world quickly will put that goal beyond reach, as the United States has already learned.

The next U.S. administration should give Russia time and rope enough to prove it again. Either John McCain or Barack Obama can play a long game in which Russia is taken seriously but not necessarily on its own terms.

#13 Khodorkovsky Faces 20 Years in Jail on New Charges By Henry Meyer Bloomberg, July 1, 2008

Russian prosecutors have filed new charges against Mikhail Khodorkovsky that his lawyer said may add 20 years to the jailed former OAO Yukos Oil Co. billionaire's sentence.

Khodorkovsky, who is due to be released in 2011, was charged with laundering more than \$28 billion and stealing 350 million tons (48 million barrels) of oil, the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor General's Office said today in a faxed statement. He is currently serving eight years in a Siberian jail for fraud and tax evasion.

"There's nothing fair about this case," Robert Amsterdam, a lawyer for Khodorkovsky, said today in a Bloomberg Television interview. "I don't think they're even trying to make these new charges look real."

Khodorkovsky's defense team has been hopeful of winning his early release since Dmitry Medvedev, a 42-year-old St. Petersburg lawyer, took over as Russian president in May. The state's campaign against Khodorkovsky, whose Yukos company was bankrupted and sold to state-owned companies, has come under widespread criticism in the West.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel brought up Khodorkovsky's case with Medvedev during his visit to Germany last month. Medvedev, the handpicked successor of former president Vladimir Putin, has promised to ensure the rule of law in Russia.

Nothing Changes

"The signal is clear that with Medvedev's ascent to the presidency, nothing in Russia is going to change," said Yevgeny Volk, a Moscow-based analyst for U.S. research group, the Heritage Foundation. "Medvedev is playing the role of a good cop after Putin to improve Russia's image in the West but we should distinguish between words and deeds," he said by phone.

Lawyers for Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man whose fortune was estimated at \$15 billion by Forbes magazine, yesterday dismissed the new charges, filed in a 145-page indictment, as fabricated.

"It has the same absurd and unproven claims about the alleged theft and legalization of all the oil produced during the six years that Yukos existed," the lawyers said in a statement posted on the Khodorkovsky defense team's Web Site.

The new case against him is based on alleged embezzlement of illegal oil revenue from 1998 to 2003 and carries a maximum sentence of 22 1/2 years, the lawyers said previously. Platon Lebedev, Khodorkovsky's former business partner, faces the same charges, the prosecutors' statement said.

Funding Opposition

Khodorkovsky's supporters have accused the Kremlin of persecuting him because he funded opposition parties and to increase state control of the energy sector.

Yukos, once Russia's largest oil producer and the foundation of Khodorkovsky's fortune, was declared bankrupt under the weight of more than \$30 billion in back taxes, and most of its assets were sold last year to state-run OAO Rosneft.

The 44-year-old tycoon was arrested at gunpoint when his private plane was stormed at a Siberian airport in October 2003.

Putin, who remains at the center of power as prime minister, said in an interview on May 30 that he opposed granting clemency to Khodorkovsky, and that he would advise Medvedev against giving "privileges" to the jailed billionaire.

Amsterdam said the state's treatment of Khodorkovsky echoed its behavior toward foreign companies such as oil firm BP Plc, which faces losing operational control of its Russian joint-venture. Most of TNK-BP's foreign managers may have to leave Russia by the end of the month after Moscow authorities refused to renew their work permits.

Giving into the Russian government, "as BP did, doesn't buy you security," Amsterdam said. "Until our companies and our governments understand that, others will suffer the fate that unfortunately BP is suffering today."

#14

Russia charges gang with 20 racist murders Reuters, June 30, 2008

MOSCOW - Russian prosecutors said on Monday they had charged a gang led by two teenagers of murdering 20 people in a series of racist killings over eight months.

Prosecutors said they had brought charges against nine people aged between 17 and 22, including a young woman, aged 22, who recorded one attack.

"She videotaped the first crime committed by the group. The wounded person survived at the time," Vladimir Markin, spokesman for Russia's Investigative Committee at the Prosecutor General's office, said in a statement.

"Lone citizens of non-Slavic appearance were chosen as victims. The assailants attempted to inflict grievous bodily harm within the shortest possible period of time."

"Investigators ... accuse the members of the group of 20 cases of murder and 12 attempted murders," said Markin. The accused have not yet been tried.

The statement described the gang as skinheads, a term commonly used in Russia to describe young, far-right extremists who often have shaven heads and wear Nazi-style insignia.

The 32 attacks were inspired by "racial and national hatred" and took place over eight months, starting last August, Markin said. The two leaders of the group were under 16 years of age when committing the crimes.

