

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 4, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief

Dear Friend,

Please click on the link below for NCSJ's Weekly Update. I hope you have a healthy and happy Labor Day Weekend.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



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

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. September 4, 2009

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#1a

Ukrainian Jewish charity's building vandalized JTA, August 30, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Vandals painted swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on the main entrance of a Jewish charity's building in southern Ukraine.

The Chesed Velvele Jewish charity was vandalized last Friday in the town of Melitopol, in the Zaporozhsky region. Similar graffiti appeared in other town districts that night. According to Svetlana Marshak, a leader of the organization, the Jewish community of Melitopol appealed to law enforcement to investigate the case properly. The local department of Ukraine's Security Service is investigating the case but no arrests have been reported. The incident received wide coverage in the local media.

Melitopol, a former country vacation spot known for its proximity to the Black Sea, has become a center of Jewish revival. During World War II, Melitopol was in the part of Ukraine that fought vigorously against the Nazi invasion. Today, Melitopol is an industrial center and railway junction with about 170,000 residents.

#1b

Ukrainian composer Dmitry Polonsky dies JTA, September 1, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Dmitry Polonsky, a Ukrainian Jewish composer, cellist and poet, has died.

Polonsky, a founder and leader of the Ancient Kiev musical salon, died last week in the Ukrainian capital. He was 71.

He initiated the Ancient Kiev musical salon in 1988 and wrote numerous musical compositions, many with Jewish themes. He was a laureate of a number of international contests.

Polonsky, a graduate of the Belarussian Conservatory, worked as a soloist at the Bolshoi Belorussian Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Later he moved with his family to Kiev and worked as a teacher in music schools and gave concerts.

He also was the author of acrostics and fables.

#1c

Project to properly bury Holocaust victims is planned JTA, September 1, 2009

NEW YORK -- An international initiative to give Holocaust victims interred in mass graves a proper Jewish burial will be launched in Eastern Europe.

The Dignity Return project is being organized by Yuri Kanner, president of the Russian Jewish Congress, in cooperation with Rabbi Marc Schneier, chairman of the World Jewish Congress American Section.

The project's mission is to bury the remains of victims of mass execution from Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Estonia in a manner acceptable under Jewish law.

Kanner and Schneier expect the initiative to inspire thousands of volunteers from around the world, according to a joint news release.

"As we move further away from the Shoah, the number of those who can share a personal experience from this atrocity grows smaller," Schneier said in the statement. "As a result, it is increasingly up to those who were born after the Holocaust to preserve and protect their stories and these sites so that Holocaust revisionists will be unable to change history, and our call of 'Never again' will continue to resonate from one generation to the next."

The founders of the Dignity Return initiative will present details of the project on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jan. 27.

#1d

EU official: Israel hijacked Russian ship JTA, September 2, 2009

JERUSALEM -- Israel intercepted a Russian-manned cargo ship allegedly carrying secret weapons that had disappeared, a European Union official said.

Adm. Tarmo Kouts, the European Union's rapporteur on piracy and a former commander of the Estonian armed forces, told Time in an article posted Monday on the magazine's Web site that although Russia claimed the ship was carrying lumber, only a shipment of missiles could explain its actions since the alleged hijacking on July 24.

"There is the idea that there were missiles aboard, and one can't explain this situation in any other way," Kouts told Time. "As a sailor with years of experience, I can tell you that the official versions are not realistic."

Russia said the ship, the Arctic Sea, was destined for Algeria with less than \$2 million of timber, was hijacked and its tracking device disabled in late July. In mid-August the Russian government sent out a search party, which recovered the ship and its crew without firing a shot, according to Time.

Russia denied the ship was running weapons to the Middle East.

According to Time, Israeli President Shimon Peres met with his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, the day after the ship was recovered and the leaders discussed "the sale of Russian weapons and military hardware to countries hostile to Israel," though the Arctic Sea was not specifically mentioned.

In addition, Time wrote, Russia sent a disproportionate force that included destroyers and submarines to look for the ship, and returned the small crew and alleged pirates back in two enormous military cargo planes.

Russia's envoy to NATO, Dmitri Rogozin, said Kouts should stop "running his mouth," Time reported.

#1e

Group gives \$6 million for FSU projects JTA, September 2, 2009

NEW YORK -- The Genesis Philanthropy group is giving the Jewish Agency for Israel \$6 million for educational projects in the former Soviet Union.

Genesis, which is comprised of several oligarchs from the former Soviet Union who are committed to building the Russian-speaking Jewish Diaspora, will provide the funding over the next three to four years to help day schools, summer camps and other formal Jewish education projects, according to a spokesman for the Jewish Agency. The rest of the details have not been worked out.

The agreement was reached in Moscow this week, where the Agency's new chairman, Natan Sharansky, was visiting schools at the start of the school year.

As the recession has hit, funding for programs in the FSU has been cut significantly by organizations and donors across the board. It is presumed that at least part of the Genesis money will go to help bail out the Jewish Agency's floundering Heftsibah school system in the FSU.

The Jewish Agency is touting the gift as Sharansky's first major victory since taking over the organization's professional helm this summer.

"This is Sharansky's baby," the Jewish Agency spokesman told JTA's philanthropy blog, The Fundermentalist. "He has been working on this since he came on board because he has been very perturbed with cutbacks specifically in the FSU."

Sharansky, the spokesman added, "has done this very quickly and efficiently."

#2

Natan Sharansky heads to Moscow

By Amir Mizroch

Jerusalem Post, August 30, 2009

Newly-elected Jewish Agency head Natan Sharansky will travel to Moscow on Monday to mark the opening of the new school year for Jewish learning institutions in the Russian capital and attempt to raise money for the agency's programs in the FSU.

It will be the former Soviet dissident and Prisoner of Zion's first official visit to the former Soviet Union since his election to the position of chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency in June.

Sharansky is scheduled to meet with the leadership of the Moscow Jewish community, including Russia's Chief Rabbi Berl Lazar, senator and chairman of the World Congress of Russian Jewry Boris Spiegel, as well as Ambassador to Russia Anna Azri. He will also tour the various Jewish Agency-run programs for Jewish-Zionist education.

According to the Jewish Agency, Sharansky will meet with Russian Jewish philanthropists and is "pleased that many more of them have shown willingness to assist in building Jewish institutions and strengthening Jewish identity in the FSU."

The visit falls under a dark shadow, however, as the agency's funding is under serious strain, putting its programs in the FSU in risk.

According to JTA, formal Jewish education in the region is very much imperiled. Aside from the Jewish Agency cuts to Heftzibah, the school system of Chabad - perhaps the biggest Jewish player in the region - is hurting. It has been heavily financed by Lev Leviev, the diamond mogul who saw his stock plummet by 90 percent, losing him \$500 million over the past year. Another school system, Shma Yisrael, which had been heavily financed by the Reichmann family of Canada, also is dealing with financial difficulties.

The Heftzibah, Chabad and Shma Yisrael systems all received \$12 million in aid from the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, an organization that raises money from evangelical Christians to support Israeli and Jewish causes.

Sharansky's appeal to Russian Jewish oligarchs and philanthropists comes at a time when the agency's traditional source of funding, the American Jewish federation system, is reeling due to the world financial crisis, the Madoff scandal, and more localized Jewish philanthropy.

Furthermore, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee [JDC], which focuses its efforts in the former Soviet Union on delivering social services and community-building activities, is facing a significant budget deficit.

According to JTA, Steven Schwager, the chief executive officer of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and Irv Smokler, its president, sent a joint letter last Friday to the top professionals at Jewish federations across North America saying the JDC was in dire need of more money from them.

The organization already has had to cut services overseas, specifically in the former Soviet Union, and it might have to cut more, the letter warned.

JTA also revealed that in a previously undisclosed internal Jewish Agency report in May, the Agency's treasurer informed the organization's executive committee that programming in the former Soviet Union might have to be abandoned due to severe budget constraints.

