

WASHINGTON, D.C. April 3, 2009

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Richard Stone, NCSJ Chairman;
Alexander Smukler, NCSJ President;
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**



In Brief: Obama, Medvedev Meet at G-20

Dear Friend,

Since we will not be publishing the weekly update next Friday, this week's update is a special Passover two-week edition. We have included stories on many countries in the region, as well as information about the meeting between Presidents Obama and Medvedev in London at the G-20 summit on Wednesday.

From all accounts, this initial Obama-Medvedev meeting achieved its goal of setting an agenda for future U.S.-Russia relations. A wide variety of issues were discussed, including human rights. In addition, two papers were issued, one dealing with the START agreement and one dealing with the overall relationship. A senior administration official characterized the discussion as "frank," but not "defensive" on either side; a more formal summit between the two leaders is planned for July. There are several articles about this week's meeting and the state of relations between the U.S. and Russia.

On a troubling note, prior to the meeting, a prominent human rights activist in Moscow was beaten – the latest in a series of violent attacks against human rights activists and media representatives.

On behalf of the NCSJ leadership and staff, I want to wish you a Chag Pesach Sameach.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark B. Levin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. April 3, 2009

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#1a

Kyrgyzstan: Plea for a Fair Election

By Ethan Wilensky-Lanford

March 28, 2009 New York Times

More than 1,000 protesters rallied Friday in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, demanding that a presidential election scheduled for July 23 be fair. President Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power in 2005 after widely criticized elections set off a popular uprising, and parliamentary elections in late 2007 were condemned by international observers. The rally's leaders were opposition politicians who threatened to start "permanent

protest actions” calling for Mr. Bakiyev not to run unless his government met five demands by April 20, including inviting international observers to monitor the election.

#1b
Ukraine cites Jewish theater director
JTA, March 29, 2009

A Jewish Ukrainian theater director received a state honor.

Nikolay Berson was awarded the Order of Merit of the second grade on Friday according to a decree signed by Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko.

The decree recognized Berson for his “prominent personal contribution to the development of Ukrainian theatrical art, creative achievements, and high level of professionalism” on the occasion of International Theatre Day in the country.

He was among a group of Ukrainians to receive national honors from Yushchenko Friday.

Berson serves as the director of the Nikolayev Academic Ukrainian Theater of Drama and Musical Comedy.

#1c
Leviev company posts \$426 million loss
JTA, March 30, 2009

JERUSALEM -- Russian Jewish billionaire Lev Leviev's Africa Israel Group announced the largest loss in Israel's history.

The company lost \$426 million in 2008, it announced Monday.

Africa Israel, which is 75 percent owned by Leviev, had a net loss of \$637 million in the fourth quarter.

The company was affected by the global economic crisis and the drop in real estate value of its holdings in the United States and Russia.

Leviev has been the largest donor to Jewish education programs in the former Soviet Union. The Or Avner school network, which he founded and continues to fund, has had to cut its budget by one-third.

#1d
Ukrainian government returns more Torahs
JTA, March 30, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Ukraine returned more Torah scrolls to local Jewish communities.

The government on Friday transferred six old Torah scrolls to the Union of Religious Jewish Organizations of Ukraine.

Yakov Dov Bleich, the chief rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine who received the scroll fragments, told JTA that he considers the transfer a small step on the way toward all Torah scrolls and fragments being held in the Ukrainian State Archives being returned to their original communities.

“It seems they returned old, not exploitable Torah scrolls' fragments,” Bleich said.

Kiev is a home to between 17,000 and 30,000 Jews.

Some 85 damaged Torah scrolls and fragments were returned last week to the religious Jewish community in the Ukrainian city of Chernigov.

#1e

Sale of Jewish property in Lithuania thwarted JTA, March 30, 2009

PRAGUE -- A Lithuanian plan to sell a building that once housed the Vilna Ghetto Jewish library was halted by the U.S. Embassy, JTA has learned.

The library building, which the World Jewish Restitution Organization and Lithuanian Jewish community identify as Jewish community property, housed 450,000 books of Jewish literature in Vilnius under the Nazi occupation between 1941 and 1943.

Herbert Block, an executive vice president with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and a top official with the restitution group, said the embassy in the Lithuanian capital had informed him by e-mail that the Foreign Ministry had acceded to the embassy's request to cancel the sale, which was to have taken place April 8.

Lithuania is among the few countries in Europe that has yet to come up with a restitution or compensation plan for Jewish communal property.

"For eight years the Lithuanian government has been promising to come up with a plan, but so far nothing has come of it," Block told JTA Monday.

The library is on a list of 438 buildings claimed as Jewish property that were taken over by the Communist government of Lithuania after World War II. The U.S. Embassy in Vilnius argued that the Lithuanian government should not be selling disputed properties.

In fact, the sale was not announced to any Jewish authorities but was uncovered by a local non-Jewish American activist in Vilnius, Wyan Brent, who alerted Jewish groups in the United States.

The restitution organization and the Lithuanian Jewish community recently rejected a \$41 million compensation package for property, saying the sum, and how it was to be paid out over 10 years only if it was feasible for the government, was insufficient.

With numerous delays by previous governments and now the current government, the restitution process remains stalled, said Andrew Baker, director of international Jewish affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

Baker also was informed by the embassy of the library sale cancellation.

"It seems it was only blocked by a last-minute intercession," he said.

#1f

WWII mass Jewish grave discovered JTA, March 31, 2009

MOSCOW -- Investigators discovered a mass grave for 200 Jews in a western Ukrainian city.

Rabbi Mendel Teichman, the chief rabbi for the city of Uzhhorod, on the country's border with Slovakia, and the region, in recent weeks had come across an open area with no fence and no headstones in the local Jewish cemetery in recent weeks.

The rabbi then found decades-old historical documents stating that the grave site was the resting place for more than 200 Jews killed by the Nazis in World War II.

Before the war, Uzhhorod was part of Hungary and the city was known as Ungvar.

The rabbi took his discovery to the Rabbinical Center of Europe, which is now seeking the relatives of those resting in the mass grave in order to seek help in building a fence and monument at the site.

#1g
Lenin monument vandalized in Russian spa region
AP, April 2, 2009

ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia— Police say vandals have sprayed paint and drawn a swastika across a large painting of Vladimir Lenin on a mountainside in southern Russia.

The report of the vandalism comes a day after a bomb blew a large hole in a famous statue of Lenin in St. Petersburg.

The portrait on the Mashuk Mountain in Pyatigorsk was created in 1925 and had periodically been given a fresh coat of paint. The area has come to be known as Lenin Rocks, and a spa at the bottom of the mountain also carries the name.

Pyatigorsk police said Thursday that the vandals also drew anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi graffiti. The defacements were discovered last week.

#1h
Arrested pilgrims allege police abuse
JTA, April 2, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Jewish pilgrims stopped for speeding in a Ukrainian town say they were beaten by police.

Yakov Dov Bleich, chief rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine, told JTA that two fervently Orthodox pilgrims, citizens of Israel, who made a pilgrimage from London to the central Ukrainian town of Uman sued local police after they said they were beaten.

The police said the pilgrims, who were in Uman visiting the grave of the founder of the Bratslav movement, broke the speed limit twice and did not react properly after they were ordered to stop. One of the pilgrims and a police officer suffered injuries, according to Bleich.

The Uman city court found the pilgrims guilty of speeding and fined them. They also were ordered deported for resisting arrest.

"I don't think this is a Jewish issue, it's more a legal issue," Bleich told JTA.

Uman has become a mecca for Chasidim since 1808 when Rabbi Nahman, the founder of the Bratslav movement, died in the town and was buried there. Some 20,000 to 25,000 Jews visit Uman annually, many gathering there to celebrate the Jewish New Year.

#2
Lithuania May Turn to IMF, EU for Loan, Moody's Orchard Says
By Aaron Eglitis
Bloomberg, March 27, 2009

Lithuania may have to turn to the International Monetary Fund and the European Union for a loan if its budget deficit widens and funding costs remain high, said Kenneth Orchard, an analyst at Moody's Investors Service.

"Its possible that they will have to go to the IMF and the EU for extraordinary financial assistance" if the deficit widens, Orchard said in an interview on March 25 in Brussels.

Lithuania is stumbling toward its worst recession since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. The budget deficit may widen to 4.5 percent of gross domestic product this year as the economy contracts 9 percent, SEB Bankas forecasts. GDP slumped an annual 2 percent in the fourth quarter.

The government sold 166.3 million euros (\$226 million) of bonds through the first two months of 2009 in the domestic market with an average interest rate of 7.3 percent, and a further 50 million euros of litai-denominated bonds via private placements abroad, to finance the budget deficit, the Finance Ministry said on Feb. 27.

"We are concerned that the amounts they are raising are relatively small and seem to be at high rates," Orchard said.

Neighboring Latvia turned to a group led by the IMF and European Commission for a 7.5 billion euro bailout after it took over its second-biggest bank and its economy contracted 10.3 percent in the fourth quarter.

Calls Resisted

Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius has resisted calls from central bank Governor Reinoldijus Sarkinas, SEB Bankas economist Gitanas Nauseda and others to come to a standby agreement with the IMF for a loan.

Moody's rates Lithuania A2, the fifth-highest investment grade, with a negative outlook.

Standard & Poor's cut Lithuania's credit rating one level to BBB, the second lowest investment grade, on March 24 because of the country's worsening economic outlook and the threat to its chances of adopting the euro in 2011.

Further downgrades may follow should the situation deteriorate and the government fail to secure international aid, S&P analyst Eileen Zhang said then.

"Our baseline assumption is that the Lithuanian government will be securing extra financing, by which we mean the EU, IMF or other bilateral lenders," she said. "If the authorities fail to do so, then the risk will remain on the downside."

#3

World Bank loans 20 million dollars to Tajikistan

AFP, March 28, 2009

DUSHANBE — The World Bank approved Friday a 20-million-dollar (15-million-euro) grant to Tajikistan to help the Central Asian state weather the global economic crisis and keep up its reforms.

"The World Bank's board of executive directors today approved the 20-million-dollar grant to help the government of Tajikistan mitigate the impact of the global economic slowdown and continue to implement its medium-term reform program," the World Bank said in a statement.

"Tajikistan's growth is expected to fall to three percent in 2009, one-third the expansion rate enjoyed during 2000-2007, due mainly to the drop in remittances from Tajik working in Russia and to a decline in exports of cotton and other commodities," it said.

The influx of migrant workers who lost their jobs in Russia also put pressure on Tajikistan's social services, the bank said.

"Although we are glad to provide this much needed support for Tajikistan, it is clear from the current unfolding global economic crisis and its implications for Tajikistan that there is need for additional donor support," Motoo Konishi, director for Central Asia, said.

The grant would be the World Bank's third such loan to support Tajikistan's reform.

Tajikistan, an impoverished nation of 7.5 million which shares a porous border with Afghanistan, has been buffeted by the financial slowdown, leading to rolling blackouts across much of the mountainous country.

Influential think tank International Crisis Group last month warned that Tajikistan, whose economy has been hard hit by a fall in remittances from labourers working in Russia, was in danger of becoming a failed state.

#4

Tajikistan criticised over restrictive religion law

By Roman Kozhevnikov

Reuters, March 26, 2009

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan, a Muslim nation bordering Afghanistan, introduced a new religion law on Thursday which the United States has criticised as highly restrictive.

The law empowers the government to impose stricter control of religious groups in the former Soviet republic which tolerates only the state-approved version of Islam.

The law was signed by President Imomali Rakhmon on Thursday and will come into force after its official publication.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said the law would only "legalise harsh policies already adopted by the Tajik government against its majority Muslim population".

"The picture for religious freedom in Tajikistan is growing dim," the commission, which advises the U.S. government on religious freedom in the world, said ahead of the signing.

"The passage of this problematic new law could severely limit religious freedoms in Tajikistan," it said in a report.

Countries across former Soviet Central Asia, including Tajikistan, have been criticised in the West for using the threat of extremism as an excuse to crack down on political dissent and religious groups outside state-sponsored Islam.

The new law imposes censorship on religious literature and restricts performing rituals to state-approved venues. It makes it harder for new religious communities to get registration.

In Tajikistan, religion has been a particularly thorny issue since Rakhmon's Moscow-backed forces defeated an alliance of Islamists and liberals in a 1990s civil war.

Like elsewhere in Central Asia, most people in Tajikistan, a mountainous Persian-speaking nation, practice the Sunni branch of Islam but there is a substantial Shi'ite minority.

Other minorities include Protestant and Jewish communities. Last year Tajikistan demolished its only synagogue to make way for a presidential palace.

In a gesture possibly aimed at sweetening Thursday's decision, Khasan Asadullozoda, Rakhmon's brother-in-law, donated a new building to the Jewish community, community members said.

"We are extremely grateful," said chief rabbi Mikhail Abdurakhmanov. "Now we have a place of worship again."

Rakhmon tolerates little dissent and has been tightening his grip on power. Worried about resurgent Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan, he says his main goal is to maintain political and economic stability in his impoverished homeland.

The opposition, which is weak and carries little weight in domestic politics, criticised the law.

"People's religious rights are violated in every article of this law," said Khikmatullo Saifullozoda, one of the leaders of the main opposition Islamic Revival Party.

"It would have been more accurate to call this law not 'Law on the Freedom of Consciousness' but 'Law on its restriction'."

#5
European Court Seems to Rankle Kremlin
By Clifford J. Levy
New York Times, March 29, 2009

MOSCOW — Fed up with the brazen string-pulling and favor-trading in the corrupt Moscow courts, a judge named Olga B. Kudeshkina went public, criticizing the system in numerous interviews as little more than a legal bazaar — “an instrument,” as she put it, “for settling political, commercial or simply personal scores.”

When Ms. Kudeshkina was then dismissed, she joined a stampede of Russians in appealing their cases to the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled last month that she had been improperly disciplined.

But now, it seems, that path is becoming more difficult, as the Kremlin is blocking an overhaul of the European court that is intended to reduce a multiyear backlog of cases — many of them from Russia.

The dispute with the court has underscored the Kremlin's growing antipathy to international organizations and thrown into question the commitment of Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, to confronting corruption and what he has described as Russia's “legal nihilism.”

The strains may well be further aggravated because the court is about to rule on two appeals from Russia's most well-known prisoner, the former oligarch Mikhail B. Khodorkovsky.

The rulings of the court, which was established under the auspices of the Council of Europe, are binding on all its member countries.

If the court sides with Mr. Khodorkovsky, it could order a new trial, potentially setting up a pivotal clash with the Kremlin.

The human rights court, based in Strasbourg, France, plays an influential role in Europe, handling appeals from countries with a total population of roughly 810 million people. Russia is the only one of the 47 members that has not approved the reform plan, which needs unanimous support to move forward.

The court appears to have increasingly rankled the Kremlin by issuing rulings that highlight corruption, torture and other official misconduct in Russia, including the pervasive practice of what is known here as “telephone justice” — a politician calling and instructing a judge how to rule.

The Kremlin has responded to the Kudeshkina case and others by attacking the credibility of the European court. “Unfortunately, the decisions of recent months and even the last year give grounds for doubting the full objectivity, the impartiality, of the European court,” Russia's justice minister, Aleksandr V. Kononov, said last month.

Mr. Medvedev said in December that he respected the European court, but that it “cannot and should not replace the Russian justice system.” He gave no indication that the reforms would be approved.

Russia began taking part in the court in the late 1990s. In 2000, the court received 1,987 appeals against Russia, or 8 percent of the total, court officials said.

At the end of 2008, the number of cases filed against Russia had risen to 27,250, or 28 percent of the total, far more than any other country, and out of proportion to its population.

The jump in cases from Russia has caused delays running to several years, court officials said. (The Kudeshkina case, for example, was filed with the European court in July 2005.)

The court officials said the standoff with the Kremlin had turned so contentious that the court was seeking ways to adopt reforms without Russia’s permission, which would be an unusual breach of diplomatic practice.

“There is a real crisis at the court,” said Thomas Hammarberg, the human rights commissioner at the Council of Europe. “Everyone has been very critical of Russia about it.”

Russia’s judge on the European court, Anatoly I. Kovler, who was nominated by the Kremlin, recently warned that Russia risked being suspended from the Council of Europe because it was standing in the way of the procedural changes and had delayed complying with some of the court’s decisions.

The court does not take up the vast majority of appeals that it receives, often because plaintiffs have not exhausted their legal options in their countries. In 2008, for example, it decided to consider in depth 1,671 cases from all the member countries.

But the process of sifting through cases is time consuming, and the changes, known as Protocol No. 14, would scale back the number of judges needed to evaluate each case initially.

Protocol No. 14 was proposed in 2004, and Russia signed it in 2006. But the Russian Parliament, which is closely controlled by the Kremlin, must ratify it, and has not. Russian officials say the changes would tilt the court even more against Russia.

They have also stepped up their complaints about the court’s rulings, especially those involving the war in Chechnya.

In many decisions, the European court has found that the Russian military was responsible for the disappearance and presumed killing of Chechen civilians, mostly in 1999 and 2000, according to the European Human Rights Advocacy Center, a nonprofit group in London that specializes in these cases.

In its rulings, the European court often orders the Russian government to pay tens of thousands of dollars in compensation to Chechen plaintiffs.

The European court is expected to issue decisions soon on two appeals from Mr. Khodorkovsky, the former oligarch, which assert that his rights were violated during his arrest and first trial. If the European court rules in his favor and calls for a new trial, it would be a significant embarrassment for the Kremlin.

Russian prosecutors are currently trying Mr. Khodorkovsky in Moscow on new charges that could keep him incarcerated for many more years and dilute the impact of the coming European court rulings.

The European court also agreed recently to accept a multibillion-dollar lawsuit brought by the former management of Mr. Khodorkovsky’s oil company, Yukos, which was essentially seized by the government after his conviction. That decision is months away.

Prominent lawyers in Moscow said they were worried that the Khodorkovsky case might widen the rift over the European court, and urged the Kremlin to drop its opposition to Protocol No. 14.

Genri M. Reznik, a lawyer who is a member of a Kremlin advisory body called the Public Chamber, said senior officials needed to acknowledge that the Russian legal system was deeply troubled.