Russian sociologists are struggling to understand the phenomenon of rising neo-Nazism and xenophobia in a country which lost millions of its citizens fighting against Nazi Germany during World War Two.

Nowadays swastika graffiti can be seen across Russia, and Jewish cemeteries and synagogues are occasionally vandalized.

A group of prominent Russian anti-fascists asked the authorities in April to investigate the appearance of their personal data on a far-right Internet site listing them among "Enemies of the Russian People".

(Reporting by Dmitry Solovyov; Editing by Elizabeth Piper)

#15

Wrong on Russia

By Stephen F. Cohen

International Herald Tribune, July 1, 2008

Neither of the two major American presidential candidates has seriously addressed, or even seems fully aware of, what should be our greatest foreign policy concern - Russia's singular capacity to endanger or enhance our national security.

Despite its diminished status following the Soviet breakup in 1991, Russia alone possesses weapons that can destroy the United States, a military-industrial complex nearly America's equal in exporting arms, vast quantities of questionably secured nuclear materials sought by terrorists, and the planet's largest oil and natural gas reserves.

It also remains the world's largest territorial country, pivotally situated in the West and the East, at the crossroads of colliding civilizations, with strategic capabilities from Europe, Iran and other Middle East nations to North Korea, China, India, Afghanistan and even Latin America. All things considered, our national security may depend more on Russia than Russia's does on us.

And yet U.S.-Russian relations are worse today than they have been in 20 years. The relationship includes almost as many serious conflicts as it did during the cold war - among them, Kosovo, Iran, the former Soviet republics of Ukraine and Georgia, Venezuela, NATO expansion, missile defense, access to oil and the Kremlin's internal politics - and less actual cooperation, particularly in essential matters involving nuclear weapons.

Even the current cold peace could be more dangerous than its predecessor, for three reasons: First, its front line is not in Berlin or the Third World but on Russia's own borders, where U.S. and NATO military power is increasingly ensconced. Second, lethal dangers inherent in Moscow's impaired controls over its vast stockpiles of materials of mass destruction and thousands of missiles on hair-trigger alert, a legacy of the state's disintegration in the 1990s, exceed any such threats in the past. And third, also unlike before, there is no effective domestic opposition to hawkish policies in Washington or Moscow, only influential proponents and cheerleaders.

How did it come to this?

In the U.S. policy elite and media, the nearly unanimous answer is that Russian President Vladimir Putin's antidemocratic domestic policies and "neo-imperialism" destroyed that historic opportunity. You don't have to be a Putin apologist to understand that this is not an adequate explanation.

During the last eight years, Putin's foreign policies have been largely a reaction to Washington's winner-take-all approach to Moscow since the early 1990s, which resulted from a revised U.S. view of how the cold war ended.

In that new triumphalist narrative, America "won" the 40-year conflict and post-Soviet Russia was a defeated nation analogous to post-World War II Germany and Japan - a nation without full sovereignty at home or autonomous national interests abroad.

The policy implication of that bipartisan triumphalism, which persists today, has been clear, certainly to Moscow. It meant that the United States had the right to oversee Russia's post-Communist political and economic development, as it tried to do directly in the 1990s, while demanding that Moscow yield to U.S. international interests. It meant Washington could break strategic promises to Moscow, as when the Clinton administration began NATO's eastward expansion, and disregard extraordinary Kremlin overtures, as when the Bush Administration unilaterally withdrew from the ABM treaty and granted NATO membership to countries even closer to Russia - despite Putin's crucial assistance to the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan after 9/11. It even meant America was entitled to Russia's traditional sphere of security and energy supplies, from the Baltics, Ukraine and Georgia to Central Asia and the Caspian.

Such U.S. behavior was bound to produce a Russian backlash. It came under Putin, but it would have been the reaction of any strong Kremlin leader. Those U.S. policies - widely viewed in Moscow as an "encirclement" designed to keep Russia weak and to control its resources - have helped revive an assertive Russian nationalism, destroy the once strong pro-American lobby, and inspire widespread charges that concessions to Washington are "appeasement," even "capitulationism." The Kremlin may have overreacted, but the cause and effect threatening a new cold war are clear.

Because the first steps in this direction were taken in Washington, so must be initiatives to reverse it. Three are essential and urgent: a U.S. diplomacy that treats Russia as a sovereign great power with commensurate national interests; an end to NATO expansion before it reaches Ukraine, which would risk something worse than cold war; and a full resumption of negotiations to sharply reduce and fully secure all nuclear stockpiles and to prevent the impending arms race, which requires ending or agreeing on U.S. plans for a missile defense system in Europe.

American presidential campaigns are supposed to discuss such vital issues, but neither John McCain nor Barack Obama has done so. Instead, in varying degrees, both have promised to be "tougher" on the Kremlin than George W. Bush has allegedly been and to continue the encirclement of Russia and the hectoring "democracy promotion" there.