The combination of cuts to both formal Jewish education and social services could significantly undermine what has been a 20-year process to build up Jewish life in the former Soviet Union since the fall of Communism, JTA said.

"For 20 years the Jewish Agency worked to connect thousands of Jews to their [religious] roots in the FSU. Together with the government of Israel and the Fellowship of Christians and Jews, we will work to expand this important activity," Sharansky said before his trip.

According to the agency, Sharansky has decided not to continue to implement cuts to the organization's activities in the FSU, home to several hundreds of thousands of Jews. This visit is meant to find ways of expanding the agency's operations in the FSU in the spheres of Jewish-Zionist education among the youth.

Sources familiar with the workings of the Russian-Jewish educational system told The Jerusalem Post that Sharansky would have a hard time raising funds among Russian philanthropists, as the amounts the Jewish Agency requires to keep its operations going are too high for individual donors to sustain.

The sources said Sharansky should instead use his prestige and position to look for partnerships among international Jewish organizations to work together on agency programs.

In November 2008, the agency passed a budget that included \$45m. in cuts, with much of the savings coming from programs in the former Soviet Union. The agency slashed \$1.9m. from its Jewish Identity budget for the region, leaving just \$431,000.

The agency has also reduced its funding of Heftzibah, a partnership with the Israeli Education Ministry that includes a network of 44 Jewish day schools across the former Soviet Union with more than 10,000 students.

Heftzibah had its budget cut in November from nearly \$13m. to just over \$5m. Now the budget is slated to be \$2.6m. for the coming school year.

According to JTA, the agency carries out its next scheduled round of cuts for 2010, it will have reduced its overall budget by about \$80m. over the past several years.

Agency officials say the cuts have come uniformly around the world, but unlike other regions where local donors have been able to pick up some of the slack, the Jewish Agency has been unable to find local philanthropists in the former Soviet Union willing to do so.

Sharansky will open the school year at the Lipman Jewish Day School in Moscow, giving an open lesson to students. The subject of his lesson will be "The History of the Zionist Struggle in the USSR," and the lesson will be shown via video-conference link-up to three additional Jewish day schools in the former Soviet Union: in Vilna, the capital of Lithuania; Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, and St. Petersburg.

These four schools are part of a network of 44 Jewish schools spread out across the FSU taking part in the Heftzibah formal Jewish education program.

On September 1, some 13,000 Jewish children in 100 schools across the FSU formally start the 2009-2010 school year.

#3

Back to shul, 25 years and a Soviet prison sentence later

By Haviv Rettig Gur

Jerusalem Post, August 30, 2009

It took Diaspora Affairs Minister Yuli Edelstein 25 years to get a second aliya at the Peitav Synagogue in Riga.

Barely a month after the last time he prayed in the Latvian capital's only shul, in 1984, Edelstein was arrested by Soviet security services and thrown into prison for three years.

"We were vacationing on the Baltic coast with fellow refuseniks, learning Hebrew together. One day a local refusenik from Riga said, 'Let's go to synagogue.' Both of us had started becoming religious," Edelstein said last week.

He was just 26 years old when he entered the Peitav Synagogue in early August 1984 to pray with a dozen elderly Jews, who viewed him at first with suspicion.

"They were checking me out as I walked in. They wanted to see if I knew how to pray, how to put on a tallit. They wanted to see if this 26-year-old was a crazy person or a spy.

"When they saw I knew what I was doing, one came to me very formally and said, 'We are considering giving you an aliya to the Torah.' So I went up to the Torah."

Later that month, back in Moscow, Edelstein's home was searched by state security agents, allegedly looking for narcotics. He was arrested on September 4, and was only released in May 1987.

"The next time I went up to the Torah was three years later, at the Great Synagogue in Moscow. There I said birkat hagomel [the blessing giving thanks for surviving danger] for the first time."

On Wednesday, Edelstein stood once again on the bima of the Peitav Synagogue, but the circumstances were quite different.

"This time, at the dedication of the reconstructed synagogue, you had the president of the state, the prime minister, the ministers of transportation and culture, the mayor, the deputy president of parliament. It's a different situation from those handful of elderly people in the synagogue," he said on the phone from Riga.

Edelstein was in the Latvian capital not only for the synagogue dedication, but also for talks on Latvia-Israel and EU-Israel relations, stopping the Iranian nuclear program, restitution of Holocaust-era Jewish assets, and other issues.

"I think the most painful issue raised in the discussions, which I hope won't hurt relations between the two countries, is the coming [Soccer World Cup qualifying] game between Israel and Latvia to be played in Ramat Gan on September 5. The Latvian ministers insisted Latvia would win. I didn't agree."

#4

Moldova Elects Pro-Western House Speaker Amid Turmoil

By Stefan Bos

Voice of America, August 30, 2009

The pro-Western coalition of the former Soviet republic of Moldova has won election of their candidate to the key-post of speaker of parliament and also named an ex-Communist as its choice for president of Europe's poorest nation. But Moldova faces political turmoil after the powerful Communist Party boycotted the vote amid concerns over the country's economic future.

Not everyone celebrated when Mihai Ghimpu became the first politician of Moldova's four-party ruling coalition to take office, as parliament speaker: All members of the Communist Party in parliament boycotted the vote and walked out of the legislature.

The 58-year-old Ghimpu and his pro-Western coalition, dubbed the 'Alliance for European Integration', seek closer ties with the European Union and want to take the former Soviet republic out of Russia's sphere of influence.

But critics have accused Ghimpu of seeking re-unification with neighboring Romania, an E.U. member state. Most of Moldova was once part of Romania and about one in five Moldovans, some 800,000 people, have already either secured or applied for Romanian citizenship.

Yet, in comments aired by the European Commission-backed network Euronews, Moldova's leading civil rights activist Natalia Morari, suggests that young people want pro-Western candidates, such as Ghimpu, to take power. "I really know many people who were waiting for these results and they were thinking: if the opposition wins, I will stay in this country and try to continue my business or my studies. But if the Communists win again, I will leave this country at least for the next four years..."

Besides a new house speaker, the coalition has also nominated Marian Lupu, who defected from the Communist Party, for the post of president. Analysts caution that the still influential Communists have a chance to retain the presidency, in any event, because pro-European parties do not have enough votes to choose one of their own. In Moldova, the parliament members vote for president.

Election officials initially declared that the long ruling Communist Party had won re-election in April. That announcement prompted violent street protests by mostly young urban voters.

Shouting anti-Communist slogans, demonstrators stormed the parliament building and the offices of President Vladimir Voronin to protest alleged election fraud.

At least one person reportedly died in the clashes and many more were injured.

However it was the Communists' subsequent failure to secure election of their presidential candidate that prompted a new election in July which brought the pro-western coalition to power.

Should a new deadlock arise over the office of the presidency, the current Communist President Voronin is expected to remain in office until another election is held sometime next year.

But whoever is in power, will grapple with an economic crisis and widespread corruption that has disillusioned young voters, says rights activist Morari. "All young people want to leave this country. This is the poorest (the worst) thing...If your business starts being profitable, Someone will come to your place tomorrow and tell you: "if you want to keep your business give us a part of it, if you do not want to end up in prison." And this someone is usually related to the big family in power," she said.

That's not all. A new government will also have to resolve a 19-year-old rebellion in an eastern break-away region, where Russia has troops and which wants to be annexed by Moscow.

#5

Chechnya and Its Neighbors Suffer a Relapse

By Ellen Barry

New York Times, August 30, 2009

MOSCOW — Just a year ago, Russian authorities were so proud of their success at bringing order to the north Caucasus that they made Chechnya a stop for the Valdai Discussion Club, the handpicked group of Western analysts flown to Russia every year to hobnob with top officials.

Two busloads of writers and academics were shuttled to the gigantic mosque built by President Ramzan A. Kadyrov in memory of his father, granted a wide-ranging interview with Mr. Kadyrov and allowed to stroll down the repaved, repainted and rebuilt streets of Grozny, the Chechen capital. Even the skeptics among them left impressed: calm, it seemed, had returned to Russia's crucible of violence.