"We should not blame the mirror of the Strasbourg court if we are shown to have an ugly face," he said.

#6

Russia government must ward off social crisis: World Bank

By Gleb Bryanski and Toni Vorobyova

Reuters, March 30, 2009

MOSCOW - The Russian economy will contract by 4.5 percent in 2009 and the state needs to spend up to 1 percent of GDP to save some 4 million people from poverty and stave off social unrest, the World Bank said on Monday.

In its Russian Economic Report, the World Bank said the government should boost unemployment subsidies by 70 percent, increase child subsidies by 220 percent and raise pensions by 20 percent for a third of the poorest pensioners.

"The social situation has worsened so rapidly and so unexpectedly that it is important to shift the focus of the anti-crisis policy to the population," the World Bank's Lead Economist on Russia, Zeljko Bogetic, told a news conference.

Economists and political scientists are on alert for any signs the economic crisis is raising risks to Russia's political stability. Vladimir Putin's popularity over 10 years in power as president and now prime minister has been bolstered by booming commodities prices which helped raise the living standards of even some of the poorest Russians.

The forecast contraction in gross domestic product (GDP) is much sharper than the 2.2 percent expected by the Russian government, due to the World Bank's markedly more pessimistic view on the global economy.

"There are risks to the downside both on the global level and in Russia," Bogetic said.

During Russia's last recession a decade ago, the economy contracted 5.3 percent and the ruble lost two thirds of its value.

THREAT OF SOCIAL PRESSURE

A poll published last week by the independent Levada Center showed that 26 percent of Russians would be willing to take part in mass social protests about rising prices and falling living standards.

"Since there is a threat of a significant social pressure it would have been clever to pay attention and assign funds for social protection," Bogetic said, adding that aid to the poor may also boost domestic consumer demand.

"They will not buy expensive imported goods," he said. He said the government could also spend another 0.5 percent of GDP on infrastructure and supporting small and medium enterprises.

The Russian government approved a revised 2009 budget this month with a deficit of 8 percent of GDP but the World Bank said the energy exporter could sustain a 9 percent deficit due to its accumulated fiscal reserves.

The new U.S. administration called on major economies to use government spending to jumpstart growth but Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin has said a higher deficit would be inflationary.

"We do not regard inflation as a significant problem in the Russian economy in 2009," Bogetic said, forecasting that consumer prices would rise 11-13 percent this year.

The World Bank expects the global recession to end next year, with the Russian economy posting zero growth in 2010.

Bogetic said the current more flexible exchange rate policy was "favorable for the gold and forex reserves' preservation" and that the ruble has found a stable level after several weeks of managed devaluation, which ended in January.

"The exchange rate has reached a stable level which corresponds to the current oil prices," he said.

The World Bank's forecasts are based on the price for Russia's Urals oil blend at \$45 per barrel in 2009 -- broadly in line with the \$41 level assumed in the budget.

It sees capital outflows of \$170 billion this year -- in contrast to the Russian central bank which has revised its view to around \$79 billion from \$90 billion.

"Our estimates are based primarily on our view about scheduled repayments of banking and corporate sector (debt) of around \$130 billion and a significant slowdown of foreign direct investments," Bogetic said.

#7

Russia seeks top table seat at G20 summit AFP, March 30, 2009

MOSCOW - President Dmitry Medvedev heads to the G20 summit promoting a makeover of the global economic order designed to win Russia respect and keep major economies, America's in particular, in check.

Ahead of Thursday's summit in London, Russia has come up with an ambitious plan to overhaul the entire global financial order and even introduce a new supra-national currency.

Medvedev even said the international community should have a say when the world's richest countries make decisions with global implications, as in the US mortgage crisis.

But analysts doubt Russia's plans will get many backers among Group of 20 countries, be they established players or rising powerhouses such as Brazil, India and China.

"Global processes are under way to form new centres of economic power and it is clear Russia is not at the centre of such processes," said Vladimir Osakovsky, an analyst at Moscow-based UniCredit Bank.

"The Russian ideas are interesting to discuss, but hard to realize even in the mid-term perspective," he said.

Economists say that while some of Russia's ideas -- such as a world currency -- are currently unfeasible, others will fail more due to Moscow's lack of diplomatic heft.

Though Russia is a member of the Group of Eight industrial powers, it is still not among the 153 members of the World Trade Organisation and is side-lined at meetings of Group of Seven finance ministers.

And while Russia is among the top world energy producers and an undoubted political heavyweight, its economy is dwarfed by the United States and European Union.

"There are no grounds whatsoever for the realization of the supranational currency idea," said Ruslan Grinberg, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Economics Institute. "This is akin to building Communism."

Russia wants to revive its influence among former Soviet nations, handing out billions of dollars in loans and aid to neighbours and promoting the ruble as a future reserve currency.

While some of these plans show promise, Moscow's more ambitious goals for global influence ranging from Africa to South America, at least for now, lack substance, say analysts.

Part of Russia's proposals to the G20 include reform of institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose weaknesses it says have been exposed by the crisis.

The West, however, will not be in a rush to give developing economies a greater voice in how international lenders are run and will "rather jealously guard their positions," said Nikolai Podguzov, an analyst at Moscow-based investment bank Renaissance Capital.

Amid reports that the G20 meeting may be devoted to crisis management rather than long-term reform, Britain's Financial Times has reported that the British Foreign Office has already relegated Russia to the rank of second-division player.

Russia appears reluctant to accept this and has been talking up its reform plans for weeks.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin joined in efforts to promote Moscow's case ahead of the summit when he said Russia had spent a greater proportion of its GDP than any other country -- 4.5 percent -- in efforts to stem the crisis.

Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said ahead of the summit that on many issues Russia shared similar positions to "China and other countries."

Soon after Russia called for the creation of a supra-national currency, China moved forward with a similar initiative.

US President Barack Obama poured cold water on the idea and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said there would be more immediate issues to discuss at the summit.

Nonetheless, economists say that even if Russia is not among the most authoritative voices at the summit, getting a place at the table among the world's most influential developed and developing economies is a good start.

"I believe Russia should stick to the G20," said Grinberg, of the Economics Institute. For Russia, "collective leadership is important. It's humanity's dream," he said.

Other analysts said that Russia could expect greater attention for its ideas over time if it refrained from habitual use of aggressive rhetoric and saber rattling.

"It's just a matter of time and consistent policies," said Podguzov.

#8

Kremlin Should Seize This Obama Moment

By Vladimir Frolov

Moscow Times, March 30, 2009

In the runup to the first face-to-face meeting between Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama, expectations are running high in both Moscow and Washington that the meeting will finally usher in an era of serious constructive engagement in U.S.-Russia relations. Since Obama's inauguration, the atmosphere of the relationship has significantly improved.

On Jan. 29, Medvedev sent Obama a six-page letter outlining Russia's readiness to engage the United States on the entire global agenda -- from nuclear cuts to Afghanistan and North Korea. Obama responded on Feb. 9 with a less profusely worded but equally constructive message signaling the new U.S. resolve to engage Russia that Vice President Joseph Biden made public with his "hitting the reset button" speech in Munich.

The first substantive meeting between Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton this month went extremely well, according to the participants on both sides, with both Lavrov and Clinton pushing aides to work hard to start talks on a follow-on to the START treaty ahead of a Obama-Medvedev meeting on April 1.

Obama and Clinton have entrusted this issue to Rose Gottemoeller, nominated as assistant secretary of state for verification and compliance. This is a clear signal to Moscow of Washington's serious intentions. Another signal that was not lost upon the Kremlin was Clinton's appointment of Dan Fried, a former assistant secretary for Europe and a U.S. official despised by Moscow, to the glorious job of resettling Guantanamo prisoners.

Obama left the door open to canceling U.S. missile defense deployments in Central Europe, although his linking of missile defense to Russia's help in neutralizing Iranian nuclear threat is unworkable. Obama's support for the NATO open-door policy is palpable because the White House has put Ukraine's and Georgia's membership bids on the back burner, at least until more cohesive governments emerge there. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's call for "setting the alliance's borders" is likely to close the debate on NATO enlargement to Russia's satisfaction.

In Moscow, the desire to work with Obama's team is growing even as fears of being "duped" fuel suspicion. Moscow's priority seems to be to hold out for substantive changes in the U.S. position as proof of a genuine U.S. desire to take Russia's concerns into account. This stance could squander a strategic opportunity.

#9

Russia's Reset

Mr. Obama isn't contemplating change solely on the part of the United States

Editorial

Washington Post, March 30, 2009

WITH A FIRST presidential meeting set for this week between Barack Obama and Russia's Dmitry Medvedev, it appears that the two sides may have different ideas of what to expect from the "reset" in relations that the Obama administration has promised.

The Russian view seems to be that the resetting has to come primarily from the Americans. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov furthered that impression in an interview with the Financial Times last week. "Practically on any problematic issue which we inherited from the past eight years, I understand the Obama administration is undertaking a review which we welcome," Mr. Lavrov said. Russian officials appear to hope that such a review will mean less U.S. pressure to form a united front against Iran's development of a nuclear weapon and, above all, acceptance of a Russian "sphere of influence" over countries that were once part of the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact -- what Mr. Medvedev has called "a region of privileged interest."

Indications from Washington, recently reinforced by Mr. Obama, suggest that his administration does not share this view of a one-sided need for change. The administration is hoping for improved relations across a range of issues, including Iran, Afghanistan, and fighting terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons. It will be more willing than the Bush administration to engage in arms control talks, especially to extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires at the end of this year. But Mr. Obama has given no signs of being less alarmed than was President George W. Bush about Iran's nuclear program and certainly has shown no willingness to acquiesce in the "privileged" position that Mr. Medvedev claims over his neighbors.

On the contrary, at the same time that Vice President Biden introduced the "reset" concept, in a speech in February in Munich, he also repudiated the concept of spheres of influence. And after meeting with the secretary general of NATO last Wednesday, Mr. Obama reiterated the point. "My administration is seeking a reset of the relationship with Russia," the president said, "but . . . we are going to continue to abide by the central belief that countries who seek and aspire to join NATO are able to join NATO." The message: Georgia and Ukraine, former Soviet republics, should be free to form and join alliances as they choose, notwithstanding Russia's vitriolic objections.

The administration believes, in other words, that it can develop constructive relations with Russia without sacrificing the interests of Russia's neighbors. Whether such a reset will be acceptable to Mr. Medvedev or to Russia's de facto top ruler, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, remains to be seen.

#10

The far Right rises as Ukraine crumbles

By Adrian Blomfield

The Daily Telegraph, March 30, 2009

EUROPE'S economic crisis has allowed the extreme Right in Ukraine to capitalise on the turmoil engulfing the former Soviet republic.

An unexpected regional election victory by a previously marginal ultra-nationalist party is among a series of developments in Ukraine that threaten to fulfil the worst fears of G20 leaders as they gather for their summit in London.

Lacking the protection of European Union membership, Ukraine has few of the safeguards that prevent its Western neighbours from falling into ruin. A sharply weaker currency, a collapse in exports and an economy expected to contract by at least six per cent this year has forced the country to seek pounds 11 billion from the International Monetary Fund.

Even this lifeline is endangered by a poisonous feud between President Viktor Yuschenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, the prime minister.

The two rivals led the Orange revolution in 2004, before falling out in spectacular style. As Mrs Tymoshenko plots to take Mr Yuschenko's job, ordinary Ukrainians are showing signs of rejecting them both. On March 15, voters in the Ternopil region of western Ukraine elected a new regional assembly. This was an Orange revolution bastion, a region that has long sought to embrace the West and shun Russia.

But it is also has Ukraine's highest unemployment. In a crowded field, the previously little-known Freedom Party won 50 of the assembly's 120 seats as voters embraced its hard Right leader, Oleg Tyagnibok, who has urged the expulsion of all Jews and Russians from Ukraine.

"The problem is less the popularity of the nationalists than the universal disappointment with mainstream parties," said Viktor Chumak, a political scientist in Ukraine's capital, Kiev. "Voters are sympathising with radicals more and more as a result of the crisis."

So concerned are the authorities with the Ternopil result, which they claim was rigged, that commentators are predicting the presidential election could be postponed. Some even say the constitution could be changed so the president is chosen by parliament rather than the people.

Critics argue that mainstream politicians - the squabbling Orange revolution ruling alliance and the equally discredited pro-Russian opposition - only have themselves to blame because of their failure to lead in a time of crisis.

As the danger of political radicalism grows, Ukraine is in danger of formal bankruptcy. Oleksandr Suhonyako, the president of the Association of Ukrainian Banks, gave warning that the country could default on its sovereign debt because of political division and ineptitude.

"In a way, the crisis in Ukraine is less an economic one than a political one," he said. "The key political leaders do not understand how to lead the country out of crisis. If the political crisis continues, we could see the worst case scenario. The threat of sovereign default is there."

The country's government debt, at only 20 per cent of GDP, is well below the recognised danger threshold. The main concern is over corporate debt, with fears that banks could collapse, triggering crises in the financial sectors of western European countries such as Austria, which is significantly exposed to Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Western politicians forced Mr Yuschenko and Mrs Tymoshenko to pledge to work together to fulfill the IMF's conditions for the rescue package.

The prime minister, however, quickly reneged. On the day she pledged to use her parliamentary majority to pass the laws recommended by the IMF, Mrs Tymoshenko marshalled her forces to sack the foreign minister, one of the president's allies. The IMF's money is still being withheld.

#11

Kazakh minister invites chief rabbis to inter-religious conference with Iran

By Etgar Lefkovits

Jerusalem Post, March 26, 2009

A senior Kazakh minister has invited Israel's chief rabbis to participate in an inter-religious conference in Kazakhstan this summer with Christian and Muslim leaders from around the world, including from Iran.

The invitation to participate in the third conference of "World Leaders of Traditional Religions," which will take place in July, was presented to Israel's two chief rabbis by the Chairman of Kazakhstan's parliamentary Committee on International Relations Defense and Security, Kuanysh Sultanov, during a four-day visit to Israel.

The gathering, which has been held twice in the past and has drawn several hundred people, has included religious leaders from both Iran and Syria, who plan to attend this year's conference as well.

"The role of religious leaders is to build peace based on tolerance and mutual respect," Sultanov said Thursday in an interview with The Jerusalem Post.

The ninth largest country in the world with a territory the size of Western Europe, Kazakhstan is ethnically and culturally diverse, in part due to mass deportations of many ethnic groups to the huge Eurasian country during Stalin's rule.

Kazakhstan declared itself an independent country on December 16, 1991, the last Soviet republic to do so.

Although Islam is the primary religion, followed by Orthodox Christianity, a moderate Kazakhstan allows freedom of religion, with a whopping 46 different religious beliefs registered in the country of 16 million, including about 40,000 Jews.

"Unfortunately many in the West confuse our country with Afghanistan," he said.

On his second visit to Israel, the 63-year-old Kazakh parliamentarian, who also heads the Israeli-Kazakh partnership committee, said that Kazakhstan was opposed to nuclear proliferation all over the world, and not only in neighboring Iran, with which Kazakhstan has friendly political and economic relations.

"We support the resolution of the UN regarding Iran's nuclear program," he said tersely. "Taking into account that Iran is a member of the international community, it should respect the opinion of the international community."

"We would like to stress that regarding nuclear proliferation we are concerned not only about Iran but about all countries in the world," he added.

The Islamic Republic has sought to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an intergovernmental mutual-security organization, previously known as the Shanghai Five, which was founded in 2001 by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Sultanov said that a decision on the Iranian request, which is still being deliberated, will only be made by consensus of the six-country group, and is not a matter for Kazakhstan alone to decide.

#12

As Jewish givers pull back in FSU, Christian group steps in

By Grant Slater

JTA, March 27, 2009

MOSCOW -- Claps and cheers rang through the cavernous foyer of the Moscow State University of Management as two dozen students in a program for Jewish community professionals stepped up to receive their diplomas.

The cheers filled the small room, but outside their echo faded in the school's business wing -- perhaps auguring the daunting challenges these newly minted MBAs face as they head out into a Russian Jewish community caught in the global economic crisis.

"Chances are you will have more clients needing help from your programs at exactly the time when you have less money to help them," warned Carol Saivetz, a sponsor of the master's in business administration program in which the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee partnered with Moscow's leading management school, with funds from the Fred and Rita Richman Family Foundation.

Starting last August, the financial crisis has permeated the organized Jewish community in the former Soviet Union, spreading at different rates in different countries. Ukraine has been the hardest hit in the region, with an inflating currency that has the country teetering on collapse.

In recent months, the International Fellowship for Christians and Jews has stepped in to temporarily prop up children's welfare operations across the former Soviet Union, especially in Ukraine. But the funds will last only until the end of the academic year in June, warned the group's president, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein.

#13

Russia-U.S. Rivalry In Post-Soviet Space Could Be 'A Game With Certain Rules'

Interfax-AVN, March 30, 2009

Russia and the United States will continue vying for influence in the post-Soviet space, but more compromises will be made as the competition continues, said Sergei Rogov, director of the U.S. and Canada Studies Institute.

"Competition will continue in this sphere of course," Rogov said at a news conference at Interfax on Monday.

This rivalry has been a zero sum game over the past few years, mostly focused on "who will press out whom," he said. And this principle made itself felt particularly vividly in the matter of Ukraine and Georgia's accession to NATO, Rogov said.

"But if progress is made in the talks between Russia and the United States - in disarmament matters for instance, in nonproliferation, and cooperation in Afghanistan - it will have a definite impact on competition in the post-Soviet space," the experts said.

The game without rules could evolve into a game with certain rules, he said.

"The refusal to admit Ukraine and Georgia to NATO already signals a compromise is possible in this sphere," Rogov said.

Asked whether a Russian-American commission could be set up similar to the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, Rogov said a coordination at the level of the U.S. secretary of state and Russian foreign minister is at issue now.