To be fair, nobody has asked the candidates about any of these crucial issues. They should do so now.

Stephen F. Cohen is professor of Russian studies at New York University. His latest book is "Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia."

#16

Unconventional wisdom about Russia

By Henry A. Kissinger

International Herald Tribune, July 1, 2008

Conventional wisdom treated Dmitry Medvedev's inauguration as president of the Russian Federation as a continuation of President Vladimir Putin's two terms of Kremlin dominance and assertive foreign policy.

A visit to Moscow with an opportunity to meet leading personalities of the political world, as well as representatives of various age groups in business and intellectual circles, convinced me that this judgment is oversimplified and premature.

For one thing, the emerging power structure in Moscow seems more complex than conventional wisdom holds. It was always doubtful why, if his primary objective was to retain power, Putin, at the height of a popularity that would have allowed him to amend the Constitution to extend his term, would choose the complicated and uncertain route of becoming prime minister.

My impression is that a new phase of Russian politics is under way. The statement that the president designs foreign and security policy, and the prime minister implements parts of it, has become the mantra of Russian officials from Medvedev and Putin down. I encountered no Russian in or out of government who doubted that some kind of redistribution of power is taking place, although they were uncertain of its outcome.

Putin remains powerful and highly influential. It is likely that he has assigned to himself a watching brief over the performance of his successor; it is possible that he is keeping open the option of becoming a candidate in a future presidential election.

Whatever the ultimate outcome, the presidential election marked a transition from a phase of consolidation to a period of modernization. The growing complexity of the Russian economy has generated the need for predictable legal procedures, as already foreshadowed by Medvedev. The operation of the Russian government with two centers of power - at least initially - may, in retrospect, appear as the beginning of an evolution toward a form of checks and balances lacking heretofore.

What are the implications for American foreign policy?

During the next several months, Russia will be concerned with working out the practical means of the distinction between design and implementation of national security policy. The Bush administration and the presidential campaigns would be wise to give Russia some space to work out these arrangements by restraining public comment.

With respect to the long term, ever since the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, a succession of American administrations has acted as if the creation of Russian democracy were a principal American task. Speeches denouncing Russian shortcomings and gestures drawn from the Cold War struggle for pre-eminence have occurred frequently.

The policy of assertive intrusion into what Russians consider their own sense of self runs the risk of thwarting both geopolitical as well as moral goals. There are undoubtedly groups and individuals in Russia who look to America for accelerating a democratic evolution. But almost all observers agree that the vast majority of Russians consider America as presumptuous and determined to stunt Russia's recovery. Such an environment is more likely to encourage a nationalist and confrontational response than a democratic evolution.

It would be a pity if this mood persisted because, in many ways, we are witnessing one of the most promising periods in Russian history. Exposure to modern open societies and engagement with them is more prolonged and intense than in any previous period of Russian history - even in the face of unfortunate repressive measures. We can affect it more by patience and historical understanding than by offended disengagement and public exhortations.

This is all the more important because geopolitical realities provide an unusual opportunity for strategic cooperation between the erstwhile Cold War adversaries. Between them, the U.S. and Russia control 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Russia contains the largest landmass of any country, abutting Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Progress toward stability, with respect to nuclear weapons, in the Middle East and in Iran, requires - or is greatly facilitated by - Russian-American cooperation.

Confrontational rhetoric notwithstanding, Russia's leaders are conscious of their strategic limitations. Indeed, I would characterize Russian policy under Putin as driven in a quest for a reliable strategic partner, with America being the preferred choice.

Russian turbulent rhetoric in recent years reflects, in part, frustration by America's seeming imperviousness to that quest. Two elections for the Duma and the president also have given Russian leaders an incentive to appeal to nationalist feelings rampant after a decade of perceived humiliation. These detours do not affect the underlying reality. Three issues dominate the political agenda: security; Iran; and the relation of Russia to its former dependents, especially Ukraine.

Because of their nuclear preponderance, Russia and America have a special obligation to take the lead in global nuclear issues such as nuclear proliferation. Four questions need to be answered in this respect: Do Russia and the U.S. agree on the nature of the challenge posed by the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran? Do they agree on the status of the Iranian nuclear program? Do they agree on the diplomacy to avert the danger? Do they agree on what measures to take if whatever diplomacy is finally adopted fails?

It is my impression that a considerable consensus is emerging between the U.S. and Russia regarding the first two questions. With respect to the others, both sides must keep in mind that neither is able to overcome the challenge alone or at least only with greatly increased difficulty.