That case is difficult to make after the summer of 2009. Explosions and shootings have been a daily occurrence in the region all summer. Between June and August, 436 people have been killed, compared with 150 during the same months in 2008. And the number of attacks jumped to 452 from 265, according to statistics compiled by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a private research group based in Washington.

The numbers do not fully capture what has happened. High-ranking officials have been strafed with machine-gun fire, targeted by snipers as they strolled out of restaurants or rammed with cars packed with explosives. A prominent human rights worker was snatched outside her apartment, killed and left on a roadside.

And suicide bombings, ominously, have returned to Chechnya after a pause of several years. Two militants blew themselves up Friday morning to escape capture, making it a total of three suicide bombings in the region in just the past week.

"The period of stability is quite clearly over in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya," said Pavel K. Baev, a senior researcher at the Oslo-based International Peace Research Institute. "But it hasn't spread. This is what allows the Russian leadership more or less to keep their distance, not to pay serious attention."

For years, the Kremlin's strategy in the Caucasus has hinged on Mr. Kadyrov, with Moscow giving him free rein to crush signs of rebellion in the region. Mr. Kadyrov, a former separatist himself, transformed his corps of fighters into a brutal internal police force. Human rights organizations documented his government's use of torture, intimidation and extrajudicial killing, but even liberals had to admit that he had been effective at quelling the violence.

Now, Mr. Kadyrov's grip on Chechnya looks far weaker, leaving Moscow with a choice about whether to stick with a deeply flawed policy or risk a change of course.

A year ago, and as Mr. Kadyrov pressed for more autonomy from Moscow, it appeared that the Kremlin was testing an alternative style of leadership in neighboring Ingushetia.

One of Dmitri A. Medvedev's early acts as president of Russia was to remove Ingushetia's despised president and replace him with Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, a former military intelligence officer. Mr. Yevkurov set about gaining the trust of Ingushetia's population, firing officials for corruption and reaching out to dissidents and rights activists.

Then, on June 22, a suicide bomber swerved into Mr. Yevkurov's motorcade, releasing a blast so powerful that the president's car flew off the road and into a brick wall. Mr. Yevkurov, gravely wounded, was evacuated to Moscow and spent most of the summer recovering.

With him went the hopes that the Kremlin was ready to embrace a softer approach, said Aleksei V. Malashenko, a Caucasus specialist at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

“It is a tragedy, not only for Ingushetia and Yevkurov himself, but generally for the Caucasus,” Mr. Malashenko said. “Everybody who said it’s necessary to kill, to press, to exterminate, and dialogue is useless — they are all justified by the destiny of Yevkurov. So it’s very bad.”

Then on Aug. 17, a truck full of explosives barreled into police headquarters in a heavily populated part of Nazran, the Ingush capital, killing 25 people and wounding 280.

The drumbeat of suicide attacks that have followed are a reminder of the days when rebels made theatergoers and schoolchildren hostages to their rage against Russia, and they are evidence that, despite his assurances, Mr. Kadyrov has not stamped out the insurgency.

Mr. Kadyrov blames Wahhabis and other Islamic extremists for the attacks and has repeatedly charged that they are financed and trained by Western countries. He said on Friday that a collaboration between the police, the Federal Security Service and local clergy could prevent young Caucasian men from turning to religious extremism.

“We are doing very little today to stop this process,” he said. “We must try to find mistakes in what we are doing, and correct them. We must do all we can to win a spiritual victory.”

But in other quarters, scrutiny is falling on Mr. Kadyrov’s government and social problems like poverty, unemployment and corruption.

Igor Y. Yurgens, the director of the Institute of Contemporary Development and a close aide to Mr. Medvedev, said he believed that “Chechenization” — allowing Chechen authorities a primary role in quelling the insurgency — had served an essential purpose but was now fueling violence rather than preventing it.

“There is big hatred of Kadyrov, there is big hatred of different clans, and it is transformed into social hatred,” Mr. Yurgens said.

Russia’s leaders, he continued, should “make a counterbalance to Kadyrov gradually, without insulting the guy who restored order to the region, but who is becoming a problem.”

“This way of running the region cannot last forever,” he added.

Though Mr. Medvedev’s early instincts were along the same lines, the series of insurgent attacks have pushed him to embrace tougher tactics, Mr. Yurgens said. This month, Mr. Medvedev encouraged Russian forces to kill terrorists “without sentiment” and called for an end to jury trials in terrorism cases, which often result in acquittals.

It is, Mr. Yurgens said, “ferociously difficult” to expand democracy under violent conditions.

“We are all confused,” he said. “I think he is confused.”

Mr. Kadyrov’s defenders, and even some of his critics, warn that shifting course in Chechnya risks the outbreak of a third war.

Ruslan I. Khasbulatov, an ethnic Chechen who once served as speaker of the Russian Parliament, and who has occasional contact with Mr. Kadyrov, said he noted an obvious increase in criticism of the Chechen leader after Moscow declared an end to its decade-long counterterrorist operation in Chechnya. That move gave Mr. Kadyrov even more autonomy from the federal center.

Intelligence and military officials were frustrated by the decision and then by Mr. Kadyrov’s renewal of ties with Akhmed K. Zakayev, an exiled separatist leader still wanted on Russian terrorism charges, Mr. Khasbulatov said.

Mr. Khasbulatov said he worried that the grumbling signaled waning support for Mr. Kadyrov in Moscow and that the results, though pleasing to critics outside the country, would be disastrous for Russia.

“They began accusing him of all sins, and in the past this preceded something terrible,” he said. “Get rid of Kadyrov, send in some guy from Moscow, and a new war will start. What will the West say then?”

#6

Russian Premier Calls Nazi-Soviet Pact Immoral

By Andrew E. Kramer

New York Times, September 1, 2009

MOSCOW — Russia’s prime minister, Vladimir V. Putin, published a lengthy article Monday characterizing the Nazi-Soviet pact to divide Poland at the outset of World War II in 1939 as immoral, but he stressed that it was just one of a series of such deals that countries struck with the Nazis at that time.

Mr. Putin called the nonaggression pact, which included secret amendments defining spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, “analogous” to the agreement by Britain and France a year earlier at Munich to accede to the German invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The prime minister released his historical interpretation just before a scheduled visit to Poland on Tuesday for a commemoration of the start of World War II, 70 years ago this week.

The pact — which was followed by German and Soviet invasions of Poland — remains a source of anger there, and the article heightened expectations of what Mr. Putin would say during his visit.

Ria Novosti, an official Russian news agency, reported that Mr. Putin would use the trip to counter what the Russians call efforts by Eastern Europeans to recast the causes and lessons of World War II. Russia looks upon the war as a searing event in its history, one in which, by some estimates, 25 million Soviet citizens died.

Mr. Putin is also expected to discuss a current source of tensions — the possibility that the United States will deploy interceptor missiles in Poland — with Poland’s prime minister, Donald Tusk.

In his article, Mr. Putin wrote that he was compelled to discuss the pact, named Molotov-Ribbentrop for the Soviet and Nazi foreign ministers who negotiated the accord, because it was being cited today by countries who have traced their postwar Soviet occupation to this agreement.

“It is indicative that history is often slanted by those who actually apply double standards in modern politics,” he wrote.

The article, published in the Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza and posted in Russian on the Russian government Web site, did not backtrack on earlier Russian condemnations of the pact or apologies for the subsequent massacre of Polish officers at Katyn Forest.

But it did highlight a theme that has played on Russian state television in recent weeks: that even Poland was complicit in making deals with the Nazis. The article notes that the Polish Army occupied two provinces of Czechoslovakia at the same time the German Army invaded that country following the Munich agreement with France and Britain in 1938.

Mr. Putin argues that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was inevitable after the Western Allies had acceded to the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

He called that an effort by the West to “ ‘buy off’ Hitler and redirect his aggression to the east.”

Stalin’s government, Mr. Putin wrote, was impelled to sign the agreement because it was facing aggression in the east from Japan and did not want war on two fronts.