#14

Building Russian-U.S. Bonds

By Dmitry A. Medvedev

Washington Post, March 31, 2009

MOSCOW -- It is hard to dispute the pessimistic assessments of the Russian-American relationship that prevailed at the end of last year. Unfortunately, relations soured because of the previous U.S. administration's plans -- specifically, deployment of the U.S. global missile defense system in Eastern Europe, efforts to push NATO's borders eastward and refusal to ratify the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. All of these positions undermined Russia's interests and, if implemented, would inevitably require a response on our part.

I believe that removing such obstacles to good relations would be beneficial to our countries -- essentially removing "toxic assets" to make good a negative balance sheet -- and beneficial to the world.

This will require joint efforts. The exchange of letters between myself and President Obama this year showed mutual readiness to build mature bilateral relations in a pragmatic and businesslike manner. For that we have a "road map" -- the Strategic Framework Declaration our countries signed in Sochi in 2008. It is essential that the positive ideas in that declaration be brought to life. We are ready for that.

Possible areas of cooperation abound. For instance, I agree with President Obama that resuming the disarmament process should become our immediate priority. The wish to ensure absolute security in a unilateral way is a dangerous illusion. I am encouraged that our new partners in Washington realize this.

It also appears that we all understand the need to search for collective solutions to the problems facing Afghanistan, with the involvement of all influential players. In this spirit, Moscow hosted a broad-based conference on Afghanistan under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We welcome the U.S. initiative to convene a United Nations conference in the Netherlands. It is critical that Russia and the United States view these conferences as mutually reinforcing rather than competitive.

Neither Russia nor the United States can tolerate drift and indifference in our relations. I spoke in Washington last November about the need to put an end to the crisis of confidence. To begin with, we should agree that overcoming our common negative legacy is possible only by ensuring equality and mutual benefit and by taking into account our mutual interests. I am ready for such work with President Obama on the basis of these principles, and I hope to begin as early as tomorrow at our first meeting in London before the Group of 20 summit.

The state of the global economy is a great concern to all. We can ensure the sustainability of the global financial system only by making its architecture mutually complementary and reliant on a diversified system of regional reserve currencies and financial centers. During the summit, Russia and the United States can help lead the effort to establish universal rules and disciplines that would apply to all parties without exception. We should also think together of whether it might be expedient to introduce a world supranational reserve currency, potentially under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund.

In bilateral relations, we need to see more successful investment projects, joint research and development by companies, and increased trade in high-tech products.

The end of the Cold War and subsequent globalization fundamentally altered the geopolitical context of our relations and vastly increased the importance of leadership. Today, effective leadership must be collective, based on the desire and ability to find common denominators for the interests of the international community and major groups of states. The G-20 summits are a major step toward this.

I am convinced that Russia and the United States can offer much to the world while maintaining our special responsibility in world affairs. These opportunities are most visible on the issues of strategic stability and nuclear security. The nature of the Russian-U.S. relationship to a large extent determines transatlantic politics, which could use trilateral cooperation among the European Union, Russia and the United States as its pillar.

The need to restart our cooperation is prompted in part by the history of our relations, which includes a number of highly emotional moments -- diplomatic support provided by Russia to the United States at critical points of America's development, our joint fight against fascism and the era of detente.

In his inaugural address, President Obama explicitly expressed his understanding that the United States needed to change together with the rest of the world. His speech deeply impressed me with its unbiased assessment of America's problems. I agree that greatness is never a given. It must be earned.

Long ago, Alexis de Tocqueville predicted a great future for our two nations. So far, each country has tried to prove the truth of those words to itself and the world by acting on its own. I firmly believe that at this turn of history, we should work together. The world expects Russia and the United States to take energetic steps to establish a climate of trust and goodwill in global politics, not to languish in inaction and disengagement. We cannot fail to meet those expectations.

#15

World Bank Sees Slump in Russia Worsening

By Ellen Barry

New York Times, March 31, 2009

MOSCOW — The World Bank released a grim report on Russia on Monday, projecting a 4.5 percent contraction in the economy in 2009 and warning that the financial crisis would push 5.8 million Russians into poverty unless the government shifted more spending to poor families.

The report was a sharp revision of the World Bank's November forecast, which predicted an increase of 3 percent in gross domestic product in 2009. World Bank analysts also took a more pessimistic view than the Russian government, whose experts are predicting a 2.2 percent contraction.

The report praised the government's \$85 billion anticrisis program, which stabilized Russia's banks and prevented financial panic. But it said too little had gone to households — a hazard in a society where 37 million people, a quarter of the population, lives near the poverty line.

"It is a somewhat disturbing development that we would like to draw attention to," said Zeljko Bogetic, the World Bank's chief economist on Russia. "The challenge is now to act quickly."

During the hours after the report was released, the ruble slipped to about 34.2 per dollar, its lowest rate in 10 days, and both of Russia's main stock indexes dropped more than 3 percent. Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov told reporters that he believed that the World Bank report was too pessimistic and said the government had asked experts to review the forecast.

Among the bank's discouraging conclusions was that Russia cannot expect the kind of vibrant, "V-shaped" recovery that it saw after its 1998 currency crisis.

Though Russia weathered the "rapid tsunami" that followed the collapse of Lehman Brothers last September, Mr. Bogetic said, lower household spending and a pileup of collapsing corporate loans could develop into a "silent tsunami," suppressing global markets until at least the middle of 2010.

“As the crisis continues to spread to the real economy around the world,” the report said, “initial expectations that Russia and other countries would recover fast are no longer likely.”

The World Bank report addresses a particular worry of Russian authorities: that unemployment will translate into civil unrest. Already, nearly 6.4 million Russians are unemployed and 1.1 million are on forced leave or working part-time schedules.

By the end of 2009, unemployment will probably reach 12 percent, the World Bank predicts. The poverty rate will climb to 15.5 percent, erasing some of the gains made in the last decade, when poverty fell to 10 percent from about 20 percent, the report said.

The report recommends a package of payments, including increases of 70 percent in unemployment subsidies and 220 percent in child welfare payments, which Mr. Bogetic said “could alleviate some of this social pain.”

“These instruments are better than all the others in reaching the poor,” he said. “You need to jack them up sufficiently.”

The report gives high marks to Russia for “responding fairly massively” to the onset of the financial crisis, spending a projected 6.7 percent of its G.D.P. on anticrisis measures when the internationally recommended rate is 2 percent. As a result, Russia avoided a wave of bankruptcies and bank closings, an achievement that “somewhat surprised” most foreign analysts, Mr. Bogetic said.

The World Bank revised its forecast for the price of crude oil to \$45 a barrel, increasing slightly to \$53 in 2010. The average price of a barrel of oil in 2008 was \$97.

#16

The Disorder of Conferring With Russia

By John Vinocur

New York Times, March 31, 2009

BRUSSELS — When Barack Obama goes one-on-one this week in London with President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia he will be entering talks of exceptional difficulty.

The United States seeks possible Russian assistance in turning Iran away from nuclear weapons and Russian cooperation in a framework for an ambitious new disarmament plan. But it will be doing so at a time when the American military’s view of a new, noxious Russia is hardening.

The big problems (and great contradictions) in a vast attempt to engage with Russia were encapsulated in congressional testimony given in Washington last week. American generals basically said Russia’s post-Cold War innocuousness was over and that its potential threat to NATO and its friends in Europe and Eurasia was now such that America should abandon its plans to draw down its forces in Europe.

They could have been talking on their own, of course — although what politically astute military man would risk crossing his commander in chief just two months into his term? The fact is, Gen. John Craddock, NATO’s top commander and chief of U.S. forces in Europe, stated that the West’s basic post-Cold War notion about Russia had been “turned upside down” by its invasion of Georgia last August.

That assumption, he said, was that “after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, there were no borders under threat of invasion in Europe and Eurasia.”

Now, General Craddock went on, “I think that assumption has been proven false.”

There was more. The general described the Russians’ presence in Georgia and cutoff of European gas supplies in January as actions that “suggest their overall intent may be to weaken European solidarity and systematically reduce U.S. influence.”

In a world that doesn't want another Cold War, General Craddock, tossing in some maybes for courtesy and conditionality's sake, sounded like a man who had marked the close of an easier era. He finds that a palpable American "presence" in Europe, and providing the additional military credibility necessary to back up NATO's Article 5 pledge to come to the aid of a member under attack, are the best response to his new threat assessment.

But what about political credibility?

Presumably, General Craddock's message, while minus Obama's initials at the bottom, was meant to be read in Moscow and Europe as having a measure of authority before the U.S. president and Mr. Medvedev meet in the margins of the G-20 meeting in London.

All the same, a dubious, show-me Republican from New York, John McHugh, ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, poked at the administration's contradictions.

Like General Craddock, Representative McHugh supports U.S.-Russia conversations. But the congressman pointed to the potential cross-purpose of bolstering NATO allies who see Russia actively wanting them back in its zone of influence, and, the risks, perhaps "unnecessarily" taken by the administration, in seeking "a grand bargain" with the Russians.

The ultimate risk would be destroying NATO if American security guarantees to its members appeared lessened as a result of trade-offs in talks with the Russians.

While General Craddock clearly tried to eliminate that concern, the immediate difficulties of making headway with the Russians — pressing the reset button just the right amount — were reinforced last week.

Prime illustration: When the Czech Republic's government fell in a no-confidence vote last Tuesday, it raised the question of the country's commitment to continue taking part in the American plan to build a missile shield aimed at countering eventual Iranian nukes.

The shield, opposed by Russia as a security threat (some threat — it would represent 10 interceptors defending against thousands of Russian missiles) is often described as a potential Obama administration bargaining chip in exchange for Russia's agreement to help to block Iran's nuclear program.

Since it doesn't require Gary Kasparov's tactical genius to see that the Americans soon may have nothing to barter, a logical Russian move is to mark time and wait. In the extreme, that would be for the rich fallout of either an attack on Tehran's atomic installations or the United States backing down from its position that Iranian nukes are "unacceptable."

Barely a day later, Medvedev's office initiated another problem.

It announced the creation of a special armed forces group in the Arctic to "ensure military security under various military-political circumstances." The region, with its potential energy wealth, is an element of rising concern as America urges NATO to focus on energy security issues involving Russian dominance of Europe's source of supply.

At the same time, the Russian Foreign Ministry deemed as an "unfriendly act" against Moscow a pledge by the European Union to help modernize Ukraine's gas infrastructure. The Europeans, (oh the shame), had not discussed the matter beforehand with Russia, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was considering a review of ties with the European Union.

NATO's turn for admonition came Friday. Its statement of interest March 5 in resuming official contacts with its Russian counterparts, broken last August, was "not enough," Moscow's ambassador to NATO said. He then announced that "words acceptable to Russia are needed in the final declaration of the NATO summit" in France and Germany April 3 and 4.

Not exactly the more forthcoming country some have expected to emerge from its battering in the global economic crisis. Instead, it's one that reflects General Craddock's view that future relations with Russia are likely to be more difficult than at any time since the Cold War.

The key now, he said, was hunting for a balance between talking to the Russians and dealing with them through NATO.

In his testimony a week ago, General Craddock was not taking much of a leap in the dark when he added, "I think balance is a difficult thing to find."

#17

NATO's Hard Choices

By Charles A. Kupchan

New York Times, March 31, 2009

NATO's 60th anniversary summit will surely be dominated by its mission in Afghanistan. And rightly so; NATO's ability to advance Afghanistan's security and stability has become the litmus test of the alliance's effectiveness.

But even as NATO confronts this immediate challenge, it must also open a searching debate about three over-the-horizon issues that it can no longer afford to push off — its relationship to Russia, its decision-making rules and its potential transformation into a global alliance of democracies.

Whatever the merits of NATO enlargement — and they are many — the eastward expansion of the alliance has unquestionably come at the expense of its relationship with Russia. To be sure, Russians themselves bear primary responsibility for the recent backsliding on democracy as well as their bouts of foreign policy excess, the war in Georgia most notable among them. But the perception among Russia's leadership and its public alike that NATO's continuing expansion impinges on their country's security and prestige has certainly not helped matters.

The way out of this bind is to find a formula for encouraging Russia to become a stakeholder in Europe's security order; a participant in, rather than an object of, NATO's evolution.

At this point, the immediate goal is not finding the precise formula for reaching out to Moscow, but beginning a strategic conversation that makes clear that NATO members are sincerely committed to anchoring Russia within the Euro-Atlantic community. The conversation can begin by exploring ways to make more of the NATO-Russia Council. NATO members should pick up on Moscow's call for fresh thinking about a "new European security architecture." This dialogue must be backstopped with concrete strategic cooperation on issues such as missile defense, access to Afghanistan and diplomacy with Iran.

Ongoing enlargement also forces the issue of decision-making reform. The alliance has 26 members and counting; as its ranks grow in number and diversity, continued reliance on consensus may well become a recipe for paralysis.

In addition, the more complex strategic landscape in which NATO operates has diluted the solidarity that NATO enjoyed during the Cold War. The sharp disagreements that have arisen over Afghanistan and over offering membership to Georgia and Ukraine are not fleeting differences that will soon disappear. They are by-products of the inevitable divergence of interest and threat perception that has accompanied NATO's adaptation to the post-Cold War world. Like it or not, NATO is growing more unwieldy and a consensus more elusive.

Such divergence hardly spells NATO's fracture, but it does mean the alliance must adjust how it reaches decisions. Members are unlikely to give up the consensus rule on matters of war and peace. However, the alliance should forge a more flexible approach to decision-making on most other issues.

Finally, members should debate the calls, primarily coming from American voices, to transform NATO into a global alliance of democracies. Recasting NATO's relationship with Russia and reforming decision-making require careful deliberation. The proposal for NATO to go global does not; it should be dismissed.

The mission in Afghanistan, coupled with ongoing commitments in the Balkans, is already testing NATO's resources and cohesion, making it hard to imagine that the alliance should contemplate tackling new challenges in Kashmir or the Gaza Strip. Moreover, extending NATO membership to the likes of India, Israel, Japan or Australia would not only prove uniquely contentious for the alliance but also saddle it with commitments likely to go unmet.

NATO should by all means forge strategic partnerships with countries and regional groupings willing to contribute to the common cause. But prudence requires that NATO focus on helping others help themselves — providing assistance and training, serving as an institutional model, on occasion partnering with local states in limited missions — all to the service of other security organizations around the globe that can be as successful in their own regions as NATO has been in Europe.

NATO's 60th anniversary comes at a time of challenge and strain for the alliance. Against the backdrop of the mission in Afghanistan, NATO would be wise to consolidate its gains by reaching out to Russia, updating its decision-making to reflect its broader membership and recognizing the limits of its own success.

Charles A. Kupchan is professor of international affairs at Georgetown University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. A fuller version of this article is available at www.nato.int/review.

#18

Geopolitical Diary: What Russia Will and Won't Trade With Washington Stratfor.com March 31, 2009

The Russians have been projecting optimism about upcoming meetings with the Americans in Europe, reinforcing the "reset button" theme that the Obama administration had introduced. However, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev gave a speech Sunday night with a somewhat different sensibility. Regarding the U.S. proposal that Washington would make concessions on ballistic missile defense (BMD) in Europe in return for pressure against Iran by Moscow, Medvedev said, "I don't think that any trade-offs are possible in this respect. Any information as to replace one issue with another one is not true; this is not a serious talk. But I have no doubt that we shall discuss both issues — that of ABM (anti-ballistic missile) defense and of the situation around Iran's nuclear program. I believe that President Obama thinks the same way."

Medvedev went on to say, "As regards the ABM, as regards the deployment of the notorious capabilities in Europe, our position has always been clear: We should not create ABM elements — a comprehensive antimissile system is required. And Russia is ready to become engaged in this system, because we are also interested in securing our country and our citizens from threats posed by certain problematic states. But the point is that this should be done through common efforts rather than by deploying any missiles or radars along our borders when a real doubt arises as to what lies behind all this. Is it done to make us nervous or in order to really prevent some threats?"

In other words, there can be no quid pro quo on Iran. However, the Russians would entertain a comprehensive ABM system, jointly developed and presumably under some sort of international control, as opposed to American BMD installations along Russian borders, since the Russians have doubts about the real motives behind the deployment.

We translate the Russian position in this way. First, Russia's relationship with Iran is too valuable to Moscow — and too painful for Washington — to be traded for a BMD installation in Poland. The price for Iran will be much higher than that. Second, the real issue is not the BMD system in Poland but the longer-range plans the United States might have on the Russian border. The Russians are far more concerned about other U.S. bases in Poland and other arms deliveries to the Polish military and to the Baltic states that are part of NATO. It is the unstated plans that make the Russians nervous, not the BMD system.

The solution Moscow proposes would eliminate the problem \rightarrow for Russia. First, it either would eliminate the need for bases in Poland or at least place those facilities under international control. Second, it would represent a transfer of critical technology to Russia and to all participants. The United States is not going to internationalize its hard-won and costly BMD technologies entirely. Washington has offered to share some technology to enable the Russians to build their own system, but not to write a blank check, or to avoid placing installations in Poland that make Russia nervous.

This last is the critical point. The Russians don't want the United States using Poland as a base for containing Russia, and they fear the BMD is simply the first of many military installations. Even less do they want U.S. and NATO forces deploying into the Baltic states. They might trade pressure against Iran in return for guarantees that Poland and the Baltics would serve as a neutral buffer zone, but not for anything less.

If the Americans concede on this point, then NATO \rightarrow under internal pressure already \rightarrow would be dead. It would mean that the guarantees built into NATO membership would not apply to Poland and the Baltics, given that NATO would have guaranteed the Russians not to deploy defensive forces there. Moreover, the Americans are not certain the Russians have all that much influence in Iran. They might trade BMD for a major Russian effort. The United States won't neutralize part of NATO in exchange for a good try.

As with the rest of the meetings, there is a superficial collegiality in place. Beneath the surface, it is a very different meeting. Obama tabled his Afghanistan plan on Friday, setting up a discussion of European contributions to the effort. Medvedev rejected the American proposal on BMD-Iran last night, letting the Americans know \rightarrow if they didn't already \rightarrow that there would be no deal. Everyone is putting their cards on the table. It is not clear whose cards are better at the moment, but it is clear the stakes are getting higher.