The issue of relations with Ukraine goes to the heart of both sides' perceptions of the nature of international affairs. Genuine independence for Ukraine is essential for a peaceful international system and must be unambiguously supported by the U.S. But the movement of the Western security system from the Elbe River to the approaches to Moscow brings home Russia's decline in a way bound to generate a Russian emotion that will inhibit the solution of all other issues. It should be kept on the table without forcing the issue to determine the possibilities of making progress on other issues.

The Sochi declaration of Presidents Bush and Putin in April outlined a road map for an emerging strategic dialogue between the two sides. It remains for the new administrations in Russia and America to give it operational context.

Henry A. Kissinger heads the consulting firm Kissinger & Associates. Distributed by Tribune Media Services.

#17

Nuclear Pact With Russia Faces Resistance

By Jay Solomon

Wall Street Journal, July 2, 2008

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration's landmark nuclear-cooperation pact with Russia is being threatened by delays in the U.S. Congress, the latest in a series of missteps in the White House's counterproliferation strategy.

U.S. lawmakers are voicing opposition to the agreement in part because of Moscow's history of trade with Iran in nuclear materials and ballistic missiles. Legislators are seeking greater guarantees from the White House that Russia has halted its military cooperation with Tehran.

The troubled Russia agreement comes as a similar U.S. nuclear-cooperation deal signed with India in 2005 appears unlikely to be passed into law before the end of President George W. Bush's second term, largely because of legislative opposition in New Delhi, U.S. officials say.

Democratic and Republican lawmakers are also working to block recent moves by the Bush administration to forge civilian-nuclear agreements with energy-rich Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

"The Bush administration has put nuclear commerce above common sense," says Rep. Edward Markey (D., Mass.), co-chairman of Congress's Bipartisan Task Force on Non-Proliferation.

The goal of the administration's nonproliferation strategy is to persuade developing nations to forgo their own development of nuclear fuel cycles. Washington's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership initiative, or GNEP, says the U.S. will assist in the development of civilian-nuclear power in return for commitments that countries will buy nuclear fuel from internationally monitored fuel banks. That could help keep nuclear fuel out of the hands of rogue states or terrorist groups.

Washington's conflict with Iran largely centers on Tehran's aggressive pursuit of the nuclear fuel cycle, which can be utilized for developing nuclear weapons. U.S. officials say they want to utilize GNEP to create an international regime to counter the Iranian model.

Last July, Mr. Bush and Russia's then-President Vladimir Putin signed a nuclear-cooperation pact in a bid to broaden relations between the two countries. Russia is a crucial partner in developing a fuel bank, due to the size of its domestic nuclear power industry, according to U.S. officials.

The deal would allow U.S. firms to sell certain nuclear technologies to Russian companies. They would be allowed to cooperate in developing what U.S. officials say are more proliferation-resistant reactors. And the pact would ease the sale of Russian nuclear fuels into the U.S.

A significant number of U.S. lawmakers say they are considering blocking the Russia deal because of Moscow's past support for Iran's nuclear activities and its long-range missile systems.

A U.S. official working on the Russia deal said the Bush administration is running short of time but expressed confidence it would be finalized.

The White House has certified to Congress that Russia isn't aiding Iran in the pursuit of atomic weapons. But Rep. Markey and other U.S. lawmakers have questioned the accuracy of the intelligence provided by the administration. They have recently asked the Government Accountability Office to produce its own report detailing Moscow's military support for Tehran. Russia is assisting Iran in building a light-water reactor in the city of Bushehr. The Bush administration supports the project because the nuclear fuel comes from Russia and is stored outside Iran. U.S. intelligence officials have acknowledged that Russia continues to provide Iran with conventional arms. But the administration nonetheless sees the pact as a way to get greater Russian cooperation.

The White House submitted the Russia agreement to Congress on May 13, meaning it would pass into law if lawmakers didn't move to block or amend the legislation in 90 consecutive working days.

The Russia nuclear deal was initially expected to pass without much scrutiny. The crisis over Iran's nuclear program, however, has shifted the debate, say congressional staffers. Lawmakers have begun seeking to erect legal obstacles to the bill's passage. In the Senate, an amendment to the recently tabled Iran Counter-Proliferation Act would bar U.S.-Russia nuclear cooperation. And the findings of the GAO's probe into Iranian-Russian cooperation could stoke more calls for altering the agreement.

Congressional officials also say the White House could simply run out of time to reach the 90-day mark during the current congressional calendar.

#18

Democracy With Barak Obama

By Boris Yunanov

Novaya Gazeta, July 1, 2008

The idea of building the society of equal opportunities has always been attractive for the USA, but it has never been advantageous

When there are no real elections in your own Motherland, you begin to realize your ardor for prophecy on the side. The exciting primaries fight by the US presidential contenders coincided with tranquil change of power with us. A considerable part of our citizens, that became unused to be interested in politics, looked at what was going on beyond the ocean. There was a great intrigue: for the first time in the history of the most omnipotent state a white woman threw down the glove to a black man.