Mr. Putin did not mention that the Nazi-Soviet pact also restored a portion of the Russian empire lost after World War I and coveted by Stalin.

#7

Russia's Brutal Guerrilla War

How the crisis in the North Caucasus could go global.

By Paul Quinn-Judge

Foreignpolicy.com, August 31, 2009

The daily and deadly news from Russia's restive North Caucasus region -- police buildings blown up in Ingushetia, human rights activists murdered in Chechnya, firefights in Dagestan -- makes it clear that the insurgency there is far from finished, despite Moscow's frequent claims of victory. The conflict has splintered and metastasized, with atrocities carried out by both sides. Guerrillas are increasingly turning to suicide attacks, and they do not rule out more mass hostage takings, like the 2004 Beslan school seizure. Human rights activists and rivals of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov are murdered in Moscow, the Chechen capital, and abroad with impunity.

The absolute worst-case scenario -- a gradual linking-up of insurgents in Central Asia with the North Caucasus' young Islamist fighters -- might be remote, but it is now possible. Such a link-up would require at least three factors. First, Russia's policy of blind brutality in the North Caucasus would have to continue, ensuring a steady stream of recruits to the Islamist cause. Second, the Taliban would have to consolidate along Afghanistan's frontiers with Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, or Tajikistan, turning the borderlands into safe havens and creating a series of conduits allowing fighters to move from Afghanistan into Central Asia and beyond. Finally, Central Asian jihadists from countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, or Uzbekistan would have to emerge as a fighting force large enough to exert serious regional pressure. The first is already happening. The second is a matter of time. The third cannot be ruled out. These eventualities threaten to transform the conflict in the Caucasus from a secessionist struggle to something vastly more menacing.

What is the state of the conflict now? On one side is Kadyrov, a former separatist guerrilla and the self-proclaimed defender of Russia's frontiers. He has become the Kremlin's chief enforcer in the region. On the other side sits the North Caucasus guerrillas, led by Doku Umarov. Like Kadyrov, he fought in the first war against the Russians, from 1992 to 1996. He has since embraced the Islamist cause. He and his guerrillas fight for the establishment of a caliphate, and he is now known as "the Emir of the Caucasus Emirate." Umarov is seconded by an adroit guerrilla organizer code-named Magas. He is an ethnic Ingush connected to the 2004 attack on the school in Beslan, in which 330 people, 176 of them children, died. In the past, many Chechen guerrillas, including their former leader, Aslan Maskhadov, repudiated such barbarism. Umarov, however, remarked in a recent interview that "if [it] is the will of Allah" there would be more Beslan-type attacks. "As far as possible, we will try to avoid civilian targets," he explained. "But for me there are no civilians in Russia."

The regional government is equally sinister. Western media and human rights groups have long accused Kadyrov's security services of a nasty list of atrocities, including abduction, torture, and murder -- all of which, naturally, he denies. In mid-July, one of Chechnya's best known human rights activists, Natalia Estemirova, was abducted and murdered. In August, Zarema Sadulayeva, who worked with a children's charity, and her husband were abducted from their office and murdered. Two members of the Yamadayev family, warlords close to the Russian military intelligence service, died recently after falling out with Kadyrov last year. One was murdered close to the prime minister's office in downtown Moscow, the other in Dubai. There was an attempt on a third brother recently.

Kadyrov dismisses any responsibility for these events. The attacks on the Yamadayevs are efforts to discredit him, he says. He also denies any connection to the Estemirova murder. "Why would Kadyrov kill a woman nobody needs?" he said in a recent interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "She never had any honor, dignity, or conscience." His tortuous logic recalls that of his self-proclaimed idol, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who, when asked about the 2006 murder of opposition journalist Anna Politkovskaya, described her influence as exceedingly insignificant.

Putin's macho throwaway remarks on occasions like that one set the tone for the general brutality of the fighting in the North Caucasus. This is a man who gave hunting knives as presents to the troops in Chechnya at the height of that battle, in January 2000. Moscow's policy, if one can call it that, can be summarized in two simple points. First, ignore the conflict for as long as possible. Keep it out of the mainstream media, and thus the public eye. Make sure the masses are not distracted or demoralized by the news. Second, if it gets really bad, send in the troops.

This policy is not working and sooner or later will once again blow up in the Kremlin's face. Unrest is slowly escalating within the North Caucasus. If the uptick continues, there is a strong chance of a cross-fertilization -- in resources, propaganda, and strategies -- with the guerrillas gradually returning to Central Asia from Afghanistan.

The new generation of North Caucasus guerrillas is intensely aware of what is happening elsewhere in the Muslim world. They are often better educated than their predecessors and almost always computer savvy. Today, most guerrilla movements in the region have Web sites, and some even use Twitter. Increasingly, the North Caucasus guerrillas use the suicide tactics favored by the Taliban and al Qaeda -- which means they do not need as many fighters to wreak havoc. This is no coincidence. Their Web sites regularly report and carry videos of suicide attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their own shahids-to-be now record video farewells, in the style of their Iraqi and Afghan comrades.

The links between insurgents in the North Caucasus and Afghanistan are deep and long-standing. Hundreds of Central Asians were trained in Chechnya in the late 1990s by two of the best known guerrillas at the time: Shamil Basayev and his Saudi comrade in arms, Ibn al-Khattab (who incidentally gained his first combat experience fighting with the mujahedeen, allegedly alongside Osama bin Laden, against Soviet forces). When the fighting in Chechnya tailed off, these volunteers regrouped and joined other conflicts: in Afghanistan and then in northwest Pakistan. There, they reportedly have joined up with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an umbrella group for Islamists from Central Asia, the North Caucasus, and Muslim areas of Russia, such as Tatarstan.

Reportedly, a small number of wizened IMU fighters has returned to Central Asia -- to Russia's border -- this summer. The trend is disturbing. The Central Asian states are deeply corrupt, incompetent, and authoritarian -- all desperately brittle edifices. The alacrity with which countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan opened their facilities to the U.S. military has made them a more attractive target for Islamists still. And they sit close to Russia's most restive and violent province, filled with radicalizing forces.

The situation in the North Caucasus looks bad now, but you can be sure it will get much worse if the Kremlin allows the murderous status quo to fester. It may no longer be far-fetched to imagine the day when the fighters of the Caucasus Emirate link up with their jihadi allies in Central Asia, turning much of the southern rim of the former Soviet Union into a zone of low-intensity warfare that will destroy political dreams and reputations from Moscow all the way to Washington.

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#8

Russia the Bully

Moscow should have no problem finding friends in its own backyard -- but instead it's just getting lonelier. Here's why.

By Christian Caryl

Foreignpolicy.com, August 31, 2009

As Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin might be tempted to remind his Ukrainian counterpart Yulia Tymoshenko when they meet this week, her country is a bit of a mess these days. Her ostensible boss, the once-adored President Viktor Yushchenko -- yes, the same guy who emerged from the Orange Revolution as

a national hero a few years back -- has become the political equivalent of radioactive waste. With the national election just four months away, his popularity ratings are in the low single digits. Corruption is rife, the economy sagging.

Now, just imagine that you're the man who once called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century." To Putin and his friends at the pinnacle of the Russian political elite this must seem like a golden opportunity -- the perfect moment to administer the coup de grace to a shaky rival. Perhaps that's why Putin's ostensible boss, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, recently fired off a torrent of invective at the Ukrainian government that stunned onlookers in Kiev and around the former Soviet Union. The list of grievances in the Russian president's letter was long: The Ukrainians are canoodling with the Europeans behind Russia's back. They're restricting Russian language instruction in the public schools and "distorting" the historical record in Ukrainian textbooks. They're blocking access to the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet on the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. They've kicked out innocent Russian diplomats on the scandalous pretext of spying. And, just for good measure, he also accused them of supplying weapons to the Georgians in last year's war.