#19
Obama's 50-50 Russia Strategy
Successful arms-control talks between Russia and the U.S. could also help matters in Iran and Afghanistan.
By Andrew Nagorski
Newsweek April 6, 2009

Even to some of the closest observers of Russian foreign policy, it's almost impossible to know which direction Moscow is headed. One day it's threatening to station missiles aimed at Poland in its western enclave of Kaliningrad; the next, it's proclaiming its eagerness to take up Washington's offer to press the "reset button" on U.S.-Russia relations. One day, it's vowing to help with supply routes for NATO forces in Afghanistan; the next, it's offering Kyrgyzstan some \$2 billion in loans and aid, emboldening the Central Asian country to demand the closure of the U.S. air base there. One day, it's signaling its solidarity with Western efforts to stop Iran from building nuclear weapons; the next, it's refusing to rule out the sale of sophisticated S-300 ground-to-air missiles to Tehran.

All this raises a key question: at President Barack Obama's meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in London on April 1, which Russia will he be seeing? Most likely, both leaders will accentuate the positive, voicing hopes for a new cooperative relationship between their two countries—and for good reason: Moscow and Washington have more in common than one might think.

For starters, both sides are eager for new nuclear-arms-control agreements that would allow them to scale back their arsenals and prevent a new arms race that neither side can afford in the midst of the current economic crisis. And the history of U.S.-Russian relations shows that talks on doomsday weapons tend to set the tone on all issues. A breakthrough on arms control could spill over into other fronts, including Afghanistan and Iran.

Moscow is more worried than it lets on about the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran, despite its major commercial and arms deals with Tehran. Like Washington, it is well aware of the potential wild card this could be. An Iran armed with nuclear weapons would have a huge psychological impact, raising the confidence of

Muslims throughout the region—including in rebellious regions of southern Russia and the ex-Soviet republics over the border.

The same factor—resurgent Islam—makes the quest for stability in Afghanistan as important to Russia as it is to the United States. Washington worries that Muslim extremists could spark more terrorist attacks on Western targets; Russia is concerned that Afghanistan's failure would spill over into Tajikistan and other border states, where Muslim extremists would destabilize pro-Russian governments.

In one sense, Afghanistan is a live threat to Russia. Victor Ivanov, the head of Russia's anti-narcotics service, recently warned that a massive influx of heroin from Afghanistan is "a key negative factor for demography and a blow to our nation's gene pool." With Russia facing a sharp drop in its population because of alcoholism and an abysmal health-care system, the heroin explosion is only worsening the downward spiral. An estimated 2.5 million Russians are now addicts, according to the Ministry of Health.

Still, reaching any agreement with the prickly Medvedev—Vladimir Putin regime will be a struggle. The Obama administration is well aware of just how quickly U.S.-Russia relations can sour. When George W. Bush took office, he too expressed his eagerness for a new relationship with Russia. Then-President Putin reciprocated the sentiment. Yet the relationship soon degenerated into acrimony. After last summer's brief Georgia-Russia war, relations plunged into the deep freeze.

Russia's deteriorating economic situation may further exacerbate tensions. Over the past several months much of the wealth generated by soaring energy prices has evaporated, and the Kremlin has reacted furiously to the first manifestations of social discontent, dispatching Interior Ministry troops all the way from Moscow to the far-eastern port of Vladivostok to stamp out small protests.

Washington's greatest fear is that the Kremlin won't have the patience for talks and diplomatic cooperation, and will instead adopt a more confrontational posture to deflect attention from the mounting economic and social problems at home. In that pessimistic scenario, another conflict in Georgia or elsewhere could doom all hope for a better relationship. Worse yet, the Russians would go ahead with the sale of the S-300 missiles to Iran, setting off a dangerous sequence of events. Worried about the potency of those weapons, Israel could feel compelled to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities before they are deployed.

Though the Obama team has spoken of hitting the "reset button" in Russian relations, it knows the chances of a real turnaround are 50-50, at best. Its current strategy is to ignore the more negative signals coming out of the Kremlin and take the professions of good will seriously. It realizes that its best shot at changing course is now, when both sides have maximum incentive to start anew—but that there are no guarantees of success.

Nagorski, a former NEWSWEEK Moscow bureau chief and editor, is director of public policy and senior fellow at the EastWest Institute.

#20

Sen. Kerry Advocates A New Partnership In US-Russian Relations Conference on "Designing U.S. Policy Toward Russia", March 27, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) delivered a speech today titled, "A New Partnership for a New Moment in US-Russian Relations" on the United States policy toward Russia.

Conference on "Designing U.S. Policy Toward Russia" March 27, 2009 Library of Congress Convened by the Carnegie Corporation and other organizations

SEN. KERRY: We all know that in recent years, America's relationship with Russia reached its lowest and least constructive phase in two decades. The President who once looked into Putin's eyes and saw his soul regrettably didn't see his plans—and in the years that followed, tanks rolled forward and democracy rolled back.

Lines were crossed, opportunities were missed, and hopes for progress were dashed. Some feared we were headed back to the bad old days, and all were concerned that relations had taken a severe turn for the worse.

That was the state of US-Russian relations two months ago, as President Obama took office. Fortunately, he and his Administration quickly announced their goal to "re-set" relations with Russia and have set out in concrete ways to do so. And I can't emphasize enough the urgency on both sides to find more constructive ways to work together.

As the Administration has acknowledged, achieving better relations with Russia is not going to happen overnight. It will demand a sustained effort to contain and take the bad habits of confrontation-which seem to reemerge all too easily-and replace them with a new pattern of cooperation. But that is precisely what this moment in our relationship requires: an openness to new concepts and a willingness to move beyond old thinking that is reflexive rather than productive. We cannot-and need not-allow our differences, which are real, to define our relationship.

F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote: "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." Well, that's essentially what our Russia policy must do. We will stand up for principle when we have real differences, but our primary focus must be to enlist Russia whenever possible to act as the global partner that it can be in common purpose around common principle-or at least common interest.

Without question, the single most important partnership we can create-one that would contribute to our relationship as well as the world at large-is a serious joint effort to dramatically confront the threat of nuclear weapons and nuclear terrorism. Nowhere is our challenge greater, and nowhere is shared leadership more vitally important than in this arena. And we inherit a tradition forged by Kennedy and Khrushchev in the crucible of the Cuban Missile Crisis, elevated by Reagan and Gorbachev in a surprising moment at Reykjavik, deepened by Vice President Al Gore and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and updated for a new century by Boris Yeltsin and statesmen Senators Richard Lugar and Sam Nunn. I'm fortunate to serve now with Dick Lugar as the ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee and the longest-serving Republican in the Senate, and I'm grateful to have served with, and to and share the podium with Sam today.

Our countries survived the Cold War because old adversaries had looked into the abyss of mutual hostility and mutual destruction, and then found ways to communicate, cooperate and even to lead together.

And yet, despite all the years of nuclear cooperation and arms control, here we are, currently staring over the edge of a different nuclear precipice: the danger of a world where new and multiplying nuclear actors decide they want nuclear arsenals of their own, but won't necessarily play by old nuclear rules. As you've just heard, that is why many of our best thinkers, like Sam, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, and Bill Perry are urging America to lead the world toward zero nuclear weapons. We all understand that zero is scary to people, some people argue about stability-I understand all those arguments-but I guarantee you this: every step you take toward zero makes the world a safer place. I agree we therefore need to move in that direction. And I would add that, if this effort is ever to succeed or even get close to its possibilities, it must begin with a new level of US-Russia partnership at the heart of it.

Nothing is more urgent to our mutual security than doing all we can to prevent nuclear terrorism. When Osama Bin Laden has called the acquisition of nuclear weapons a "holy duty," then we must face the fact that the detonation of even a single terrorist nuclear device, in Washington, in Moscow or anywhere, would alter world history.

The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program has been an historic step in the fight to prevent nuclear terrorism, and our challenge today is to build on this foundation with greater effort and greater cooperation. In 2004, when I was a candidate for president, I proposed that over a four year period we work to secure all of the world's loose nuclear material, and I'm pleased the Obama Administration has adopted this goal as well. Our two governments must be working together at every level with the highest urgency, delivering serious increases in resources and personnel, tackling bureaucratic roadblocks in our own countries and

leveraging our joint leadership to ensure that other countries take the steps they must to keep nuclear material out of the hands of terrorists.

But our joint effort cannot stop with loose nukes alone. We ushered in the nuclear era, accelerated it and sustained it-and frankly, our indifference these past years to nonproliferation has encouraged others to pursue a similar arsenal. We therefore have a special burden-Russia and the United States-to lead the effort to end the era of nuclear threat.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, America and Russia inevitably lead by example - whether we seek to or not. For proof we need only look to our own histories. We tested and deployed the atomic bomb, and Russia raced to follow. We developed a long-range bomber to deliver the bomb, and Russia followed our lead. We tested and deployed a hydrogen bomb, and so did Russia. Both sides raced one another to launch nuclear ballistic missiles from underwater, to "MIRV" our missiles, and to find ever more battlefield scenarios to use our bombs. Each time one party upped the ante, the other simply doubled down- inspiring country after country to do all they could to join the table.

We built up our arsenals to levels that truly earned the descriptor "MAD." To have as many weapons as we do today is, frankly, mindless inertia-and, ladies and gentlemen, need I remind you, it is shockingly expensive as well as dangerous. Experts estimate that America alone has spent \$7.5 trillion on nuclear weapons that we hope to never use, an amount greater than the GDP of any other country on earth for an entire year. And we continue to spend billions more on stockpile stewardship and hedges against each other's bets on warheads, delivery systems and tactical weapons.

That's why, to advance US-Russian partnership, and to reduce the nuclear threat, it is vital that we reach agreement on a legally- binding successor to the START treaty this year. With START set to expire in December, we must make it a priority to strike a deal or create a bridge before we lose the only rules we have to verify a nuclear agreement with Russia. President Obama has committed to pursuing these negotiations with the intensity they deserve, and I urge him and President Medvedev to take advantage of their upcoming meeting on the sidelines of the London economic summit to set bold and timely goals for these discussions.

I am convinced that a new treaty can take us well below the levels established by the Moscow Treaty, and do so with robust verification rules and with obligations that last more than a day. We should set a near-term goal of no more than 1,000 operationally deployed warheads-and experts affirm this can increase our national security, rather than diminish it. Obviously we must pursue such a goal in close consultation with our allies and our military, but 1,000 warheads is more than enough to deter aggression. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is already working to lay the groundwork for the United States to follow Russia's lead and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.

We must also confront - jointly - the immediate challenge posed by Iran's nuclear program. An Iran with nuclear weapons is bad for Russia and bad for the world, and Russia has stated publicly that it doesn't want a nuclear Iran.

I'll tell you: I recently traveled to the Mideast and met with leaders across the region, and it's interesting that while country after country has said that Iran can't have a nuclear weapon, I believe that only Israel has made a decision as to what it might do. And I believe Iran has seen the indecision and uncertainty of those who oppose the program. The Bush Administration drew lines that it couldn't or wouldn't enforce, and globally we have never put in place a sanctions regime that has been meaningful. And so the message has been one of uncertainty, indecision, and in fact weakness. Nothing could be worse. All of the posturing of the last eight years has in fact worked against us. And so one of the urgent priorities of this Administration is to actually sit down with our allies and decide what is the red line and what are we prepared to do about it. And we are going to have to realize that Russia is going to be a critical player in making that determination.

President Obama is right to open the door to direct engagement with Iran. But it is imperative that our strategy of engagement is backed by a commitment on both sides to an effective multilateral response if negotiations fail. The world requires Russia to join a multilateral effort to persuade Iran to turn away from its current nuclear track. For all who want to avoid the dangers and devastation of a military option, Russia is an essential partner.

Russia's ongoing supply of civilian nuclear fuel for electricity remains an important incentive for Iran to do the right thing. But Russia needs to be prepared to fundamentally alter its relations with Iran if Iran continues to choose the wrong nuclear path-and Russia must make that clear in its actions as well as its words.

Given this ambitious agenda, we also have our part to play-and part of that is to make sure that our approach to missile defense does not divert us from cooperation on common interests. Many Russian leaders argue that missile defense in Europe is somehow directed at them. In fact, it is not. I have always had serious reservations regarding the rapid deployment of a largely untested missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic-and I intend for our Committee to examine this closely. But we have to move to an approach based on the real threats-threats that we actually face-and Russia and the United States should put more effort into jointly developing effective defenses against medium- and intermediate-range missiles. And Russia should also seek, for its part, to minimize the need for missile defense in Europe by helping to convince Iran to change its nuclear and missile policies. It's important to remember that our partnership with a global power such as Russia is not limited to nuclear weapons and missile defense. The momentum that we generate on arms control can and will extend to the other critical challenges, and the opportunities for cooperation are clear.

First, we can work together to restore economic order in the world. The interest Russia has already shown in this endeavor is necessary and welcome. Russia and the United States can and should work together with other G-20 countries to establish the parameters of a new and more secure global financial order. This is an urgent, shared mission.

Second, we share the threat of terrorism. Both of our countries have suffered attacks on our own soil, and we must continue to find ways to partner in the struggle against violent extremism.

Third, it is well-known that Russia and the United States cooperated on the ouster of the Taliban. This cooperation broke down precisely when we should have built on it. A failed state in Afghanistan poses a threat not just to us but also to Russia-so Russia has much reason to work for a successful resolution in Afghanistan, just as NATO does.

Fourth, I know Russia and the United States do not always see eye-to-eye on climate change-but I'd like to offer some advice and a caution to my Russian friends: I believe that in the years ahead, a nation's willingness to confront the threat of climate change will increasingly be a defining aspect of great power responsibility. Russian officials have promised me that their per-capita emissions will never exceed those of the United States, but-at a moment when everyone must massively reduce emissions to avoid catastrophe-this simply isn't enough.

In fact, Russia could become the site of disastrous new greenhouse gas emissions from methane, which is 20 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Experts say the total amount of methane beneath the Arctic is greater than the total amount of carbon stored in all of the world's coal. Today the methane is beneath a "lid" of permafrost, on land and underwater. But the lid is disappearing: last year, the International Siberian Shelf Study measured the highest-ever levels of methane in the Arctic Ocean, and found methane bubbles coming out of chimneys on the sea floor. There are places, on land and at sea, where lighting a match in the open air causes an explosion from free-floating methane. Alongside any thought of economic gain from climate change, Russia should consider the reality that these changes will bring with them dramatic and unpredictable new downsides as well-both domestically and in a world community that is increasingly concerned and increasingly mobilized to take action.

But while we ask Russia to act as a global partner, we must also demonstrate to Russia that there are benefits to a constructive relationship. Over time, as the relationship develops, the Jackson- Vanik Amendment can be done away with and a real Bilateral Investment Treaty could be concluded to facilitate trade. Before the Russian- Georgian war last summer the Bush Administration and Congress considered a formal nuclear cooperation agreement, and in the context of improved relations this too could quickly be revived. When Russia accepts international standards on the rule of law and ownership, then Russian membership in the WTO will be good for the US and good for the world.

So clearly, there are huge opportunities staring us in the face- opportunities for genuine partnership between the United States and Russia. Unfortunately, the relationship will also require working through disagreements. And we must acknowledge the different worldviews that drive those disagreements. If you don't, it's very hard to have an honest conversation and deal with any of these realities.

The last twenty years have been felt and lived very differently in Saint Petersburg and Moscow than they have been in Washington or Prague. In fact, the story that Russia's leaders tell is almost the mirror image of our own. Where we saw the fall of the Soviet Union as a triumph of freedom, Prime Minister Putin has called it "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". In the 1990s, where we saw a young democracy with new personal liberties, Russians were also living through a withering economic crisis with new levels of personal economic insecurity-and frankly, their perception is that we reveled in their misery. I heard this reiterated by former President Gorbachev just a few days ago. While the view from Washington was one of Russia slowly joining the world community, Moscow saw only humiliation and rejection. And, of course, where we saw Russia's neighbors emerging from foreign domination, Russia saw western encroachment and new rivals ever closer to home.

In part, Russia is still coming to grips with the collapse of empire, a phenomenon which, historically-as far back as ancient Rome- has always been followed by disorder and conflict. Ninety years after the fact, the Middle East is still dealing with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The great Polish journalist Ryszard Kapucinski tells a story of two Ugandan military captains from opposite ends of their country who could only speak to each other in Russian, because both had been trained in Moscow. Though the USSR struggled under the strain of projecting its power globally, this was the world in which Prime Minister Putin spent his formative professional years. And the Ugandans' story played out in various iterations across a world awash in Soviet money, Soviet weapons, and Soviet influence.

That helps to explain why, since 2004, Russia has in many ways been acting as a "revisionist" power: rejecting the terms under which it was expected to join the current world order. Instead, Russia has almost habitually opposed us, often in the name of "multi-polarity," with a newfound assertiveness that extends beyond Georgia, Ukraine, and energy policy. Russia has embraced aggressive tactical diplomacy on many other fronts as well, including offering billions in loan guarantees to small countries to buy influence and discussing potential military bases in Venezuela.

This is important: The United States should not hesitate to acknowledge Russia as the great power it was and is. Russia is the largest country on earth, with massive oil, gas, and mineral resources-not to mention the human capital of a society with remarkable intellectual achievements. Whether oil prices are at \$40 or \$140, Russia is a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council and therefore also a member of the P5+1 on Iran, a member of the Middle East Quartet, and a member of the six-party talks on North Korea. There is scarcely an issue of global importance that would not benefit from greater cooperation with Russia. We must recognize that, while Russia is no longer the existential opponent of Leonid Brezhnev's era, neither is it the malleable junior partner of the days of Boris Yeltsin's.

We may also wish to acknowledge that, although there have been very good reasons for many of the steps we took-we also bear some responsibility for the downturn in US-Russian relations. It is important that we understand the Russians aren't acting illogically; they are reacting to what they regard-rightly or wrongly-as repeated assaults on their identity as citizens of a powerful country.

To acknowledge Russia's narrative of recent history doesn't mean acceptance of Russia's view of the region. In fact, obviously we don't accept that. For twenty years now, America, Europe, and the world have made-and will continue to make-an enormous investment in the freedom, economies, and sovereignty of the former Soviet and Iron Curtain states.