Obama and the lady

He might be taken for a TV preacher. The word "changes" is his mantra. "We can believe in changes" is his campaigning slogan. He promises changes to his country. Nothing else, but changes. And that was enough: America is a country of trustful people. "Is he serious, this guy from Illinois? Can he help getting our guys back from Iraq? Can he deal with taxes? Maybe he is able to stop the recession, so that it be possible to sell a house with normal price? Hey, he really looks different from those spongers from Washington! They say he is something between John Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Well, if he means it, we mean it too!"

A year and a half ago, anticipating the rivalry between Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama, the well-known observer Charles Krauthammer asked carefully his compatriots: will America have enough emancipation to elect a woman or enough political correctness to go for the son of an immigrant from Kenya?

It's not only that the American elector has had enough maturity. "Obama-mania" has become the newest American trend. The senator from Illinois with a 4-year-experience of a politician has become the hope of the country that experienced three times a great shock during last eight years: 11/9, Iraq, mortgage crisis.

Very few were able to forecast his victory in the primaries. Now there is an opinion that Hillary lost due to shortage of money (she still owes 11 million dollars) and due to being disliked by the leadership of the Democratic Party.

But let us cut back for a year ago. That time money was coming in plenty to the campaigning staff of the senator from New York State. There were periods where her moneybox was replenished with \$10 millions weekly. Hillary looked like the confidence itself. She was backed by the bankers from Wall Street who were tired of squandering by the Republican administration. She knew beforehand in which state she was going to win, and the prospective results quite satisfied her. The failure began somewhere in the middle of February. Marc Penn, the main strategist of the Clinton's staff committed a fatal mistake when he stated to the press that the chances by Obama were zero for becoming the first black President in the US history. He forecast that Obama would be out of the race in April as the key states, like Pennsylvania with its 158 super-delegates, would anyway vote for Hillary Clinton. That statement was a gross violation of the party's bylaw; it is not accepted that the final chances of the contenders from same party be estimated at the primaries stage. Presumption by Penn was disliked by the party's leadership and by many super-delegates who turned away from Clinton at the end.

Barak Obama managed to get the top record 265 million dollars to his campaigning fund and the votes of the majority of super-delegates. 28 August he will be officially confirmed as a contender for Democratic Party for the November elections. But one may say that the final stage of the presidential race has begun already. Primaries were the time of brilliance of polemic improvisation, spectacular traveling from state to state, whale of hands-shaking and hugs, and absolute poorness of content. That was a competition of personalities. Now the time has come for competition of political platforms.

Is negating Bush enough?

The American nation is going to take another maturity exam. Whatever delicate the choice was between a white woman and a black man, anyway it is much more difficult choosing between a white man and a black man. It's ironic that now Barak Obama seems to return to his initial campaigning position. Would you risk staking at him in his struggle with John McCain? Me personally, no. The matter is not only that it is going to be a problem attracting the electorate of Hillary Clinton, one third of which is willing to vote for McCain, as the polls say. McCain's advantage is his foreign policy attitude: Atlantic solidarity, relations with Russia, Balkans, Iraq. McCain sees clearly the place of America in the world. Significantly, he was supported by the four previous state secretaries: Henry Kissinger, Lawrence Eagleburger, George Shultz and Alexander Haig.

Barak Obama has been building his campaign on negating the policy by George Bush. Day by day he repeats that McCain is like Bush of four years ago. Such a tactic is unlikely to bring him fruits in the months remaining before it's November. First, McCain has an image of the Republican in terms of his party belonging, and the image of solo rebel in his life. Even his rivals from Democrats' camp admit that he is an honest and disinterested person, disliked by his orthodox party fellows. Second – and this is the most interesting – McCain will find enough arguments to prove that the outcomes of the ruling by Bush the junior are not so bad. Examples? The US has extended and continues to extend the NATO ranks. It has managed that independence of Kosovo be declared and Iran be condemned. The anti-missile defense system is being built in Europe. And even in Iraq the US has used ably the contradictions between Shiites and Sunnites so that now none of the both groups want American troops to leave. In the meanwhile, the casualties by the US in Iraq have reduced to top minimum and the profits by American companies are growing with the new contracts. The main challenges for America are presented by Russia and China, and Barak Obama, who never saw their leaders in his life, is not the man able to take those challenges.