On one level it seems to be working. Candidate Viktor Yanukovich, the man usually described as the "pro-Russian" candidate in the 2004 presidential elections, is now way ahead of both Yushchenko and Tymoshenko in the polls. (The most recent surveys put him with 22 percent of the vote, while Tymoshenko comes second with 11 percent.) When the Moscow-based Orthodox Patriarch Kirill I came for a visit at the end of July, he was mobbed by adoring believers around the country -- and also made a point of allowing Yanukovich to bask in his reflected glory. Meanwhile, Ukrainian approval of NATO remains weak. A majority of Ukrainians consistently express greater distrust of the United States than of Russia.

So why isn't this a Russian success story? Because, at the same time, the idea of Ukrainian independence is going strong. The same polls that show all those encouraging sentiments about Russia also underline the point that Ukrainians -- even those who live in regions ethnically and geographically close to Russia -- are less inclined than ever to give up their own state or their own policies. For example, one recent survey showed that 70.2 percent of Ukrainians had a favorable view of Russians -- but that only one in 10 of them wanted closer relations with Moscow. A mere 13.7 percent supported the idea of formulating joint foreign policy with the Russians, and only 9.3 percent liked the idea of a common currency. As a result, say some analysts, if Moscow's preferred candidate Yanukovich wins the presidential election in January 2010, his actual policies may turn out to be considerably less pro-Russian than the cliché would have it -- since, once in office, he'll be the defender of Ukrainian sovereignty.

"Yanukovich isn't quite the toady that his opponents make him out to be," notes Alexander Motyl, a Ukraine expert at Rutgers University. "I'd bet that he, like every Ukrainian president and PM since 1991, would adopt a moderately pro-Ukrainian and semi-pro-Russian position." If the object of the Kremlin's policies is to drive Ukraine back into the arms of Mother Russia, so far it's not working.

Ever since the Soviet Union broke up at the end of 1991, Russia has been trying hard to reassert its influence over the other ex-Soviet republics -- countries the Russians often refer to in the aggregate as "the near abroad." Over the years this effort has become an increasingly frustrating one for Moscow, which is deeply concerned about the rising power (both real and imagined) of regional rivals like the United States, Western Europe, and China. Yet so far, despite its myriad advantages, the Kremlin has surprisingly little to show for its pains. Somehow the Russians still have trouble getting traction in their own backyard.

It doesn't have to be this way. There's a persistent myth that the republics of the former Soviet Union are inherently and fanatically anti-Russian, always ready to choose the path that doesn't have Moscow on it. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Polls consistently show that people even in countries where tensions with Russia are high - like Ukraine and Georgia - actually want more cooperation with Russia, not less. Most surveys also show that non-Russian ex-Soviets want to maintain linguistic, cultural and religious ties with Russia wherever possible. Militaries across the region still share weaponry, training, and doctrine with Russia. And, of course, there remains a thick web of economic and trade ties between Russia and the post-Soviet states -- especially when it comes to energy. A number of countries (including Georgia) depend to a remarkable degree on remittances transferred home from citizens working in Russia. (One recent study by the

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, for example, found that in some ex-Soviet states these flows exceed bank deposits or foreign direct investment -- and most of that money is coming from Russia.) Yet Moscow has somehow done a persistently miserable job of transforming all of these potential advantages into good relations with its neighbors -- as even Russian scholars have sometimes seen fit to observe.

Moscow's tensions with the Baltic Republics, Georgia, and now, increasingly, Ukraine have already become the stuff of headlines. But it may be some of the stories that haven't been getting much publicity that are the most instructive. Take, for example, Belarus, the country of 10 million people sandwiched between Russia and Poland and run by the redoubtable dictator Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Lukashenka has been president since 1994, and for almost that entire time his country's closeness to Russia has been unsurpassed by any other country in the region; for years the two countries have seriously discussed the possibility of outright legal and economic "union." Yet over the past year Belarus has staged a remarkable reversal. Lukashenka ostentatiously discarded a set of senior officials identified with his years of human rights abuses and made dramatic overtures to the European Union.

The reasons for the shift are straightforward. "After almost two decades of formal independence Belarus is gradually becoming truly independent," says Arkady Moshes of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. "It's drifting away from Russia." Energy is a big part of the equation. Its supplies of oil and natural gas have long been generously subsidized by Moscow, but Minsk hasn't failed to notice that Russia has been working hard to strike deals with other countries to build new transit pipelines that would bypass Belarus. "Lukashenka sees that the days of cheap energy are over," notes Moshes. And with that the prospect of closer economic and cultural ties to Europe suddenly begins to look much more enticing. The fact that Belarus is populated almost entirely by Russian-speakers, it turns out, is not enough to outweigh the relative attractions of the West.

Of course, one more recent event has probably helped to concentrate minds in the region as well -- Russia's small but victorious war with Georgia one year ago. For the past year the Kremlin has been busily lobbying members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the club of ex-Soviet republics with the closest ties to Russia, to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two Russian-backed mini-states inside Georgia. Yet so far takers have been notably absent -- even among the authoritarian states of Central Asia, traditionally among Moscow's most stalwart backers. (The one country in the world aside from Russia that's been willing to extend recognition to the two statelets? Nicaragua.)

The case of one of Russia's other closest allies within the ex-Soviet club is equally instructive. Islam Karimov, the dictator of Uzbekistan, gave Moscow a jolt recently by announcing that his country wouldn't be taking part in exercises of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a security grouping that includes several Commonwealth countries. Karimov has also pulled his country out of a recent economic bloc, refused to participate in exercises of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which brings together Russia, China, and the Central Asian republics, and even allowed the U.S. military to use Uzbek facilities to transport supplies into Afghanistan (this after kicking the U.S. out of key bases in his country a few years back). Russia also recently signed a deal with adjacent Kyrgyzstan that will allow it to base forces in the strategically sensitive Ferghana Valley -- but without consulting the perennially paranoid Uzbeks, a typically ham-handed gesture Karimov is not likely to forgive any time soon.

Russia's ability to get in its own way remains a cause for much head-scratching in the region. "When they tried to stop NATO enlargement, whom did they discuss it with? The United States and Germany," notes Kadri Liik, Director of the International Center for Defense Studies in Tallinn, Estonia. "But in fact the biggest driving force of NATO enlargement [was] the countries themselves. Russia tried to discuss these countries over their heads, and it backfired."

Something comparable is now happening again with energy. Moscow's apparent willingness to use energy supplies in its political disputes with some of its neighbors is now driving the European Union to seek greater diversification of supply and alternate pipeline routes. "Russia uses coercion more than attraction," says Moshes, the Finnish analyst.

So is this just a symptom of poor policymaking -- or an expression of a deeper problem? Some worry that this tendency is deeply rooted in the present authoritarian government in Moscow -- one whose intense nationalism

demands the constant search for enemies, external and internal, to legitimize its own actions. "That kind of regime cannot by definition enjoy 'normal' relations with its neighbors," notes Motyl, the Rutgers professor. Whatever the reason, one can only hope that Russia is able to find a way back to healthy relations with its former satellites -- for its own sake, one might add, as much as theirs.

Christian Caryl is a contributing editor to Foreign Policy.

#9

William Korey, Soviet Jewry Activist, 87

By Gal Beckerman

Forward, September 1, 2009

William Korey spent more than 30 years of his life deeply involved with the struggle to allow free emigration for Soviet Jews. But when I interviewed him in his Queens apartment a few years ago, he did not hide the fact that he never liked to work on individual cases. "There would be no end to it," he told me.

This was typical for a man who consistently offered a scholarly, objective eye on an issue that was otherwise an emotional flashpoint for American Jewry. Spend all your energy dealing with individual cases, his thinking went, and there would be no time left for taking a step back and calmly, soberly analyzing the problem.

And that's exactly what Korey did. He became the intellectual heavyweight of the movement. His analysis — delivered in hundreds of essays and op-eds over his lifetime, as well as in a half-dozen books, including 1973's influential "The Soviet Cage" — provided just the right counterpoint of precision and erudition to match the mass rallies and hunger strikes.