We will-and we should-continue to engage Russia on improving its record on human rights and democracy. And we continue to believe that Russia's neighbors have a right to choose their own destinies, and America and the international community will continue to support their self-determination. I've been to Georgia and met with its leaders, and I believe that Georgia has an undeniable right to its territorial integrity. We should pursue an enhanced Bilateral Investment Treaty, expanded Georgian access to the General System of Preferences,

and the negotiation of a Free-Trade Agreement-and none of these initiatives should get in the way of our ability to cooperate with Russia on the larger issues I've discussed.

The Georgia war of 2008 points to another imperative: we must address the terribly misnamed "frozen conflicts"-many of which are anything but-arising from the fall of the Soviet Union. While few Americans had heard of Transdnistria or Nagorno-Karabakh, they found out about South Ossetia quickly enough when it led to war and international crisis last summer.

Russia can avert future crises and increase international confidence by working for internationally-accepted solutions to these conflicts. In this context, Russia's call for a new Euro-Atlantic Security Architecture is noteworthy, and we look forward to exploring it and fleshing out more details. Russia's recent opposition to the OSCE's mission in Georgia, however, is counter-productive. I share the concern of many over Russia's failure to fully implement the cease fire agreement, as well as the continued lack of access for international monitors in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. International monitors can prevent incidents that lead to further conflict and divert us from the larger agenda.

I also believe it was wrong for Russia to repeatedly manipulate the flow of energy to Ukraine for political purposes. Russia may have a legitimate need to obtain market prices for its gas exports, but even as Ukraine's reputation as a reliable transit country may have been tarnished, Russia's reputation as a reliable supplier also suffered. Ukraine is a country that, for all its difficulties in governing, has made remarkable progress toward democracy-and we will continue to look for ways to help them find security and prosperity.

And finally, as we consider the prospects for a new era in US- Russian relations, we must understand the economic dynamics at play in Russia-which many argue are as crucial to Russia's fall and rise as anything else. The economic news from Russia has been dramatic: a sharp decline in Russia's foreign exchange reserves and a 67% decline in Russia's stock market. We don't yet know whether today's financial crisis and the steep drop in oil prices will create opportunities for shared leadership and a softening of some of Russia's stances-or a hardening of confrontational policies in an effort not to repeat what Russia saw as Western exploitation of its weakness in the 1990s.

What is clear is that our attempts at more constructive relations will fail if we condition them on resolving our differences first. The mutual benefits that greater partnership can bring are clear and compelling-and so are the costs of letting relations drift.

In the twentieth century, America and the Soviet Union expended incalculable resources on their rivalry. We cannot go backwards, and- for all the tension of 2008-I don't believe that we will. We must re- engage and reinvigorate the better habits of our Russia policy-the ones that prevailed at moments, during the twentieth century, when our separate interests gave way to mutual responsibility and a mutual stake in sparing humanity the horrors of war.

Our challenges are no less daunting today than they were during the Cold War: Nuclear terror, global climate change, the world economy-these are the big issues that will define this century, and great nations have a responsibility to meet them. These problems won't allow us the indulgence of "old-think." It's simply too dangerous not to get this right.

When Russia, the United States, China, and Europe share so many significant challenges that can bring us together, we cannot afford to let the smaller issues pull us apart. We have real disagreements and bad habits of disagreeing, and make no mistake: it will take sustained effort and creativity to chart a better path forward.

But the days when Moscow stood on the opposite side of every global crisis have passed. We must now strive to find the same side- both of us-whenver possible in a new century full of new perils and new opportunities.

Simply put: great challenges require great nations to lead in new ways. That is America's challenge, it is Russia's challenge, too-and our success demands that we work together. Thank you.

#21

Mapping a New Strategy Democracy in Former Soviet Areas Needs a Friend

By Ludmila Alexeeva and Gregory Shvedov

Washington Post, March 30, 2009

Since the end of Soviet Union, an ill-formed foreign policy apparatus has limited the United States' successes in promoting democracy and helping to create civil societies in the former Soviet states. This lack of success has led some to suggest that the United States should stop trying. But those of us on the front lines of this struggle have one message for our American friends: Don't give up.

The 2008 war in Georgia can be seen as a product of the failure to make human rights and democracy the central elements of U.S. policy -- not just in Russia but in Georgia, as well. And this conflict, in turn, has made both countries less democratic and free than they were when it began. In Russia's case, this was not a change in direction. But Georgia's fast retreat from democracy since the riots of November 2007 was an abrupt about-face that generated almost no U.S. reaction. This silence legitimated Georgian authorities for actions that led to the start of the war.

This is the troubling backdrop as President Obama prepares to meet with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday in advance of the Group of 20 summit in London. Across the former Soviet countries in the recent past, the United States has failed to respond forcefully as the right to dissent and democratic protest has lost ground. There are many examples of this: A year ago in Armenia, 10 people were killed and hundreds hurt during peaceful protests, and the only trial held in the aftermath has been of members of the opposition. At the start of this year, Radio Liberty and Voice of America were thrown out of Azerbaijan, while Russia cut by 90 percent the number of foundations and other donor groups allowed to make grants to nongovernmental organizations, severely curtailing the funding these groups need to operate. On Jan. 19, human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and young journalist Anastasia Baburova were shot on the streets of Moscow; no one has been charged in their murders, just as those responsible for the 2006 assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya remain at large.

What can the Obama administration do now to counter this backsliding? We don't have all the answers, but we suggest the following five-point program:

-- First, don't spend all your time working with government officials. Governments in non-free countries tend to monopolize the relationships between states. Deal instead with the leaders of civil society, no matter how weak they may be. New, real dialogues should be formed through annual forums or conferences of independent civil society groups of the United States and Russia. If we are to have a democratic and, hence, peaceful future, these are the leaders who will take us there. Those in power represent the past.

-- Second, focus assistance on the institutions of civil society, working with governments when possible but bypassing them when necessary. This is especially important in the regions facing the gravest crises, such as the Northern Caucasus and South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Don't use the cowardly label "frozen conflicts regions" to avoid working in these difficult places.

-- Third, recognize the importance of the media and make sure that your commitment to the free flow of ideas never falters. Continue to support international broadcasting via Radio Liberty and Voice of America and step in to help independent media, especially Internet outlets. To thrive in these countries, these new media need support, professional development and special security programs for journalists.

-- Fourth, consider forming a single agency to direct democracy and human rights activities, and find new, effective leaders to run it. Now, too many cooks are spoiling the soup; we could accomplish more with less if there were one reliable forum for us to work together. The National Endowment for Democracy, which has helped our organization and other nongovernmental entities in Russia, is the model to follow.

-- And fifth, don't get discouraged when we don't meet our shared goals overnight. Instead, focus on developing long-term social marketing strategies aimed at fostering change in the consciousness, values and

social norms of ordinary people. Real change will arise from the people, and so the people should be empowered. Democracy is never built in a day.

Underlying these points, however, is our most important message: Our struggling democratic movements need friends. Throughout the Cold War, we viewed the United States as our best friend. But in recent years we have lost the sense that the United States views us the same way.

Now, President Obama, you have the chance to restore that friendship, extending the healing process that you began in your own country to ours.

With your help, we can build the kind of open, democratic and law-based societies that you have spoken so eloquently about.

We still believe in a fundamental principle: that people are the source of political power. People who want to experience their rights can't be left to illegitimate political leadership. Will the new administration of the United States be silent on the attempt to shut up independent voices?

Ludmila Alexeeva is chair of the Moscow Helsinki Group. Gregory Shvedov is editor in chief of the Web media Caucasian Knot.

#22

Moscow Warns on Low Oil Prices

By Gregory L. White

Wall Street Journal, March 31, 2009

MOSCOW -- To many in the West, Russia's oil wealth is an addiction that has warped its economy. Russian energy czar Igor Sechin considers that envious nonsense.

Russia's resources "are a God-given good that should be used effectively," he said in his first major interview with a foreign media outlet. "Somebody is always wanting to take them away."

Widely considered the Kremlin's hard-liner-in-chief, Mr. Sechin is one of Russia's most powerful officials. He was a longtime aide and confidant to Vladimir Putin before Mr. Putin became president in 2000.

Last year, Mr. Sechin took over as deputy prime minister, responsible for the vast energy sector, when Mr. Putin became premier. Until recently, Mr. Sechin rarely spoke to the media, giving an aura of malevolent intrigue that was fueled by rivals who cast him as the author of the Kremlin's assault on oil giant OAO Yukos, among other things. In recent months, he has raised his public profile.

In a wide-ranging, 90-minute conversation, Mr. Sechin sought to play down differences between hard-liners and liberals in the Kremlin. But his views on energy policy, state ownership and other issues often differ significantly from those of more pro-market and pro-Western colleagues, highlighting tensions within the cabinet.

"One should be objective and judge by effectiveness," he said before leaving on a trip with Mr. Putin to an auto factory in southern Russia. "Let the senior comrades make the assessment. I have my management and it regularly corrects me."

He disagreed with Western economists and some liberal Russian officials, such as First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, who have suggested that Russia would be better off if oil prices don't go too high, arguing the surge in income in recent years has hampered needed efforts to diversify the economy. Mr. Sechin credited the oil boom with allowing Russia to build up the reserves it is now spending to support the economy.

And he was quick to point out that Russia became a major oil exporter in the 1970s in response to demand in the West amid the Arab oil embargo. "Now they tell us, 'You have Dutch disease, you're a resource economy.' But you yourselves asked us to be that way," he said.

Mr. Sechin is Moscow's point man for warming relations with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. But he said Russia, the largest oil producer outside the cartel, isn't ready to accept membership in the group, despite its pleas.

"It would be irresponsible for Russia to join OPEC because we can't directly regulate the activity of our companies," he said, as nearly all are privately owned.

Yet, he supports "coordinating actions" with the cartel because of the shared interest in lifting prices. He said Moscow isn't in a position to mandate lower production, but Russian oil companies will curb output this year as falling prices cut into their ability to produce.

He figured that if oil slides back under \$40 a barrel, Russian output this year could fall twice the amount the government now forecasts, or about 300,000 barrels a day.

Russia, he added, wants to keep oil prices between \$60 and \$100 a barrel. To help ensure that, Moscow is considering building a reserve of crude to allow it to react to market shifts. In addition, Mr. Sechin said Russia has put off auctioning development rights for some big, new export-oriented fields.

At current prices, he said oil companies are starved for vital capital to invest in new projects. "If companies don't have access to stable financial resources for the long term, that could lead to a shortage and to a sharp increase in prices for oil and oil products," he said. "That might not alarm consumers very much now because demand is falling, but when the recovery begins...this situation could develop."

Mr. Sechin called for a gradual but major overhaul of the international oil trade, adding tight regulation and longer-term supply contracts, eliminating "economically unjustified intermediaries" and reducing speculation. Russia is the world's No. 2 crude exporter.

Mr. Sechin hailed BP PLC's TNK-BP Ltd. joint venture in Russia as a sign of Russia's openness to foreign investment in the sector. But he singled out secretive Siberian giant OAO Surgutneftegaz as "Russia's best private oil company."

Investors have criticized Surgut for refusing to release international-standard financial accounts or details of its ownership structure.

Speaking about the Russian economy as a whole, Mr. Sechin said the government isn't planning to take over troubled companies. "There is no goal of nationalizing," he said. "I remind you that in the West, this process is under way and it's much harsher. But not here."

Mr. Sechin said the government is supporting companies, but would consider nationalizing only "in exceptional cases, when shareholders ask or [when] it would have influence on systemically important companies."

The government early this year rejected offers from some heavily indebted tycoons to convert loans from state banks into minority equity stakes in their companies.

"Nobody is taking anything from anyone," he said. "They should drink the cup of their responsibility to the end."

#23

In reversal, U.S. to join U.N. rights council JTA, March 31, 2009

The United States will seek to join the U.N. Human Rights Council, reversing its policy of shunning the group and prompting concern among some Jewish organizations.

On Tuesday, the Obama administration announced it would participate in May elections for a seat on the 47-member council, "with the goal of working to make it a more effective body to promote and protect human rights." The Bush administration had withheld U.S. membership from the Geneva-based council for its failure to confront human rights abusers and its singling out of Israel for condemnation.

"The United States helped to found the United Nations and retains a vital stake in advancing that organization's genuine commitment to the human rights values that we share with other member nations," U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a statement announcing the decision.

JTA has learned that top State Department officials briefed Jewish organizational leaders about the decision in a conference call late Tuesday evening.

Since its creation in 2006 to replace the widely discredited U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the council has passed 32 resolutions; 26 have been critical of Israel, according to UN Watch, a pro-Israel monitoring group based in Geneva. More than half of the council's members fall short of basic democracy standards, according to Freedom House, a democracy watchdog group. And in the past two years the council has moved to eliminate its country-specific special experts investigating human rights abuses in Darfur, Congo, Cuba, Belarus and Liberia.

"Those who suffer from abuse and oppression around the world, as well as those who dedicate their lives to advancing human rights, need the council to be balanced and credible," said Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. "The U.S. is seeking election to the council because we believe that working from within, we can make the council a more effective forum to promote and protect human rights. We hope to work in partnership with many countries to achieve a more effective council."

The Anti-Defamation League expressed concern about the Obama administration's decision.

"There is no question that the U.S. can play a decisive role in making U.N. institutions more effective, but the Human Rights Council has deep systemic flaws," said Abraham Foxman, the group's national director. "We remain concerned that the U.S. decision to join the council before meaningful reforms are put into motion may not achieve this desired goal."

Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), the most senior Jewish lawmaker in the U.S. House of Representatives, in his capacity as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee supported the decision.

"The time is ripe to take a more positive and active role in challenging the Council and in speaking out about genuine human rights atrocities," Berman said in a statement. "In two years, the Human Rights Council faces a mandated five-year review. By participating in the process as a member of the Council, the Obama Administration can begin working to bring about a much-needed overhaul."

The World Jewish Congress wondered whether the time was ripe for joining the council.

"There are so many players on the Human Rights Council that do not have our interests at heart that I think it will mobilize against the things that the United States is going to fight for," said Betty Ehrenberg, a WJC spokeswoman. "I'm not sure at this moment that the Human Rights Council is free enough of its past and present difficulties and complications to make this effort fruitful at this moment."

The executive director of UN Watch, Hillel Neuer, said he welcomes the U.S. decision, "but only if it's to vigorously push back against the world's worst abusers." He added, "The council is worse than ever before, pathologically obsessed with scapegoating Israel while turning a blind eye to millions of human rights victims around the world."

#24

Why The Rush To Engage Russia?

By Dmitry Sidorov

Forbes.com, March 31, 2009

When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov publicly hit a red button to reset U.S.-Russia relations, the funny part wasn't that the State Department mistranslated "reset" as "overload." The button probably should have been labeled "rewind," and the funny part is that anyone thinks dramatic improvement in U.S.-Russia relations is possible.

The Obama administration placed its faith in two elder statesmen--Henry Kissinger and James Baker--to lay the groundwork for the first meeting of the U.S. and Russian presidents during this week's G-20 summit in London. That's the rewind. The rub is that both Kissinger and Baker have ties that raise questions about their ability to act as standard-bearers for the administration's Russia policy. At the same time, the policy they have been recruited to promote raises the more pressing question of whether it is the most effective way to deal with today's troublesome Kremlin.

Kissinger and Baker, both former secretaries of state, led a pack of U.S. politicians who recently visited Moscow to prepare for the April summit. Both were active in shuttle diplomacy during the Bush administration as well.

The Russian press was ecstatic when Kissinger's trip was announced. Kissinger received celebrity treatment in Moscow, where he appeared on state-run RTR television and indicated that Barack Obama may visit the Russian capital in a few months. Kissinger hit the bull's eye with his educated guess. As we found out some days ago, president Obama is scheduled to visit Moscow in July.

Henry Kissinger's rapport with former Russian President Vladimir Putin, who now runs the country as prime minister, is an open secret. They've known each other since the early 1990s, when the former secretary of state traveled to St. Petersburg, and then-First Deputy Mayor Putin greeted him. The latter was responsible for external relations in the mayor's office at the time.

We also know that Kissinger's consulting firm, Kissinger & Associates, is believed to provide advice to the Kremlin. Thomas Graham, former senior director for Russian affairs on the National Security Council under President Bush, became an associate in Kissinger's company about a year ago, bringing with him extensive contacts and knowledge of Russia.

Jim Baker has his roster of Russian contacts as well. Baker is a partner in the law firm Baker Botts, which was retained by two entities dear to the Kremlin--Gazprom, the Russian state gas monopolist, and Rosneft, the Russian oil major. Baker Botts "handles disputes for Gazprom and Rosneft," Michael Goldhaber wrote in Legalweek.com on Oct. 16, 2008.

On the other side of the table sits President Dmitry Medvedev, twice chairman of the Gazprom board of directors. The Rosneft chairmanship since July 2004 has been occupied by Igor Sechin, a close Putin ally, once deputy chief of his Kremlin administration, and now the deputy prime minister of Russia.

Not even the faintest whiff of impropriety emerges from the interactions between Kissinger & Associates and Baker Botts and the Russians. One may ask, however, why people who represent companies that are presumably paid for their services are negotiating on behalf of the U.S. government. Are they really the best men for the job? Is there any potential for a conflict of interest?

One could argue that the Russians need to feel comfortable, and that the best way to achieve this is to have them deal with people they've known for a long time, bringing some trust to strained relations between the two countries.

The Russian leadership surely shares this view, but for its own reasons. They may see themselves as having a certain advantage when companies close to the Kremlin keep, or have kept, on their payroll U.S. firms that include former high ranking U.S. diplomats currently negotiating with the Kremlin.

I doubt that James Baker wants to lose Gazprom or Rosneft as current or returning clients. Nor, I surmise, would Henry Kissinger and Thomas Graham like to see the Kremlin stop responding to their phone calls and e-mails.

More broadly, why couldn't the upcoming meeting between Obama and Medvedev have been an exchange merely of pleasant formalities? What is the U.S. in such a hurry to placate the agitated Russians?