In October 2007 John McCain published his foreign policy program where he promised to expel Russia from G8 for elimination of political freedom. Russian expert community did not give much consideration to those promises as well as to McCain's personality on the whole. The political scientist Sergei Makarov stated then that McCain had made a lot of sharp statements against Russia and they should not be considered seriously. He also said that the chances by McCain for becoming president were small and he represented only part of a political American class. On the other hand, that was a good warning that there are such people. Well, that forecast did not come true. "Such people" not only "there are", but they are also going at full speed to the White House. So what is to be done? It turns out that nothing! In case the "shell-shocked with the cold war" McCain wins, it will be easier for us to resist him standing for our national interests. Such was the opinion given by the journalist Mikhail Leontyev in his interview to Echo Moskvy. This journalist translates timely and without too much of scrupulousness the feeling by the ruling elite. This elite wants McCain, as they see a progressively thinking American in Obama, who is going to be sympathized by the third-world countries. So it's not going to be very productive measuring swords with such a leader. This logic is too light and delusive. The problem is not only that McCain has softened his "hawk-like" message for Russia, after the primaries, while Obama can talk a lot of tough things. The problem is that, being a novice in foreign policy matters and being a subject to influence and manipulation, he might lead the situation to a crisis similar to the Caribbean one.

On the other hand, Obama may easily and drastically improve Russia-US relations. For that, even without looking into Dmitry Medvedev's eyes, he might return the things to the state they were at his party fellow Bill Clinton – that's the moratorium for rolling out the national anti-missile defense system (however, the money has been allotted for that already) and for further extending of NATO (however, it has been voted for by the Congress). There are no other serious contradictions between Russia and the US on the global agenda at the moment.

(Novaya Gazeta information - According to the poll by a TV station CBS, 48% of the respondents are willing to vote for the 46-year-old black Democrat Barak Obama, while 42% are willing to do it for his 71-year-old rival John McCain.)

#19

**Statement by President Bush on G8 Summit
The White House, July 2, 2008
[EXCERPT]**

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Next week I'm going to travel to Japan for the eighth and final G8 summit of my presidency.

At recent summits, G8 countries have made pledges to help developing nations address challenges, from health care to education, to corruption. Now we need to show the world that the G8 can be accountable for its promises and deliver results. As I said the other day, we need people who not only make promises, but write checks, for the sake of human rights and human dignity, and for the sake of peace.

.....

So this is an historic opportunity to meet, to exchange ideas, and to address some of the problems we all face. And I'm looking forward to going. And now I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions.

.....

Bret Baier: There have been a spate of recent stories about possible military action against Iran before the end of the year, if not by the U.S. than by Israel. And that prompted Iranian officials to say, if they're attacked they'll essentially shut down the Strait of Hormuz. One, how confident are you that Israel will not act independently as the diplomatic process moves forward? And two, what do you make of the mixed messages out of Iran - one of defiance and one of willingness to negotiate?

THE PRESIDENT: I have always said that all options are on the table, but the first option for the United States is to solve this problem diplomatically. I've also made it clear - made it clear that you can't solve a problem diplomatically unless there are other people at the table with you. And that is why we have been pursuing

multilateral diplomacy when it comes to convincing the Iranians that the free world is sincere about, you know, insisting that they not have the technologies necessary to develop a nuclear weapon.

And we're making progress along those lines. There's been the numerous Security Council resolutions, and in my recent trip to Europe I was very encouraged to see these leaders stand up and speak out about the need to keep our coalition active and keep the pressure on.

Martha Raddatz: Let me follow up on that. Would you strongly discourage Israel from going after Iran militarily? And do you believe when you leave office Iran will be pursuing a nuclear weapon?

THE PRESIDENT: I have made it very clear to all parties that the first option ought to be to solve this problem diplomatically. And the best way to solve it diplomatically is for the United States to work with other nations to send a focused message, and that is, that you will be isolated and you will have economic hardship if you continue trying to enrich.

As you might remember, I worked closely with Vladimir Putin on this issue, when I said that - when asked at one of these innumerable press conferences, did you - do you think they ought to have a civilian nuclear program, I said, of course, they should, but they can't be trusted to enrich.

And therefore, I agree with Russia that Russia - when Russia said she will provide enriched uranium for a civilian nuclear power program and will collect the enriched uranium, thereby negating the need for the Iranian regime to enrich at all.

And so we will continue working diplomatically.

#20

Medvedev dismisses McCain's call for Russia to be ousted from G8 RIA Novosti, July 3, 2008

MOSCOW - Russia's president has said that United States presidential candidate John McCain's pledge to seek Russia's expulsion from the G8 if elected was not a serious statement.

Russia joined the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations in 1997, resulting in the G8. Medvedev will represent Russia for the first time at the forum's summit in Hokkaido, Japan, on July 7-9.