Korey died August 26 at 87. He never held an official position with any of the establishment or grass-roots Soviet Jewry organizations that sprung up in the 1960s to rally around the issue. But from the very beginning, it was his coolly reasoned arguments and clear-cut writing on which the movement was able to build.

A graduate of the University of Chicago, Korey marched into Berlin in 1945 with one of the first American Army units to enter the city, newly liberated by the Soviets. His encounters with Russian soldiers inspired him to pursue a doctorate, and he joined the first class of 50 students at the Russian Institute (later the Harriman Institute) at Columbia University, the influential academic center that would become an important source of research during the Cold War. After graduating, he taught for a few years, some of them at the City College of New York, but soon he was working in the Jewish world, first for the Anti-Defamation League and then for B'nai B'rith International.

In 1960, Korey was transferred to New York to open up an office for B'nai B'rith at the United Nations. It was there that he began working on the problem of Soviet Jewry, which interested him first as a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was then, too, that he made contact with the "Office Without a Name," the top-secret Israeli bureau working out of the Israeli foreign ministry and answering to the prime minister. Also known as the Lishka, its goal was to trigger a Soviet Jewry movement in the West, and it recruited Korey to the cause. The agents of the Lishka, working undercover in the Soviet Union — the Israelis then still had an embassy in Moscow — managed to get out information on the lives of Soviet Jews, which Korey molded into articles and speeches.

Over the next 26 years at B'nai B'rith, he continued to work constantly on Soviet Jewry, functioning as an adviser at various times, and organizing an academic committee during the 1960s and '70s that recruited hundreds of professors and intellectuals in support of the cause.

In the battles that often raged between the more activist elements in the movement and those who preferred cautious steps, Korey usually sided with the establishment. Throughout the 1960s, when these debates over tactics first emerged, he took the position that the Jewish community had to be careful not to alienate the Soviets. It should simply point to international law and leave it at that. As the 1970s progressed and Korey saw that the Soviet Jewry cause had become a matter of deep concern for the entire community, he felt more

comfortable with activist moves. He supported both the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which restricted Soviet trade unless emigration increased, and the Helsinki Process, which lambasted, year after year in venue after venue, the Soviets' human rights record.

When the situation called for it, he could also wield his opinion with force. In 1980, writing in his typically clinical style, Korey even attacked the overbearing Israeli involvement in the movement. "Israel's urge to dominate is quite natural, and perhaps beneficial in many areas, for a state can do things which individuals cannot — yet in the Soviet Jewry movement, that urge is nothing less than catastrophic, for here, individuals and groups possess certain inherent advantages over states — especially spontaneity. Israel should provide information and resources to the movement; its shading into guidance and control cripples the movement. Activist resources, instead of addressing Soviet oppression, must be squandered on squabbles with the Israeli government. If this continues, the Israeli 'Office Without a Name,' not the Soviet regime, may well destroy the Soviet Jewry campaign."

After retiring from B'nai B'rith in 1986, Korey wrote a series of methodically researched books chronicling the progress of the human rights movement. His 1993 tome, "The Promises We Keep: Human Rights, the Helsinki Process, and American Foreign Policy," is still the most comprehensive account of the Helsinki Process, which arguably played a central role in prying open the Soviet Union. The foreword, written by then-senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, commended Korey for not allowing "his trenchant analysis to become captive of any single viewpoint." His account is, instead, one of "nuance and complexity" noting "the importance of both individuals and structures."

Korey cared about the structures. And this is why he spent most of his professional life trying to get the United States to ratify the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. When it was finally signed, in 1988, he was one of a select few invited by President Reagan to attend the ceremony.

And yet, despite his commitment to the bigger picture, when he sat with me in his apartment, close to the end of his life, he kept steering the conversation to the individuals he had helped. These were the memories that had stayed with him. He remembered with relish the role he played in the emigration of Valery Panov, a Jewish dancer with the Kirov ballet who was fired when he applied for an exit visa in 1972. Korey told the head of Columbia Artists, which contracted the Kirov for performances in the West, that the ballet would be met with massive protests if Panov and his wife, ballerina Galina Ragozina, were not released.

The Panovs were finally allowed to emigrate, partly because of this pressure. And in 1975 they put on a performance in Philadelphia, organized by local Soviet Jewry activists, as a form of thanks. Korey remembered that it was the middle of winter and he had to drive through snow flurries from New York. He described the excitement he felt when he walked into the 20,000-seat Spectrum auditorium and saw it filled with chanting activists — and the satisfaction of finally seeing Panov appear in the white circle of spotlight.

"That was certainly one of those small occasions," he said, "when really, I really felt tremendously exhilarated."

#10

The World According to Russia

Why, years after the cold war, the Kremlin's still obsessed with getting respect.

By Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova

Newsweek, September 7, 2009

In 1946 a young U.S. diplomat named John Fischer wrote an earnest little book called *Why They Behave Like Russians*. Fischer, who'd served with the United Nations in postwar Kiev and Moscow, was attempting to explain to a bewildered U.S. public why their wartime ally Joseph Stalin, recipient of billions of dollars in American Lend-Lease aid, had suddenly turned on Washington, declaring it a deadly enemy, and seemed hellbent on starting a Third World War. The book is still a fascinating read not least because so many of its conclusions continue to ring true today. Fischer calls Russia's leaders "the scared men in the Kremlin," deeply insecure behind their aggressive bluster and suspicious of any internal political threat to their power. Russia is hostile to the West, he writes, because it is a "wounded giant" traumatized by catastrophic historical upheavals

and far weaker than it likes to pretend. The nation, he warns, "may blunder into war as it strives to build up a protective belt of satellite states outside its vulnerable borders." Today, with tensions rising again over two Georgian breakaway regions effectively annexed by Russia last summer, that line rings as true as it did at the dawn of the Cold War.

It's more than a little scary that some 60 years after Fischer published, thinkers in the West are still pondering the same question: why do Russians behave the way they do? Why does President Dmitry Medvedev act like a sober, responsible world leader at a G8 conference, talking about a "new European security architecture," as he did in April, yet at the same time threaten to post missiles on the Polish border in Kaliningrad, as he did in November, which is something not even the Soviets ever dared? And how come Russia has stood alongside the world's democracies by supporting the last two rounds of sanctions against Iran in the U.N. Security Council but also supplies Tehran with billions of dollars' worth of missile-defense systems, a nuclear reactor, and submarines? What is the logic behind what one present-day U.S. diplomat in Moscow not authorized to speak on the record calls "Kremlin bipolar disorder"?

Russia's apparent recalcitrance isn't simply a manifestation of evil or pique; it is a reflection of a particular world view. Talk to Russians today from any walk of life about where they see their country's place in the world and you'll soon hear them use the word "respect." Mention history, and you'll likely hear a lot of blame slung at America for inflicting years of economic hardship and political chaos. No less a figure than the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev complained recently that "the fall of the Soviet Union made America's head spin it was as though Russia was no longer significant, no longer a partner, and worthless to America. Then, when Russia was on its knees, when our economy collapsed, Americans came here and applauded the great job Yeltsin had done. We understood something important then: it suited the West for Russia to be half dead."

One word you won't hear Gorbachev or his like use is "humiliation," but it lies beneath such statements and is equally important. Russians suffered intense humiliation in the painful years between 1980 and 2000, as their empire was first defeated in Afghanistan, then turned into an economic basket case, and then collapsed. And they haven't forgotten about it. Middle-aged Russians of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's generation who now make up its ruling elite grew up being told their country was the greatest in the world. They then spent the best years of their lives watching it implode. And it's not just ex-Soviet hard men like Putin who nurture this sense of grievance; smart young professionals (like Medvedev) share it as well. Small wonder, then, that Russia's quest for respect for equality or revenge often seems to stray beyond the rational.