Is it the nuclear disarmament proposal the White House recently offered the Kremlin? Or the attempt to assist Russia's WTO accession and repeal the Jackson-Vanick amendment with an eye to the missile defense program in Europe and the purported need for Moscow's support on Iran?

I accept the importance of reducing the number of nuclear warheads. But it's hardly a crucial step. No matter how much some in the Kremlin might hate the United States, they're not planning to launch a nuclear attack in the near future. The White House isn't eager for a nuclear confrontation either. And even if I'm mistaken, the aforementioned reductions won't save us from mutual assured destruction.

A helping hand in Russia's WTO accession and the repeal of the Jackson-Vanick amendment make sense in terms of business, but there's no reason to de-link them from missile defense placement in Europe. Why lose the minimal leverage we have? Putin has a well-known penchant for bargaining. So let's bargain. Otherwise, we give the Russians a fine chance to take all the chips and give us nothing but their gratitude.

What about the Kremlin's assistance on Iran? This, we are told, is the crux of the matter. In reality, it's of little or no significance. First, the Russians received a virtual green light from the Bush administration to negotiate with Tehran. They achieved almost nothing.

Second, Moscow significantly weakened the three U.N. resolutions aimed at persuading Iran to freeze or abandon its military nuclear program and clearly indicated that it will not support a military operation if need be. Third, the Kremlin has already provided Tehran with advanced weapons systems, or is in a constant process of blackmailing the West with possible sales.

Fourth, despite numerous Kremlin statements on the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran, the Russians have no rational interest in seeing Washington launch direct negotiations with Tehran to resolve the nuclear crisis. If talks are successful, they will open up a new Southern route for gas supplies from the Central Asian countries to Europe, thus putting an end to the Russia's gas stranglehold on the old world.

All of the above should convince the White House that it's time not for a reset or a rewind, but a timeout--one that will allow the U.S. to create a comprehensive strategy for dealing with Russia once the administration fills in the blank spots on its Russia team. And it should stop relying on people whose advice might be affected by services rendered to the Kremlin by their companies. No matter how willing they are to help, or how helpful their input might be, it will continue to raise exactly the ethical questions this White House promised to make a thing of the past.

Dmitry Sidorov is the bureau chief for Kommersant Publishing in Washington, D.C.

#25

Spying Claim Sets Off Spat Between U.S. and Russia

By C.J. Chivers

New York Times, April 1, 2009

A diplomatic dispute between Russia and the United States, in which allegations of Russian spying caused each government to refuse to allow senior military representatives in the other's embassies, appeared to be near resolution, American officials said this week.

The dispute hinted at continuing Russian espionage in the West, and the persistent tensions between Russia and the United States in the past several years.

The situation became contentious enough that in January the Russian government summarily asked a United States Army general at the embassy in Moscow to leave the country. The officer, Brig. Gen. Henry J. Nowak, was the senior American defense attache there.

The Russian request, which did not accuse General Nowak of wrongdoing and was short of a formal expulsion, was the third step in a quiet disagreement over accusations of Russian espionage in Canada, American officials familiar with the matter said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because consular matters are considered confidential.

The disagreement began last year when the Russian military attache in Ottawa was suspected of spying and was asked to leave Canada, a colleague of General Nowak said. Russia then tried to have the same man accredited as the attache at its embassy in Washington, officials said.

The United States declined to issue the officer a visa. Because of reciprocity procedures among NATO members, officials said, the officer's troubles in Canada disqualified him for diplomatic accreditation in the United States.

Precisely what the Russian officer was accused of doing in Canada was not clear. American officials declined to discuss the Canadian allegations. A spokesman for the Canadian Foreign Ministry said he was unable to find any public information on the matter. The Russian government did not reply to requests for comment.

After the officer was denied an American visa, the Russian government retaliated by asking General Nowak to leave Moscow, officials said. The general, who had been the attache in Russia for about 18 months, returned to the United States in January and began working at the Defense Intelligence Agency at the Pentagon while the State Department tried to have Russia reinstate him, officials said.

"The Russian government said this was a reciprocal action and wasn't personal against Brigadier General Nowak," an American official familiar with the matter said.

His departure from Russia means that both the Russian Embassy in Washington and the American Embassy in Moscow have been without their senior military attaches this year.

On Friday, the Pentagon announced that General Nowak had been reassigned as deputy director for counterterrorism issues at the Office for Strategic Plans and Policy of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, indicating that the United States had effectively dropped its request that he be allowed to return to Moscow. An American official said that now, both sides would be nominating new attaches, and that the United States was prepared to accept a Russian nominee. "Clearly this was a potential irritant," the official said. "It was regrettable, but we are going to move forward."

#26

A Historic Chance to Build a Bridge

By Paul J. Saunders

Moscow Times, April 1, 2009

We often say that there are no second chances in life, and that is generally true. But when U.S. President Barack Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev meet Wednesday, they will have an opportunity that is extremely rare in international relations -- a third chance to build a strong U.S.-Russian relationship. It won't be easy, the two countries' interests and perspectives differ significantly, but they should seize the moment.

The United States and Russia have already failed twice since 1991 to take advantage of two historic opportunities -- after Russia's independence and after the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States -- to build a generally cooperative and sustainable relationship. Leaders and people in each country have their own

perspectives on why this did not happen. What matters most, however, is that despite a softening of U.S. and Russian rhetoric in recent weeks, the relationship remains hampered by mutual frustration and suspicion.

The Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Russia -- a bipartisan group of top-level U.S. foreign policy practitioners and specialists from government, business and academia led by former U.S. Senators Chuck Hagel and Gary Hart -- has urged U.S. leaders and citizens to develop a closer and stronger relationship with Russia that reflects vital U.S. national interests, including nuclear nonproliferation, counterterrorism and energy security. We have already presented the group's key findings to top officials in the Obama administration, and earlier in March a small delegation from the commission exchanged views with Medvedev and other senior leaders in Moscow.

The commission's recommendations cover several broad areas, including nonproliferation, arms control, terrorism, energy, trade, European and Eurasian security issues and democracy. We also suggest new approaches to the most complex and contentious issues in the U.S.-Russian relationship, including efforts to halt Iran's nuclear weapons program, U.S. missile defense plans, the Kremlin's "energy diplomacy" and NATO's relations with Georgia and Ukraine.

The function of the commission is to recommend policy to the U.S. government and not to the Russian government, which is fully capable of developing its own policy options and also has access to a variety of assessments from nongovernmental organizations located in the country. Nonetheless, three points in the report are especially relevant to Moscow.

First is the clear recognition that the United States and Russia have different interests and perspectives, that each defines its own interests and that a better U.S. understanding of Moscow's interests and perspectives could make U.S. policy toward Russia more effective. Implicitly, a better Russian understanding of U.S. interests could help Moscow to improve its policy as well. Washington and Moscow would also benefit from a sharper definition of respective priorities, as it is unlikely that each will get everything it wants from bilateral relations or that the relationship can succeed without compromises by both sides. Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that U.S. and Russian national interests do not appear to be in fundamental conflict in any area. This may not be a sufficient basis for a cooperative relationship if Washington and Moscow do not engage successfully on their common interests, but it is a major difference from the Cold War era, when each worked actively for the other's defeat.

Second, the United States and Russia are unlikely to succeed in pursuing their many common interests if they are unable to engage more deeply on a government-to-government basis. This requires developing new structures for bilateral consultation and collaboration on all levels. It also requires making cooperation routine rather than something that happens only under the close scrutiny of top leaders. Despite their many differences, the United States and China are already well on the way to developing such contacts. There is no reason that Washington and Moscow could not build similar ties.

Finally, the commission states explicitly that even if the United States makes a serious effort at cooperation with Russia, it may not succeed if Moscow chooses another direction. In other words, it takes two to tango. The vital interests of both countries are deeply intertwined, and it would be to Washington's advantage to win Moscow's cooperation. Conversely, the United States could pay a high price if the U.S.-Russian relationship is dominated instead by reflexive hostility. But Moscow's interests would suffer too.

There were good reasons that the United States and Russia were unable to develop a strong and stable relationship during the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin and Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin. Building a cooperative relationship today after two false starts will be even more difficult, but good excuses are not a substitute for success, especially when the cost of another failure could be quite high. Washington and Moscow are lucky to have a third chance and should not count on a fourth.

Paul J. Saunders is executive director of The Nixon Center and senior adviser to the Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Russia.

#27

A proper translation of the 'reset button'

By Mark Medish

Foreign Policy, March 31, 2009

When U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's staff mistranslated her promise to "reset" relations with Russia into "overload" during a meeting with that country's foreign minister in Geneva on March 6, it could easily have been a Freudian slip. After years of cooling relations, there is certainly baggage weighing down the U.S.-Russian relationship on both sides.

But this week, as Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev prepare to meet on the sidelines of the G20 summit, the two leaders will have another shot at the translating the reset button: into action. And though a reset button connotes automation, both men must recognize from the outset that repairing U.S.-Russia relations will be anything but routine.

Following in the wake of George W. Bush, Obama might be excused for thinking that an improvement in relations will not be asking much. The previous administration made Kosovo independence, European missile defense, and expedited NATO enlargement its priorities. And while none of these goals was inherently outrageous, neither were they particularly wise. Taken together, they amounted to a provocative stance toward Russia. Obama's early signals of new priorities -- for example, deferring the missile defense initiative in the context of closer Russian cooperation on Iran -- are encouraging.

Lest the congratulations begin too soon, Obama must be aware that it will require some serious work to restore a sense of trust to the troubled relationship.

As its guiding logic, the Obama presidency should rely on the kind of visionary pragmatism that has characterized the best of the American foreign policy tradition. Initially, this will entail a kind of strategic rebalancing based on a careful picking of priorities in relation to countries such as Russia and China. This philosophy was clear in Secretary Clinton's message in China -- that America will not forget about human rights or support for democracy building but neither will it subordinate other important national security interests to those concerns. In the case of Russia, it will mean balancing the drawbacks of Kremlin engagement with the possible gains: nuclear arms reduction, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, stabilizing Afghanistan, and dealing with Iran.

For their part, the Russians have mostly welcomed the reset metaphor. Yet a stumbling block remains. Some advisers in the Kremlin believe that -- in the aftermath of the Iraq war -- the high point of U.S. influence in Eurasia is past, and Russia should try to reassert itself in its traditional sphere of influence. Indeed, Russia purposely exacerbated matters over the past year, particularly with its reckless incursions into Abkhazia and South Ossetia last August and its continued pressure on Ukraine's energy sector - actions that sparked understandable concern in Europe. Now, as the United States stands by Ukrainian and Georgian sovereignty and continues to fight in Afghanistan, both sides will have to take steps to demonstrate that their Eurasian dealings are benign to the other if U.S.-Russia talks are ever to amount to more than words.

Although the task is great, the two presidents should begin with areas of compatible interests, clearly defining a set of near-term priority objectives for bilateral cooperation. In addition to a compromise on missile defense and cooperation on Iran and Afghanistan, the list should include other mutually beneficial goals such as finalizing a nuclear stockpile reduction treaty to replace the START I agreement, which expires in December. A sensible economic priority would be a final push from both sides to expedite Russia's WTO accession. Finally, the United States could show good faith by lifting the Cold War-era Jackson-Vanik amendment that denies its "most favored nation" status to non-market economies that restrict emigration. Particularly since China and Vietnam have already won U.S. wavers from the rules, lifting the ban on Russia is an obvious must.

This to-do list is entirely doable, provided that the leaders of both countries share a sense of urgency and are genuinely committed to delivering results. But long before they hit the reset button together, the U.S. and Russian presidents must ensure they are speaking the same language. A first step would be to ensure that they have accurate translators in London.

Mark Medish served as senior director for Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasia affairs at the National Security Council (2000-2001). He is visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and visiting fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

#28

Russian philanthropists make another big grant

By Jacob Berkman

JTA, April 1, 2009

The Genesis Philanthropy Group, which was started by four Jewish Russian billionaires, has given yet another big grant to help the Russian speaking North American community.

The group has given \$2.7 million to the Wexner Foundation to create two Wexner Heritage classes with the UJA Federation of New York that would be comprised of Russian speaking Jews in New York and to create two fellowships through Wexner's existing fellowship program that would pay for graduate school for two Russian speaking Jews who were committed to becoming Jewish communal professionals.

Since 1984, the Wexner Foundation has run two-year intensive leadership programs focussed on Jewish history, thought and text for about 20 students per cohort.

The Genesis group is providing the money for the Russian speaking fellows, while the Wexner foundation will run the project and create special Russian programming.

This is the third significant grant that the Genesis group has given out in the past several weeks.

In mid-March, the group gave a \$5 million grant to the Foundation for Jewish Camp to increase the number of Russian-speaking Jewish youth who attend Jewish overnight camp in North America. And last week, the group gave nearly \$11 million to Brandeis University to help increase its Russian population and to create scholarships for graduate studies.

"I don't think it is any accident that this grant is with the Wexner foundation," said the president of the Jewish Funders Network, Mark Charendoff. "I think the strategy that his group of donors decided to pursue is not just in a certain content area, but they only want to make significant investments in institutions that have a proven track record of service delivery and exceptional management teams. One of the attractions for working with Wexner is you are buying into an extraordinarily strong management team. The same was true of campaign grant and the Brandeis grant."

In addition to the \$2.7 million grant to The Wexner Foundation, Genesis Philanthropy Group has allocated an additional \$2.1 million for leadership development and is making the following one year (renewable) grants to support and grow leadership among the Russian-speaking Jewish community:

- * \$150,000 to Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS), Canada to support their Decades-Plus Leadership Development Program for Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants

- * \$150,000 to Moishe Houses to open three houses in North America for Russian-speaking Jewish young adults.

- * \$285,000 to the Center for Leadership Initiatives (CLI) to devise and host leadership development gatherings specifically for Russian-speaking professionals in the Jewish community and for Russian-speaking young adults.

Here is the press release:

\$2.7 MILLION INITIATIVE LAUNCHED BY GENESIS PHILANTHROPY GROUP AND THE WEXNER FOUNDATION TO PROMOTE LEADERSHIP AMONG RUSSIAN-SPEAKING JEWS

NEW YORK, March 26, 2009: Genesis Philanthropy Group (GPG), a foundation dedicated to promoting Jewish identity for Russian-speaking Jews worldwide, and The Wexner Foundation, whose primary focus since its inception in 1984 has been strengthening Jewish leadership, have entered a \$2.7 million partnership that will focus upon intensive leadership development for Russian-speaking Jews in North America.

The joint initiative will focus on two key areas- Jewish lay leadership and Jewish professional development:

- The Wexner Foundation will create two Wexner Heritage classes comprised of Jews from the Russian-speaking community in the New York area, in cooperation with UJA Federation of New York. The two cohorts will begin a customized Wexner Heritage Program at a week-long learning institute to be held in the summer of 2010. Russian-speaking Jews will also be actively recruited to participate in Wexner Heritage groups being run in other communities.

- The Wexner Graduate Fellowship/Davidson Scholar Program for emerging Jewish professionals will add to its roster of exceptional graduate school students. Two candidates from the Russian-speaking Jewish community preparing for careers in Jewish professional life will be named Genesis Fellows in the fellowship class selected one year from now in anticipation of starting their graduate programs in fall 2010. Another set of Genesis Fellows is anticipated in the 2011 class.

"While the Russian-speaking community in North America has achieved much professional success, these talents remain largely outside of the organized Jewish community", said Stan Polovets, CEO and one of the five founders of GPG. "We are pleased that through this partnership, the exceptional expertise in Jewish leadership that The Wexner Foundation has developed will meet the unique experiences of Russian-speaking Jews to create a new cadre of committed and engaged Russian-speaking Jewish leaders."

The Wexner Foundation is eager to focus energy upon customizing leadership initiatives designed for Russian-speaking Jews. Larry Moses, President of The Wexner Foundation, commented, "We regard this work as particularly significant, perhaps historic. It provides a rare opportunity to engage the talents and energize the leadership of Russian-speaking Jews, an important segment of North American Jewish life previously under-represented in mainstream Jewish organizational life - much to the community's detriment. Leslie and Abigail Wexner, Chairmen of The Wexner Foundation, have expressed strong support for this project from its earliest stages."

Leadership development is seen as the key to succeeding in transforming Jewish life for Russian speaking Jews in America. In camps, schools, JCCs and a range of other venues there is a need for strong professional and volunteer leadership that can represent the views of the Russian speaking community. "When Genesis began its work in North America we all realized that we needed well placed, well trained leaders who could make sure the Russian perspective was included. This is critical to making sure that the Russian Jewish community is well served but it's equally critical to ensure that the richness of Russian culture informs the development of Jewish life in North America," said Mark Charendoff, President of the Jewish Funders Network, which works with GPG on its grant making in North America. "We believe that this partnership will create the environment that allows the rest of GPG's grantmaking to flourish."

"This is an exciting and important new partnership to strengthen the Jewish future. The Wexner Heritage program has nurtured a new generation of American Jewish lay leaders who have created new institutions and contributed to the enrichment of Jewish life," commented Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, who sits on the GPG Advisory Board and has been involved with the Wexner Foundation for many years. "We believe that the Wexner program can make the same contribution to elevate the Russian speaking Jewish community and draw it close to all of American Jewry"

About The Wexner Foundation:

The Wexner Foundation has developed three specific leadership initiatives over the last two decades. Over 1500 Jewish volunteer leaders in 31 North American communities have participated in The Wexner Heritage Program, more than 350 Jewish professional leaders from a wide array of Jewish affiliations and professional groupings have participated in the Wexner Graduate Fellowship/Davidson Scholars Program, and nearly 200 Israeli public officials have participated in the Wexner Israel Fellowship.www.wexnerfoundation.org

About Genesis Philanthropy Group:

The mission of Genesis Philanthropy Group is to develop and enhance Jewish identity among Russian-speaking Jews worldwide, with a particular emphasis on the former Soviet Union, North America, and Israel. GPG is committed to supporting and launching projects, programming, and institutions that are focused on ensuring that Jewish culture, heritage, and values are preserved in Russian-speaking Jewish communities across the globe. The foundation was established in the summer of 2007 by Mikhail Fridman, German Khan, Pyotr Aven, Alex Knaster, and Stan Polovets. In the past 18 months, GPG has made over 30 grants, which included gifts to organizations such as Birthright Israel, Moscow State University, the IDF Education Department, Limmud, Maccabi, and the New York Jewish Museum. Its most recent grants, announced in March '09, include \$4.4 million to The Foundation for Jewish Camp and \$10.9 million to Brandeis University.