"As far as I know, recently no one has been saying this. It is perfectly clear that any calls to expel Russia or to pressure Russia are simply not serious," Dmitry Medvedev said in an interview with G8 media on Thursday, in response to a reporter's question on McCain's comments.

In October last year, Republican candidate McCain said the G8 should become "a club of leading market democracies: It should include Brazil and India but exclude Russia." He cited "diminishing political freedoms, a leadership dominated by a clique of former intelligence officers, [and] efforts to bully democratic neighbors" in Russia.

Medvedev said the G8 exists "not because anyone likes or dislikes it, but because it has objectively the largest economies and the most important players in terms of foreign policy."

Attempts to restrict the group would damage the world order, he said.

#21

Foreign NGOs Lose Tax Status Moscow Times, July 3, 2008

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has signed a decree reducing the number of international organizations allowed to issue tax-free grants from 101 to just 12, Interfax reported Wednesday.

The sharp reduction could raise new fears about a crackdown on foreign nongovernmental organizations.

Groups whose grants will no longer be tax-exempt from Jan. 1 include the World Wildlife Fund (Switzerland), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Switzerland), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS (Switzerland), the Ford Foundation (U.S.), the Eurasia Foundation (U.S.) and the Royal Society (Britain), Interfax said.

The 12 organizations that made the tax-exempt list include the Commission of the European Communities, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the European Fund for the Support of Co-production and Distribution of Cinematographic and Audiovisual Works, the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, and several United Nations programs.

The previous list of 101 groups was approved by the government in March 2007.

Putin and other government officials have accused foreign NGOs of meddling in domestic politics and have drastically tightened registration and financial procedures for the groups in recent years.

#22

In Turnabout, Russia to Allow Permits for BP Workers

By Andrew E. Kramer

New York Times, July 3, 2008

MOSCOW - In a sign of apparent backpedaling by officials here, the Russian government said on Wednesday that it would expedite work permits for the chief executive of a BP joint venture, and five other senior staff members.

These executives will receive their permits on Thursday, a Federal Migration Service spokesman, Konstantin Poltoranin, said, and permits for 43 employees will be delivered within 10 days.

The announcement left unresolved a dispute over a sharply reduced quota for foreign employees at the BP joint venture, TNK-BP. The Russian authorities had approved 71 slots for foreign employees, which BP said corresponded to about 50 positions because duplicates were needed for expected employee turnover.

The government's concession does little to dispel the cloud over BP's work in Russia, which accounts for about 25 percent of the British company's worldwide oil output.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown plans to discuss BP's troubles in talks with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev next week during the Group of 8 summit meeting in Hokkaido, Japan, The Times of London reported on Wednesday.

TNK-BP was formed in August 2003 from the assets of TNK, Onako, Sidanco and most of BP's Russian assets. At the time, the Russian government was striking a relatively open stance regarding its petroleum resources. But as Russia becomes more nationalistic in its oil policy, BP has been under pressure from private shareholders and the government to reduce its equity stake in TNK-BP to less than 50 percent.

Most pressing is that the Russian shareholders with whom BP is feuding are suing in a Siberian court to invalidate the election of the directors of a subsidiary that controls 80 percent of BP's assets here. Loss of control over the board would deeply affect BP's operational control over the entire company. (Some assets in Ukraine and minor holdings in Russia are incorporated separately and would not be affected.)

TNK-BP's chief executive, Robert Dudley, had asked for 150 permits for foreign technical and managerial staff, corresponding roughly to the 100 positions the company has for foreign staff.

Separately, a labor dispute is continuing concerning 148 BP employees who had been sent to work temporarily at TNK-BP, but were told several months ago that they could not work legally at the company because their work permits covered only employment at BP proper.

The Russian partners have maneuvered for some time to reduce the foreign managerial presence at TNK-BP, though they deny they are doing so to gain greater control of the day-to-day operations. They say qualified but less-expensive Russian workers can be found to fill the jobs.

Mikhail Fridman, one of the Russian investors who together own half of the TNK-BP venture, said it had performed more poorly than other large oil companies, and he accused BP of blocking TNK-BP's international expansion. An implicit question is whether the Kremlin wants to take over the assets of TNK-BP, perhaps by forcing a sale to Gazprom, the giant Russian gas monopoly.

#23

U.S. Is in No Shape to Give Advice, Medvedev Says

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, July 3, 2008

MOSCOW - Russia's new president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, less swaggering than his predecessor but as touchy about criticism from abroad, said in an interview that an America in "essentially a depression" was in no position to lecture other countries on how to conduct their affairs.

With soaring oil revenues bolstering the Russian economy and Kremlin confidence, Mr. Medvedev brushed aside American criticism of his country's record on democracy and human rights. He also said that a revived Russia had a right to assume a larger role in a world economic system that he suggested should no longer be dominated by the United States.