Indeed, modern Russia's quest for respect is so intense that it's ensured that it's warped the world view of citizens and policymakers alike, casting everything in 19th-century terms, with winners and losers and enemies in different uniforms. Whether it's planting a flag on the bottom of the sea to claim the North Pole or squeezing the Americans out of a base in Kyrgyzstan, Moscow still sees diplomacy as a zero-sum game where every international engagement even supposedly friendly ones like the Eurovision Song Contest becomes a litmus test for Russian pride and power. This helps explain Russia's friendships with anti-American regimes in Venezuela, Syria, and Iran. Today's Russia is willing to pal up with anyone, it seems, as long as it bolsters Moscow's credentials as a leader of a "multipolar world."

No battleground is more emotionally charged for contemporary Russians than the lands of their lost empire. In April 2005, on the eve of massive celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, Putin told Parliament that the fall of the Soviet Union was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" and "a genuine tragedy for the Russian people." Millions of Russians found themselves citizens of different countries, Putin lamented, and the "disease" of separatism spread to Russia itself as Chechnya made a bid to break away. For Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the committee for foreign affairs in the Federation Council, the loss of the empire was as traumatic as a divorce. "We are still in the process of separating from our former husbands and wives," he says. "The rows Russia is having with its neighbors are like scenes from a divorce everyone is throwing dishes and breaking furniture." Think about this analogy and it's no surprise that Russians reserve a special resentment for America and Europe, the rich, new sugar daddies for whom their old partners left.

To the Kremlin, many Western policies reek of hypocrisy, and an unwillingness to take Russian views into account. For instance, Russia's decision last year to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent

states after its war with Georgia seen by the West as a way to dismember Georgia and punish its pro-Western president Mikheil Saakashvili for his desire to join NATO—was seen by Russians as a humanitarian defense of minorities oppressed by Saakashvili. From that perspective, it was similar to NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo to save Albanians oppressed by Serbia a move bitterly opposed by Russia. "They don't understand why America can get away with invading Afghanistan and Iraq, can get away with declaring Kosovo a new country but when we try to defend our allies in Abkhazia and Ossetia from Georgian aggression we are called the bad guys," says one former top Kremlin bureaucrat who requested anonymity when discussing old colleagues.

All this helps explain why Putin has worked so hard, ever since he came to power in 2000, to restore Russia's global standing and to reestablish its role as an undisputed regional power. Almost every major policy decision of the past decade including boosting military spending by five times and ruthlessly centralizing power in the Kremlin can be seen as a means to those ends. Last summer's war against Georgia was the most obvious, and bluntest, example of the Kremlin's strategic priorities, but more-recent manifestations include Medvedev's dressing down of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko earlier this summer for being too "anti-Russian." More-subtle moves have included a proposal to create a regional development bank largely funded by Moscow and a customs union that would include Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. And Medvedev's proposal earlier this year to revive the near-moribund Collective Security Treaty Organization a group of five post-Soviet states by adding a military rapid reaction force, fit in with this goal as well.

So far, few of Medvedev's attempts to bring former Soviet satellites closer to Moscow have come to fruition. But Moscow is likely to view any setbacks not as evidence of the flaws in its aggressive foreign policy but rather the results of outsiders' determined plotting to undermine Russia's influence in its near abroad. Indeed, given the deep-seated resentment that many Russians still harbor over Washington's supposed role in destroying their great country, it is hardly surprising that most see U.S. attempts to spread democracy in the former Soviet Union as a cynical front for Yankee imperialism. George W. Bush's call to "let freedom reign" did little to reassure ordinary Russians that the U.S. had no designs on their neighborhood. Even Gorbachev says today that "democratization is just a cover for interfering in our affairs." And Russia's elite is unshakably convinced that the populist "color" revolutions in 2003 and 2004, which brought pro-Western governments to power in Georgia and Ukraine, were not grassroots uprisings but political theater orchestrated by the CIA, says Olga Kryshantovskaya, a leading sociologist of Russia's ruling class. Thus there was widespread support for Putin's crackdown on foreign-funded NGOs in the wake of the Orange Revolution in Kiev. Seen from the West, the restrictive new laws were a Kremlin-backed assault on free speech, but seen from Moscow, the clampdown on rights groups was a defensive act to rid Russia of foreign-funded fifth columns. Most Russians now seem to believe that America is intent on pressing on with its attack, and they are determined not only to reverse the pro-Western tide of colored revolutions but to try to unseat and undermine pro-Western leaders in their backyard as best they can. "Unless we stop them, America will continue to crawl further with its bases toward Russia's borders," says United Russia Duma Deputy Sergei Markov, who is currently organizing a Kremlin-funded "Anti-Nato 2009" summer camp in Crimea, a majority-Russian part of Ukraine, designed to train young Russians to resist a NATO invasion.

Take all these factors into account and Russia's foreign policy starts to make a little more sense. Its top priority is keeping meddling foreigners from taking over any more of Russia's backyard. Even Kremlin policies directed far from Russia's borders can be tied back to this primal urge. Thus Russia has made itself a rallying point for anti-U.S. crackpots in Venezuela, Cuba, Syria, and Sudan not because it seriously thinks it can restore its status as a world player but because it hopes to forge a grand bargain with Washington over the former Soviet space. Taken separately, none of these alliances make much sense but they do if they allow Moscow to strike a deal with these Americans to act as a go-between with its pariah friends like Syria, for instance.

Consider how Russia recently used its friendship with Iran to Moscow's advantage. Back in 2007 Russia signed a deal to sell a powerful missile-defense system to Iran, but then, this summer, it allowed Israel to talk it out of actually delivering the system in exchange for Israel's promise to cut off help to Georgia's military. It was exactly the kind of deal the Kremlin loves a local victory over a sworn enemy gained by playing the global power game. High-placed Russians deny such thinking; Sergei Karaganov, the chairman of the Presidium of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy of Russia, a state-funded advisory group, swears that "Russia will never spoil its relations with Iran." But he concedes that the Kremlin might be persuaded "to change its mind if

America agrees to serious compromises and stops enlarging NATO to the east, stops the Cold War in Europe, and accepts a Russian sphere of influence."

That idea of a "sphere of influence" or what Medvedev, a little more tactfully, calls a "zone of special interests" is really a budget version of the old empire. The Kremlin seems to have bought its own rhetoric and to have convinced itself that Russia remains a great power and deserves to be treated as such. "The world's problems cannot be solved without consulting Russia," says Gorbachev. But like it or not, he's wrong. Russia still has nukes and enormous energy reserves. Yet it has little ability to project military power beyond its borders, and the Kremlin's saber rattling has pushed even erstwhile allies like Belarus and Ukraine into the arms of the West. In economic terms, Russia's GDP has recently grown close to Italy's in terms of size, thanks to high energy prices. But shorn of natural resources, the rest of its economy remains mired in inefficiency and corruption.

The key question, as Russian power continues to shrink, is whether Moscow will ever be able to come to terms with the loss of its empire and acknowledge the right of its former colonies to make independent strategic choices. So far there have been few signs of an attempt to move beyond imperial thinking, with school curriculums and national holidays all continuing to emphasize the country's lost greatness. "Russia has been an empire for most of its history; we don't know how to act as a national state," says Margelov.

But rather than pining for the past, Russia would do well to look to Great Britain, another fallen empire, for lessons in how to stay relevant in a post-imperial world. Britain ran into disaster in 1956 when it tried to assert itself militarily in its old imperial space by making a grab for the Suez Canal. Since then, London has contented itself with slowly building new constructive relationships with its neighbors, former colonies, and big powers like the U.S. The result might not be as grand or as satisfying as macho strutting and military adventures, but it has helped keep Britain at the center of world politics long after the sun set on its empire. If Russia would realize that its best hope for influence is to engage rather than confront the rest of the world, it could start truly rebuilding its influence and putting to rest the misunderstandings and suspicions that shaped the lives of John Fischer's Cold War generation.

#11

Voronin Resigns As Acting Moldovan President RFE/RL, September 2, 2009

Moldova's President Vladimir Voronin has announced his resignation after eight years in power, RFE/RL's Moldova Service reports.