IN ALL GENESIS TO PROVIDE \$4.8 MILLION TO MULTIPLE ORGANIZATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

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#29

Russia WTO bid still faces big U.S. obstacles

By Doug Palmer

Reuters, April 1, 2009

WASHINGTON - Russia still faces a tough road to join the World Trade Organization despite a push on Wednesday from U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

"From the business community perspective, everybody wants this over and done with," said Michael Considine, director for Eurasian issues at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

But Moscow must first fulfill anti-piracy and other commitments it made to the United States in 2006, as well as finish talks with all WTO members, Considine said.

Obama and Medvedev, meeting in London on the eve of a Group of 20 developed and developing countries summit, said in a joint statement they would instruct their "governments to make efforts to finalize as soon as possible Russia's accession into the World Trade Organization."

The administration of former President George W. Bush hoped in early 2008 to finally usher Russia into the WTO after years of negotiations. But the political fallout from Russia's short war with Georgia in August set those talks back for months.

Now, as Obama and Medvedev are trying to rebuild relations, congressional Democrats are complaining that Russia still has not fulfilled all of the commitments it has made to the United States to crack down on copyright piracy.

CURRENT BENEFITS AT RISK

They urged Obama in a March 26 letter to insist Moscow honor all of those commitments before he signs off on a final WTO accession package. They also recommended Obama suspend U.S. trade benefits for Russia until it significantly improves its enforcement of intellectual property rights.

The U.S. Trade Representative's office did not respond to a request for more information on Obama and Medvedev's pledge.

But in an annual report on Tuesday on foreign trade barriers, the trade office said "Russia has much work to do" to bring its laws into compliance with WTO rules and to honor bilateral deals it has made to join the world trade body.

Russia also must resolve multilateral concerns over its intellectual property rights regime, support for agriculture, import licensing of products with encryption technology, operation of state-owned enterprises and barriers to agricultural imports, the trade office said.

Many U.S. lawmakers still oppose lifting a Cold War-era restriction on trade with Russia known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment, despite the recent recommendation of a bipartisan experts group that Congress do that to help repair relations between the two countries.

The measure 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 since 1994, but most U.S. lawmakers have insisted Moscow finish negotiations to join the WTO before they vote to lift the measure and establish permanent normal trade relations, referred to as PNTR.

So far, there has been no detectable change in that sentiment, a Senate aide who works on trade said.

Once Russia reaches a final deal to join the WTO, the United States will be obligated to grant PNTR in order to share in the market-opening concessions that Moscow has made, said Doug Goudie, director for international trade policy at the National Association of Manufacturers.

That could be a tough political fight, but hopefully not as difficult as it was to persuade Congress to approve PNTR for China in 2000, Goudie said.

A WTO deal that opens the Russian market to more U.S. exports would be a boon to U.S. manufacturers at a time when they desperately are looking for new sales, Goudie said.

#30

US, Russia call for nuke cuts in sweeping agenda

By Jennifer Loven and Steven R. Hurst

AP, April 1, 2009

The United States and Russia set a newly ambitious course for global cooperation Wednesday as presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev ordered negotiators into immediate action on a treaty to further reduce nuclear weapons.

Going into their first face-to-face meeting in London, Medvedev had voiced openness to Obama's call for resetting the deeply troubled U.S.-Russian relationship, but few had expected the kind of sweeping statements that emerged from weeks of intense preparatory talks.

While setting in motion fast-track negotiations on a replacement for the seminal 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, which expires at year's end, the two leaders vowed at the same time to jointly confront other perceived threats. They specifically mentioned the nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea and al-Qaida militants who have found refuge in Pakistan.

They set a nominal July deadline for a substitute treaty for START, a date that coincides with Obama's first presidential visit to Russia. That conceivably would leave time to get the new treaty approved in the U.S. Senate by the December expiration of the current agreement. But arms control experts say December is not a hard deadline so long as there is progress.

Sen. Richard Lugar, the Indiana Republican devoted to arms control, said the announcement of intent was "truly remarkable."

Not known for overstatement, Lugar called the joint declaration "almost breathless in its optimism and scope." He spoke in an interview with MSNBC.

Obama's engagement with the Russians marks a stunning reversal from policies of the Bush administration, which was disinclined to take up deep arms control negotiations and had angered Moscow with its intention to install a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov drove that point home in a briefing with Russian reporters after the Obama-Medvedev meeting.

"The new atmosphere of mutual trust," he said, is meaningful in "taking into account mutual interests and readiness to listen to each other." He added, "We missed this much in the past years."

The joint statements are a major boost for both Obama and Medvedev → both new to the foreign policy proving grounds and in need of the other's help.

If Medvedev is successful, with Obama, in midwifing the birth of a new nuclear reduction treaty, the Russian leader will solidify his hold on Kremlin power, where former President Vladimir Putin → now the prime minister → is perpetually looking over the shoulder of his hand-picked successor.

Obama stands to gain a major ally in the foreign policy problems most vexing to his administration, particularly Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea.

Obama sweetened the deal for the Russians by pledging to work for the U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, something that long has been high on the Russian agenda. Moscow has ratified the test ban pact, but the United States has not, nor have four other members of the nuclear club: China, India, Pakistan and Israel.

The new U.S. president also said he would put his shoulder behind Russia's bid for World Trade Organization membership, a key to Moscow's integration into the global trading system.

In return, the Russians put Iran on notice that it "needs to restore confidence in its exclusively peaceful nature." Washington contends the Iranians are using work on a civilian nuclear program for electricity generation as a cover for weapons development. Moscow retains significant sway with Tehran.

On Afghanistan, the joint documents talk of solving the ongoing conflict in a "regional context," which was believed to signal Russia's readiness to help.

Moscow also agreed to toughen its tone on North Korea, with the statement saying the Stalinist country's plans for a missile launch would be "damaging to peace and stability in the region." Moscow joined Washington in urging Pyongyang to "exercise restraint and observe relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions."

Obama and his aides were particularly pleased about the Russian position on Iran and on agreement about the threat from extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But the talks were not all about agreement. Last August's devastating war between Russia and the former Soviet republic of Georgia came up, with Obama saying directly that Georgia's pro-Moscow separatist regions

of South Ossetia and Abkhazia would never be recognized as independent by the United States, U.S. officials said.

Speaking for the Russians on American missile defense plans in Central Europe, Lavrov voiced the expectation that Moscow's concerns could be eased in the coming talks on a treaty to replace START.

Going into the new nuclear talks, the United States had 2,200 strategic nuclear warheads deployed; Russia has 2,800. Under the subsequent 2002 Treaty of Moscow, a plan negotiated under the Bush administration, the two sides committed to reducing their nuclear warheads to between 1,700 and 2,200.

But that treaty did not establish its own system for verifying compliance; instead it said verification would rest upon the existing provisions of the START treaty. But if START expires in December without a replacement in place, the Moscow Treaty would be left with no legally binding system for verification.

Obama has declared his belief that the United States and Russia should take the lead in ridding the world of nuclear weapons altogether. Russian and American arms control experts believe that the START replacement treaty would seek initially to cut strategic warhead arsenals to 1,500 on each side.

Steven R. Hurst reported from Washington; Associated Press writer Barry Schweid contributed from Washington.

#31

NATO at 60: Save the Champagne

By Mark Medish

New York Times April 3, 2009

This year will mark two significant – and largely incompatible – anniversaries: the 60th anniversary of NATO and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

One could argue that without NATO's show of Western unity, the Berlin Wall may not have fallen as soon as it did. Yet with the Soviet Union receding in memory, it is a wonder that NATO still exists. Its survival can be explained by ordinary institutional inertia and an understandable desire to buttress Russia's insecure East European neighbors. Yet these are not sufficient reasons to ensure the alliance's future. And the search for a new purpose has not gone well. The depth of the problem is shown by the debate raging in capitals across the Atlantic about how to reform NATO.

Iconoclasts view it as a hollow alliance that has plainly outlived its usefulness and represents a misallocation of scarce resources. The NATO priesthood calls it the most successful alliance in history and sees it as a sacred touchstone of Western security with a promising future in "out of area" places like Afghanistan. Perhaps each side has a piece of the truth but both overstate their case.

It is important to see that this debate is a sign of strength not weakness in the trans-Atlantic community. The vitality of any international institution depends on allowing room between orthodox pieties and strident revisionism. This means being open to realistic assessments of costs and benefits.

For their part, the high priests of NATO should move beyond institutional fetishism. Those whose military and diplomatic careers have been tied up with the institution are unlikely to have unbiased views about its future. NATO should not be considered too big to fail.

Many NATO boosters have decried the de facto two-tier structure that has emerged among members, split between serious players and backbenchers. Even the alliance's most ardent fans admit that it has been a failure in Afghanistan, with many key members, like Germany and France, unwilling to pony up the resources needed for extended engagement.

After 9/11, the then U.S. secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, revealed the realist position when he snubbed NATO allies who had invoked mutual security guarantees in a noble gesture of solidarity with America. Rumsfeld understood that the most important threats to U.S. security lay far outside the European theater and that the Atlantic alliance could do little to assist in these areas.

Yet NATO critics should take seriously the Cold War insecurities that still hang over Eastern Europe. If NATO didn't exist, we would need to use alternative security structures to integrate these countries or devise new ones.

Since the Soviet collapse, NATO has been a useful tool of regional integration, although it has done little in this regard that the European Union could not do better.

Despite efforts to create a special advisory council with Moscow, NATO has been a poor tool of engagement with Russia. To Moscow, the enlarged alliance reflects the U.S. aim to consolidate post-Cold War gains and the European desire to hedge against Russia's intentions toward former Soviet satellites.

If the East European nations are understandably paranoid about Russia, the Kremlin is a tad paranoid about assumed U.S. encirclement plans. One of President Obama's main goals should be to lead the way out of this Eurasian phobia trap.

To be clear: As long as NATO exists, it is rational for countries like Ukraine and Georgia to aspire to membership. But the West should disabuse these countries of any totemic notions about NATO. There are other ways to be secure.

President Dmitri Medvedev of Russia has called for a new Eurasian security concept, but it not clear whether he has anything concrete in mind. It would be a relief if the Europeans themselves would put a clear idea forward. It would also be helpful for Russia to tone down its truculent postures.

After the fall of the Soviet bloc many voices called for disbanding NATO. That was not an outrageous idea. In the event, NATO expanded in order to survive. The expansion focused on the political element in the NATO charter rather than its core military mission.

The instinct of NATO insiders has been to push further enlargement. They dream of a global NATO embracing countries like India, Japan and Israel. It is a vision of modern Knights Templar prepared to defend a "league of democracies."

Instead of disbanding or expanding, a better option would be radical re-branding. It is not necessarily too late for this. Re-branding could start with a new name, such as POTATO, which would be far less neuralgic, at least in Moscow.

Given all the uncertainties, it would be wise to save some of the champagne for the Berlin Wall celebration later this year. NATO needs a sober re-think.

#32

Barack Obama's pragmatic first meeting with Dmitry Medvedev Washington Post, April 2, 2009

THE HEADLINE news from Europe yesterday was President Obama's meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, which Mr. Obama said produced "great progress" in several areas, including an agreement to quickly negotiate a new nuclear arms treaty. That step was certainly welcome, as were the slight indications of greater U.S.-Russian agreement on the nuclear threats of North Korea and Iran, and the need to confront the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But one other, less heralded piece of news needs to be added to the upbeat reports from London if what Mr. Obama called "the beginning of new progress in U.S.-Russian relations" is to be properly assessed. That is the

attack on one of Russia's foremost human rights activists, Lev Ponomarev, who was brutally beaten by a group of men outside his home in Moscow on Tuesday night, just hours before the Obama-Medvedev meeting. It was the latest in a series of brazen and unpunished assaults on opponents of the regime Mr. Medvedev represents - - and its timing was almost certainly not accidental. "It was an ordered attack," Mr. Ponomarev told The Post's Phillip P. Pan yesterday. "It's connected with my human rights activities."

Mr. Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have inflated ambitions; as Mr. Medvedev suggested in an op-ed published in The Post this week, they imagine the Russian-U.S. relationship as a locus for management of the world's problems. In fact, Moscow manifestly lacks the economic, military or diplomatic clout to play such a role, but arms control is one area where the interests of both nations can be furthered by bilateral engagement. While it remains to be seen whether a new nuclear accord can be reached on the tight timetable set by the two presidents, Mr. Obama was right to focus on that opportunity -- and also to offer the prospect of greater economic cooperation.

Still, the new administration appears to recognize the likely pitfalls and limits of doing business with the Putin-Medvedev regime. U.S. officials briefing reporters yesterday were cautious in describing Mr. Medvedev's response to U.S. concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. "I don't think we want to suggest that somehow they're in agreement," said one. They emphasized that, unlike President George W. Bush -- who gushed that he had glimpsed Mr. Putin's soul during their first meeting -- Mr. Obama is not seeking to develop a personal relationship with the Russian leaders but rather one focused on concrete interests.

Appropriately, Mr. Obama directly raised central U.S. concerns about Russia, his aides said, including its attempt to dominate the states around it -- and its worsening human rights record. The attack on Mr. Ponomarev "came up in the conversation," said one official, as well it should have. Mr. Obama is right to pragmatically pursue arms control agreements with Russia and to seek its cooperation on Iran and counterterrorism. But he must also make clear to the Kremlin that collaboration in those areas will never mean consent for Russian autocracy or neo-imperialism, and that as long as those policies persist, the regime's fantasy of a global partnership with the United States will remain just that.

#33

Rights Campaigner Is Beaten in Moscow

By Michael Schwartz

New York Times, April 2, 2009

MOSCOW — The leader of a prominent Russian human rights group was beaten by a group of men outside his Moscow home late on Tuesday night, in an attack that the police and colleagues say was very likely linked to his professional activities.

Lev A. Ponomaryov, the director of the Moscow-based organization For Human Rights and a leader in the new political opposition movement, Solidarity, was the latest victim of violence in Russia against well-known people involved in human rights issues. Like the others, Mr. Ponomaryov was a frequent critic of the Kremlin.

Mr. Ponomaryov was attacked by a group of men who were waiting for him when he arrived at his home, according to his organization's Web site. He was hospitalized, then released, but he returned Wednesday for medical tests, said his daughter, Elena Liptser. "It is difficult to say who did this," she said, "because he was involved in a number of human rights issues."

The day before the attack, the tires on Mr. Ponomaryov's car were slashed. Recently, he was presiding over a news conference when a gang of young people burst in throwing eggs at participants.

Members of Russia's close-knit community of human rights advocates and critics of the government have said that fear is spreading through their ranks as a result of growing violence.

In late January, a human rights lawyer, Stanislav Markelov, was shot to death along with a journalist, Anastasia Baburova, near the Kremlin complex in Moscow.

"The climate for human rights defenders has been worsening in the past several years," said Tatyana Lokshina, a researcher for Human Rights Watch in Moscow. "People are just watching their back all the time and thinking, 'when is it going to happen to me?'"

Rarely do the police identify the perpetrators of such attacks, and rights groups have accused the Russian authorities of tacit complicity, if not actual involvement in violence and threats.

Many see a concerted campaign of intimidation that is the result of years of government efforts to portray independent groups as traitors to Russia.

"Since the government began to again consider human rights organizations enemies, there has been increased pressure from the secret services, tax inspectors and of course from marginal forces and parliamentarians with supremacist, nationalist outlooks," said Alexandr S. Brod, director of the Moscow-based organization Human Rights.

Mr. Brod, who typically hires bodyguards when appearing in public because of death threats, said that the security of people like him "will be under even greater threat during the economic crisis because, in addition to marginal groups, even political forces will begin to foment hatred of them."

Aleksandr Verkhovsky, director of the Sova Center, an organization that monitors hate crimes, said it was difficult to guard against such attacks, short of quitting. His name appeared last year on an online list of "enemies of the Russian people" along with his home address and a call for all Russian patriots to kill him. Unknown individuals have since visited him at home three times, trying to lure him out "for a conversation."

Until recently, the threats against him "were rare and generally not so frightening," he said in a recent interview. "Now the situation is worse."

#34

Ex-Soviet bloc faces 'worst recession in 20 yrs'

AFP, April 1, 2009

WARSAW – Former Soviet-bloc states are facing their worst recession since the collapse of European communism two decades ago, ratings agency Fitch warned Wednesday.

"Fitch forecasts GDP growth to contract by 3.1 percent this year in 'Emerging Europe': a severe and abrupt recession after growth of 4.0 percent in 2008 and an average of 6.8 percent in the five years to 2007," Edward Parker, the agency's regional chief, said in the statement.

"Moreover, it expects only a modest recovery of 1.4 percent in 2010, insufficient to prevent further rises in unemployment and pressure on public finances," he said.

Fitch defines "Emerging Europe" as stretching from central European EU member nations such as the Czech Republic across to former Soviet Central Asia.

Many countries in the region shifted rapidly from a command economy to the free market as communist power collapsed in 1989-1991.

"Growth in Emerging Europe is expected to drop more than in other regions as the characteristics of many countries -- such as trade openness, prior macroeconomic imbalances and commodity dependence -- leaves them relatively exposed to the major shocks that have rocked the global economy," said Parker.

He pointed to "the sharpest and most synchronised recession in the world's 'advanced' economies since World War II, a reversal of international capital and financial flows, and a dramatic decline in commodity prices."

Fitch, however, warned against treating the region as a "homogeneous block," saying the overall forecast masked a wide range of potential performances.

Azerbaijan, for example, is expected to post growth of 2.5 percent, while the economy of Latvia, the hardest-hit nation in the region, is forecast to shrink by 12.0 percent.