Mr. Medvedev made his comments on Tuesday in a meeting with a small group of foreign journalists a day after the American treasury secretary, Henry M. Paulson Jr., appealed in Moscow for Russian investment in the United States. The symbolism of the visit resonated here, in that only a decade had passed since the Russian economy was in shambles and the country was desperate for Western aid.

Mr. Medvedev seemed to be seeking in the interview to raise his profile before attending the Group of 8 meeting of industrialized nations next week in Japan. Mr. Medvedev leads Russia in tandem with his predecessor and mentor, Vladimir V. Putin, who is now prime minister and is still widely considered Russia's pre-eminent leader.

In the interview, Mr. Medvedev was asked about a call by Senator John McCain of Arizona, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, to bar Russia from the Group of 8 because of its record on democracy. Mr. Medvedev, who easily won Russia's presidential election in March after the Kremlin hobbled the opposition, responded that the question of democracy was irrelevant to the Group of 8 and, besides, the United States had more pressing matters to attend to.

"The Group of 8 exists not because someone likes or dislikes it, but because objectively, they are the biggest world economies and the most serious players from the foreign policy point of view," Mr. Medvedev said. "Any attempts to put restrictions on anyone in this capacity will damage the entire world order."

He added, "I am sure that any administration of the United States of America, if it wishes to succeed, among other things, in overcoming essentially a depression that exists in the American economic market, must conduct a pragmatic policy inside the country and abroad."

Mr. Medvedev said world leaders should realize that the credit crunch and a gathering global recession signaled that the worldwide economic architecture needed to be overhauled. He did not specify how this should be done, but indicated it should entail a reduction in the influence of the United States.

“It has to be improved, it has to be more up-to-date, better protected from risks, and it must not suffer from national egoism, financial and economic egoism, but must be more fair toward other countries; this is absolutely evident,” he said. “This system cannot be oriented toward only one country and only one currency.”

A former law professor who has spent much of his career as a behind-the-scenes bureaucrat, Mr. Medvedev showed a wide-ranging knowledge of foreign and domestic issues, confidently answering questions for 90 minutes without notes and speaking at length without stumbling. The president, who is 42, spoke only in Russian but did not need an interpreter to understand questions posed in English.

Mr. Medvedev provided no glimpses of disagreements with Mr. Putin on policies or strategy, though their stylistic differences were readily apparent. Whereas Mr. Putin occasionally responds to questions with blunt retorts or salty language, Mr. Medvedev tends to offer demurrals and then to engage in a kind of academic discussion of issues.

As he has many times in recent weeks, Mr. Medvedev championed his proposals to reduce corruption, which he acknowledges is endemic in Russia. He was then asked whether he believed that corruption could be beaten back, considering that the country’s political system is dominated by a single party, Mr. Putin’s United Russia.

“A system that was built on the idea that one party holds all the truths demonstrated its weakness 20 years ago,” Mr. Medvedev said. “It failed to cope with new challenges and ceased to exist. That’s why, to ensure the competitive ability of our country on a global scale, we must make use of political competition, among other things. But it must be sensible. This is to say, competition, correctly built.”

Mr. Medvedev indicated that he would not get involved in the case of Mikhail B. Khodorkovsky, the former oil oligarch and Putin opponent convicted of financial crimes and sent to a Siberian prison. The authorities have recently brought new charges against Mr. Khodorkovsky, while his lawyers have mounted a campaign for his release.

Some political analysts have described Mr. Medvedev as more liberal than Mr. Putin and others in the Kremlin, in part because Mr. Medvedev did not serve in the security services. (Mr. Putin is a former K.G.B. agent who was head of its successor agency, the F.S.B.)

Mr. Medvedev often says his background as a lawyer plays a crucial role in his worldview, and when he was asked about his reputation, he returned to that theme. He said that when he was a student, he learned of the importance of the law, and of the right to private property. He said he also realized that there needed to be a struggle in Russia against what he has termed “legal nihilism.”

“For me, these are the ideas that I absorbed when I studied at university, as well as the value of human rights,” he said. “And in our country, they are based on the Constitution. Human rights and freedoms also must be defended unconditionally, and should be the priority of any government. It’s up to you as to how this set of values should be described.”

Asked about his political enemies, Mr. Medvedev conceded that some prominent people were disgruntled about his ascent, though he would not name them.

“I am positive that a certain number of politicians and a certain part of the population is not quite happy with the current configuration of power,” he said. “But this is what is called democracy.”

He added: “It would be ridiculous to name the destructive forces one by one. I am not an adherent of conspiracy theories. In real life, everything is so much simpler, if not banal.”