Since August 2008, Fitch has repeatedly downgraded its ratings for 10 countries in the ex-communist region.

The agency said that the economies most exposed to the dramatic decline in global trade and financial flows were Hungary and Kazakhstan while the least vulnerable was Poland.

The slump will be the first to strike the region since the Russian financial crisis of 1998, when output fell by 0.5 percent, Fitch noted.

#35

Lukashenko Eases Grip as Russia, West Vie for Belarus

By Yuriy Humber

Bloomberg, April 1, 2009

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, one of Russia's staunchest allies, is inviting an East-West bidding war for his country as he seeks to hold onto power and keep its economy afloat amid the global crisis.

Lukashenko, who has run what the U.S. in 2005 called "Europe's last dictatorship" for 15 years, agreed in January to accelerate state asset sales and reduce government-ordered bank lending in exchange for a \$2.5 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund.

He then went to Russia, Belarus's biggest trading partner and energy supplier, and asked for an additional \$3 billion in credit. When that was rejected, he sought \$2 billion. The Russians, reluctant to expand existing subsidies before the IMF aid, may now relent to keep Belarus in their orbit.

A Belarusian move toward Europe would likely heighten Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's anxiety over western encroachment in territory once ruled from Moscow. The three Baltic former Soviet republics joined the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2004, and Ukraine and Georgia are seeking NATO membership.

"Belarus is trying to reposition itself closer to Europe and further from Russia," said Charles Grant, director of the Centre for European Reform, a London-based research group. "Russia may not like it. It may stop it."

Revolutions

Lukashenko, 54, is keen to exploit Russian fears of instability in a country of 10 million Russian speakers that Moscow-based OAO Gazprom uses to ship a fifth of its gas exports to Europe.

Alongside the IMF cash, Belarus obtained an EU offer of membership in its so-called Eastern Partnership, which would break down trade barriers. Lukashenko will attend an EU meeting on the initiative in May.

Every Belarus election since 1996 has been criticized as unfair by international observers such as the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In November 2007 and again in March 2008, the U.S. Treasury Department froze the overseas accounts of state-run oil company Belneftekhim, citing human rights violations by Lukashenko.

Since then, Belarus has released the last of its political prisoners, prompting the EU to ease travel restrictions on Lukashenko and his top officials and the U.S. to lighten penalties on Belneftekhim.

Price of Aid

Access to western aid comes at a price for Lukashenko. While most governments are taking a greater role in their economies, he is being forced to unwind state controls.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, formed by the U.S. and other western governments to help Soviet- bloc states embrace capitalism after communism's collapse, says it won't increase its investments in the country until Lukashenko shows more commitment to privatization and the free market.

Lukashenko visited Moscow last month for talks with President Dmitry Medvedev. The \$3 billion in new Russian aid would have come in the form of a currency swap and added to the \$3.5 billion Moscow has doled out to its neighbor since 2007.

After Russia rejected the first request, Belarus yesterday asked Russia to provide a \$2 billion bank loan guaranteed by the Russian government, Interfax reported, citing the Russian Finance Ministry's press service.

If Russia offers the cash, it will be on condition that Belarus adopts the Russian ruble, initially as a reserve currency, and increases its military cooperation. That might include the deployment of Russian missiles on Belarusian territory should the U.S. go ahead with a planned missile- defense system in neighboring Poland.

Not Stupid

"Russia gives us loans so easily and so cheaply, knowing full well that they go on things we consume and hence can't be repaid," said Stanislav Bogdankevich, head of the Belarus National Bank between 1991 and 1995, in an interview in the capital Minsk. "Russian politicians aren't stupid. In the future, they will take Belarusian assets to cover debts. There is an element of future subjugation."

Unlike Russia and its \$385 billion cash reserve, Belarus is racing to avoid bankruptcy after its economy grew at an average of about 8 percent since 2000.

The country has about four months to raise more cash from the West or win funding from Moscow and face an "encroaching takeover by the Kremlin," said Yaroslav Romanchuk, an adviser to the government who runs the Mizes research center in Minsk.

Belarus's importance to Russia as a "geopolitically crucial location" will make it hard to rebuff Russian pressure, the U.S.-based risk-advisory group Stratfor said. "Russia's financial assistance is simply too valuable for the economically isolated Belarus to pass up" amid the economic crisis, Stratfor, which is based in Austin, Texas, told clients last month.

Plunging Exports

Belarus's exports plunged 45 percent in January, leaving the central bank with less than \$3 billion in foreign currency reserves, equal to less than a month of imports. Gross domestic debt stood at \$14.6 billion on Feb. 1, triple the amount held by the population in 28 banks.

On the list for privatization this year is the Belarusian Automobile Plant, maker of BelAZ trucks, and pipeline operator Gomeltransneft Druzhba, which services part of the Druzhba route that Russia uses to supply 20 percent of Germany's crude oil.

Belarus seeks also to sell more than 50 percent in two of its largest state-run banks by the end of 2009, Reuters reported today, citing an unnamed central bank deputy chairman.

Russia is the biggest export market for Belarusian products and the two countries formed a loose political union a decade ago that helps Belarus save \$4 billion a year in discounted natural-gas and oil prices.

Seeking Allegiance

That relationship may change if Belarus finds other donors and diversifies its sources of energy. The nation is seeking to build its first hydropower and coal-fired plants and burn peat, a decayed vegetation matter found in bogs, to cut reliance on gas to 58 percent of total electricity output from 97 percent within a decade, Energy Minister Alexander Ozerets said in an interview.

At their meeting in Moscow, Medvedev sought to lock up Lukashenko's allegiance.

"We have reached some serious agreements which have economic, humanitarian and regional dimension," Medvedev told reporters. "They now need to be implemented. They must be turned into contracts, deliveries, settlement of issues."

Conditions for more Russian loans may include recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, over which Russia waged a five-day war last August. The EU has said it will make no deals if Belarus officially recognizes the states, as Russia has. Lukashenko has passed on the decision to the country's parliament, which has delayed voting on it.

'Two Choices'

"Lukashenko's game continues in both directions," said Arkady Moshes, program director for Russia at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki. As Russia's own economy slows, Belarus needs easier access to global markets and "the country's elite now wants a deal with Europe."

"But, in the long-term, Belarus is only drifting away from Russia," Moshes said. "Lukashenko has two choices: resist and face ouster or lead the process."

#36

**Remarks by President Obama and Russian President Medvedev After Meeting
Winfield House London, United Kingdom
The White House, April 1, 2009**

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Let me just make a brief comment. I am very grateful to President Medvedev for taking the time to visit with me today. I'm particularly gratified because prior to the meeting our respective teams had worked together and had developed a series of approaches to areas of common interest that I think present great promise.

As I've said in the past, I think that over the last several years the relationship between our two countries has been allowed to drift. And what I believe we've begun today is a very constructive dialogue that will allow us to work on issues of mutual interest, like the reduction of nuclear weapons and the strengthening of our nonproliferation treaties; our mutual interest in dealing with terrorism and extremism that threatens both countries; our mutual interest in economic stability and restoring growth around the world; our mutual interest in promoting peace and stability in areas like the Middle East.

So I am very encouraged by the leadership of the President. I'm very grateful that he has taken the time to visit. I am especially excited about the fact that the President extended an invitation for me to visit Moscow to build on some of the areas that we discussed on today. And I have agreed to visit Moscow in July, which we both agreed was a better time than January to visit.

And my hope is that given the constructive conversations that we've had today, the joint statements that we will be issuing both on reductions of nuclear arsenals, as well as a range of other areas of interest, that what we're seeing today is the beginning of new progress in the U.S.-Russian relations. And I think that President Medvedev's leadership is -- has been critical in allowing that progress to take place.

So thank you very much.

PRESIDENT MEDVEDEV: (As translated.) I would like to sincerely thank President Obama for this opportunity to meet him and to meet this time in person. And, indeed, we had an opportunity to compare our views on the current relations and current situation in the world. And we had an opportunity to agree upon certain common values that we need to foster in our relations, and provide for further areas for cooperation in progression of our relations.

I can only agree that the relations between our countries have been adrift over the past years. As President Obama has said, they were drifting, and drifting in some wrong directions. They were degrading, to some extent.

That is why we believe that since such a situation was not to the benefit of the United States or Russia Federation, to say nothing about the global situation, we believe that the time has come to reset our relations, as it was said, and to open a new page in progression in the development of our common situation.

Indeed, it was said that we are prepared to cooperate further in such areas as the nonproliferation of WMDs limitation of strategic weapons, countering terrorism, and improving economic and financial situation and the overall economic situation in the world.

It is important to note that there are many points on which we can work. And indeed there are far more points in which we can -- where we can come closer, where we can work, rather than those points on which we have differences. Thus, by bringing our positions closer we can attain significant progress and, much more importantly, further our achievements.

I share the view of President Obama who said that our teams have worked really well in preparation of this meeting, and the declarations, the two declarations, which we are adopting are just another proof of that. And those are a declaration on the strategic weapons, and the declaration on the general framework of relations between Russia and the United States, which set good grounds for our further interaction.

We will be very glad to host President Obama, to greet him in Moscow in July. Indeed, July is the warmest time in Russia and in Moscow, and I believe that will be exactly the feature of the talks and relations we are going to enjoy during that period in Moscow. And of course we have set out certain objectives and certain goals and tasks we need to work through in order to get better prepared for this meeting. And indeed I am convinced that is a good opportunity for this interaction.

Well, indeed, so we are convinced that we'll continue successfully our contacts, in particular today, where we were not only discussing international issues or bilateral items of interaction; we were also discussing education, which probably not everybody -- where we have come to an understanding that we're reading the same textbooks while in these subjects. And this will set us further for interaction.

After this meeting, I am far more optimistic about the successful development of our relations, and would like to thank President Obama for this opportunity.

#37

Major Push To Engage Russians Carries Risks

By Carolyn Slutsky

NY Jewish Week, April 1, 2009

In the most extensive communal push to date to engage Russian-speaking Jews in the U.S. — a notoriously difficult population to reach — five Moscow-based billionaires are pouring nearly \$20 million into a Jewish education and identity-building effort.

Admitting that the effort to bring Russian Jews into the fold has been spotty, and perhaps even culturally insensitive, Jewish leaders involved in the new plan now say that cultivating lay leadership will be a focus of the ambitious project.

The Genesis Philanthropy Group was founded by Mikhail Fridman, Petr Aven, Stan Polovets, Alexander M. Knaster and German Khan. The GPG's funds will go to various Jewish educational institutions in North America, with the largest gifts to Brandeis University, the Foundation for Jewish Camp and the Wexner Foundation. The grants come at a counterintuitive moment for Jewish education, when major organizations from day schools to the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, which just closed due to finances, are fighting for survival.

But GPG's focus on building Jewish identity in the Russian community is one seen as long overdue, as Russian-speaking Jews now account for more than 10 percent of the American Jewish population, and nearly 20 percent of the Jewish population in New York.

In the 1980s and early '90s, the plight of Russian Jews was at the tip of the communal tongue, but once their exodus from the former Soviet Union was well underway they got lost in the shuffle of other priorities. At the same time, many chose to insulate within their own, largely secular, communities, retaining a strong cultural identity that often didn't include many elements of the mainstream American Jewish community.

"The last decade was the decade of movement, of people emigrating," said Len Saxe, director of the Steinhardt Social Research Institution at Brandeis University. "This is the decade of consolidating. There's an entirely new generation of Russian speakers who weren't necessarily born in the former Soviet Union or came from there when they were very young ... [and] we've not taken their contribution, understood them well. We've looked at them as people who need help rather than people who can contribute."

The repercussions of the grants are already being felt, prompting recipients to speculate broadly about what impact an influx of Russian-speaking Jews will have on their communities, and how their institutions can influence this generation of Russian Jews. Among the institutions receiving major grants from GPG are Brandeis University, which will get \$10.8 million to fund undergraduate and graduate scholarships and programming, the Foundation for Jewish Camp, which will use \$4.8 million to send new cohorts of Russian-Jewish campers to camps across north America, and \$2.7 to the Wexner Foundation that will go toward developing Russian Jewish leaders.

Mark Charendoff, president of the Jewish Funders Network, said GPG wants to focus broadly on Jewish identity for Russian-speaking Jews, especially in the realm of cultivating lay leadership within the Russian community itself.

"The Jewish community in North America had the best of intentions and motivations when [Russian Jews] arrived, but I don't believe those intentions manifested themselves in efforts that engaged the Russian speakers to the extent that they could," said Charendoff, whose network serves as GPG's American grantmaking staff.

"Part of the mistake that was made was it was North Americans making decisions for the Russian population without always including them in that decision-making process, and some of the activities and offerings were culturally inappropriate."

Rabbi Jay Moses, director of the Wexner Heritage Program that trains lay leaders and will add two additional cohorts of Russian-speakers to its program next year with the help of the GPG grant, agreed that this group has been largely left out of the communal conversation since it was the cause celebre more than 20 years ago.

"The American-born Jewish community did a great job of rescuing Russian Jews, getting roofs over their heads, but didn't do such a great job of the next step of that mission — to instill a sense of Jewish identity for them, help create meaningful Jewish experiences that would honor where they've come from and also help link them more deeply to their new homes here," said Rabbi Moses. "These Russian-speaking Jews have grown up here or come of age here and in many ways are still formulating how the story will be written of their immigration and how it plays out over the next generations."

For Brandeis, which will use the grant money for scholarships as well as offering educational programs and lectures and strengthening the relationship between Russian-Jews and the larger Jewish, Brandeis and Boston

communities, the grant represents a continuation of its thrust to enhance its global connection and couldn't come at a better time.

"This has been a great boon and in a period when it's very difficult for kids and their families to find the money to go to a private school this has been a wonderful gift and a win-win," Jehuda Reinharz, president of Brandeis University, told The Jewish Week.

Reinharz said there are some 150 Russian-speaking students already at Brandeis and that the grant will help them and the new students explore their identities through retreats and cultural events.

Daniel Terris, Brandeis' associate vice-president for global affairs, added that this will help continue to internationalize the curriculum and student body, joining initiatives in India and Africa as well as being a first opportunity to explore Russian-Jewish identity in depth on campus.

The Foundation for Jewish Camp will launch a pilot program this summer at Camp Tel Yehudah in Barryville, N.Y., with 144 children; by the summer of 2013, GPG and the FJC hope some 2,000 kids will be enrolled in camps nationwide.

"We look at this grant as a bull's-eye in our mission as we continue to look at the entire Jewish population and say, 'how do we use this fabulous experience of camp as a portal of entry and continue the message that camp is a wide tent that welcomes everyone,'" said Jerry Silverman, FJC's CEO. "Our hope is they build the fabulous type of communities that camps foster...we want that for every child, but especially children for whom this may not be part of what they were grounded in. This type of experience can really accelerate the curve."

Abby Knopp, director of community initiatives at FJC, saw the grant as an opportunity for the mainstream Jewish community to turn its attention to a population with high numbers and a lot of creativity and energy.

"This is still an immigration in flux, some in the community tend to be more insular, some much less so," said Knopp. "A lot of Russian parents are still saying they don't want their kids to lose their uniqueness, language and culture."

Observers in the Russian Jewish community itself see the GPG and its new grants in a mostly positive light, though some worry about how exactly the American Jewish community will embrace its Russian counterparts.

Sam Kliger, director of Russian affairs at the American Jewish Committee, said the integration process so far as gone slowly for Russian Jews, but that by and large, for the "1.5 and second generation," it has been successful.

"Now we are facing a new phenomenon. We see a new cohort of young Jews; many of them speak the Russian language, are interested in their roots, in what was then life in the Soviet Union, why their parents decided to immigrate ... and what their identities will be," said Kliger of the new generation.

"They want to have something cool, and in this case it's being a bit Russian," he said. "And for their American Jewish friends, too, it's cool to be a little bit Russian."

But Igor Kotler, a former Wexner fellow, recalled a time during the early 1990s when the Los Angeles Jewish Federation made gift baskets to greet new Russian immigrants as they were getting off the plane; the baskets included siddurim, something most of them would never have encountered in the secular Soviet Union. He worries that the new efforts might mirror those earlier ones, not addressing the real needs of his community.

"I'm afraid people who continue to be experts in this area will go ahead without consulting members of the community and teach things that are not applicable," he said.

Ultimately, though, most recipients of GPG's philanthropy feel excited about the new opportunity for Russian Jews to finally come into their own within American Judaism.

“It’s not just a question of how do we best serve Russian Jews, but that Russian Jewish culture has an enormous amount to offer American Jewish culture and we’re poorer for not having it,” said Charendoff. “It’s not simply melding on Russian-speaking Jews to current programs, it’s a completely new look at what we mean by identity and peoplehood and Jewish behaviors, observances and attitudes. But frankly that’s the most exciting piece of this — re-examining some of those issues is long overdue.”

#38
Joint Statement by Dmitriy A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, and Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, Regarding Negotiations on Further Reductions in Strategic Offensive Arm
Office of the Press Secretary
White House, April 1, 2009

The President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, and the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitriy A. Medvedev, noted that the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START Treaty), which expires in December 2009, has completely fulfilled its intended purpose and that the maximum levels for strategic offensive arms recorded in the Treaty were reached long ago. They have therefore decided to move further along the path of reducing and limiting strategic offensive arms in accordance with U.S. and Russian obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The Presidents decided to begin bilateral intergovernmental negotiations to work out a new, comprehensive, legally binding agreement on reducing and limiting strategic offensive arms to replace the START Treaty. The United States and the Russian Federation intend to conclude this agreement before the Treaty expires in December. In this connection, they instructed their delegations at the negotiations to proceed on basis of the following:

- The subject of the new agreement will be the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms;
- In the future agreement the Parties will seek to record levels of reductions in strategic offensive arms that will be lower than those in the 2002 Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions, which is currently in effect;
- The new agreement will mutually enhance the security of the Parties and predictability and stability in strategic offensive forces, and will include effective verification measures drawn from the experience of the Parties in implementing the START Treaty.

They directed their negotiators to report on progress achieved in working out the new agreement by July 2009.