Voronin said in a statement posted on his party's website that "during this time of crisis for the country and our party -- I don't plan to remain in this ambiguous and doubtful position as the incumbent president."

Voronin leads the Communist Party and had been president since 2001.

With Voronin's resignation, the role of acting president will pass to the current speaker of parliament, Liberal Party leader Mihai Ghimpu, until a new presidential election can be held in parliament.

However, the new parliament's ability to hold that vote was contested on September 1 by the Communists at the Constitutional Court. The court was asked to rule quickly.

Vlad Filat, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, the main party in the Alliance for European Integration, told RFE/RL that the alliance is still open to dialogue with the Communists and will not force a vote on the makeup of parliamentary committees.

Four pro-Western parties won a combined 53 seats in the 101-seat parliament in a repeat election in July and have formed the Alliance for European Integration (AIE) in an attempt to take over from the Communists.

A simple majority is enough to elect a new government, but the country's president must be elected with a three-thirds majority, or 61 votes.

#12

Ukraine gas storage should avert winter cuts-Gazprom

By Vladimir Soldatkin

Reuters, September 2, 2009

MOSCOW - Ukraine has pumped 25 billion cubic metres of gas so far into its underground storage facilities, almost enough to ensure smooth supplies to Europe this winter, a senior Gazprom executive said on Wednesday.

Deputy Chief Executive Valery Golubev also said Gazprom aimed to meet its deadline for developing the Shtokman gas field in the Arctic, and that a decision was pending over a potential \$2 billion Japanese loan to fund a pipeline in the Far East.

Russian gas giant Gazprom has long said it was worried by low levels of gas storage in Ukraine, which could lead to a repeat of the dispute between Moscow and Kiev that led to the severance of Russian gas supplies to parts of Europe in a freezing January this year.

"Gazprom estimates Ukraine has pumped 25 bcm into its storage, while 28 bcm is enough for uninterrupted supplies to Europe. Ukraine plans to pump a total of 32 bcm," Golubev said.

Gazprom has also said it fears Ukraine's strained finances could lead to arrears in payments for gas deliveries to the country itself, but Kiev has repeatedly managed to find money ahead of monthly deadlines.

Worries eased further when Kiev clinched a deal with the International Monetary Fund, effectively getting permission to use the funds to pay for gas supply and storage.

"There is no Ukrainian problem. Ukraine is paying for the gas on time," Golubev told reporters.

The comments came a day after Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin agreed with his Ukrainian counterpart, Yulia Tymoshenko, to let Kiev import much less gas than arranged, saving Ukraine from potentially huge fines.

Ukrainian state energy firm Naftogaz has also started talks on restructuring about \$1.6 billion in foreign debt, the company said on Wednesday.

SHTOKMAN LAUNCH

Golubev said Gazprom would deliver on its promises to start the Shtokman natural gas field after earlier warning that it might revise the timetable due to the global economic downturn. "We will do everything to get it done on time," he said.

Shtokman is located in the often stormy Barents Sea, about 600 km (375 miles) from the coast, presenting significant technical challenges to the project's engineers.

In July, Gazprom said in a memorandum ahead of a Eurobond issue it could revise the Shtokman timetable, depending on gas demand. The field is scheduled to start producing gas for export by pipeline by 2013 and as liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2014.

Gazprom also plans to build an LNG plant in the Pacific port of Vladivostok, to which gas will be delivered by a planned pipeline from Sakhalin island.

Golubev confirmed earlier reports that Japan had proposed a \$2 billion loan in exchange for the rights to sell its pipes to Gazprom for the pipeline. But he said the energy giant would probably prefer to use pipes produced by Russian companies.

"Yes, Japan proposed a loan to us, but to tell you the truth, Russian plants are able today to provide the construction project with its own pipelines," he said.

#13

Ukraine mayor accused of anti-Semitism

By Maria Danilova

AP, September 3, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine — Jewish leaders in Ukraine and Russia on Thursday condemned the mayor of a Ukrainian city who called a presidential hopeful "an impudent little Jew," and Russia's chief rabbi said he would travel there in a show of support for the local Jewish community.

The incident was a worrying sign of persistent anti-Semitism in a country that lost hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Holocaust, but also evidence of a heated presidential election campaign in a politically chaotic country and Ukraine's tense relations with neighboring Russia.

Prosecutors have charged Serhiy Ratushnyak, the mayor of the western city of Uzhhorod, with hooliganism, abuse of office and xenophobia, said Viktoriya Popovych, a spokeswoman for the regional prosecutor's office. The investigation was opened after Ratushnyak assailed former parliament speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk and attacked one of his campaign workers last month.

Popovych would not provide further details.

Yatsenyuk accuses Ratushnyak of attacking and injuring a young woman who campaigned for him in Uzhhorod on Aug. 6. The mayor threw himself at the woman, grabbed her by the throat and threw her to the ground, causing bruises and a concussion, according to Yatsenyuk's office.

Later, Ratushnyak called Yatsenyuk "an impudent little Jew" and said the politician was confusing the January presidential vote in Ukraine with small town elections in Israel, according to Yatsenyuk.

Yatsenyuk has been vague about his heritage, saying both of his parents are Ukrainian.

Ratushnyak denied he attacked the campaign activist, calling the incident a "myth." He did, however, confirm his remarks regarding Yatsenyuk but said he believed they were not offensive.

"Is everybody obliged to love Jews and Israel? If I don't like Jews and Israel, does that make me an anti-Semite?" he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Ratushnyak said that Yatsenyuk has no business running for president of Ukraine.

"Do you think a Ukrainian would go there (Israel) ... set up tents there and run for president, and do you think he would not be called an impudent Ukrainian?" the mayor said.

"So they are allowed to do everything and I — on my own land — am being told which word to use and which word not to use. This is what Zionism is."

Jewish leaders said anti-Semitism should have no place in Ukraine, which lost some 1.4 million of its 2.4 million Jews during the Holocaust, many of them in western Ukraine, and which strives to integrate with the European Union.

Russia's chief rabbi, Berel Lazar, said he would visit Uzhhorod near the Hungarian border on Monday to support the local Jewish community.

Ukraine's chief rabbi, Yakov Blaikh, also condemned Ratushnyak's actions.

"There is no place for him in modern day Ukraine," Blaikh told the AP. "He is missing the point of multinational Ukraine."

The dispute illustrates the tense relations between Kiev and Moscow. Russian leaders have fiercely opposed Ukraine's efforts to throw off Russian influence and join NATO, and have not missed a chance to criticize Ukraine for domestic problems and a lack of tolerance.

Blaikh said that Lazar was always welcome in Ukraine, but added that he believed anti-Semitism was more widespread in Russia than in Ukraine.

"Plenty of anti-Semites in Russia can use the help of Berel Lazar before he worries about anti-Semitism in Ukraine," he said.

#14

Progress seen on Russia-US nuclear disarmament talks: Lavrov AFP, September 3, 2009

MOSCOW — Efforts to clinch a new Russian-US nuclear disarmament deal this year have advanced and negotiators will report to the two countries' leaders this month, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday.

"There will be something to report about" by the time President Dmitry Medvedev and his US counterpart, Barack Obama, meet at a G-20 summit in Pittsburgh later in September, Russian news agencies quoted Lavrov as saying.

During Obama's landmark visit to Moscow in July, he and Medvedev agreed to hammer out a new nuclear arms reduction pact to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), preferably by the time it expires on December 5.

Lavrov acknowledged the talks were difficult but said the negotiators would do their best to agree on the new deal by the target deadline.

"We should be working within the timeframes that the presidents had indicated and we will do everything to try to have a new document by the moment the current agreement expires," Lavrov was quoted as saying.

A declaration signed by Medvedev and Obama at their Moscow meeting fixed no deadline for agreement on a new deal and only instructed negotiators to complete the work as quickly as possible.

#15

Obama Facing Hurdles to Nuclear Disarmament Goals AP, September 3, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Five months after President Barack Obama, with great fanfare, called for a world free of nuclear weapons, a crucial step toward that goal is running into resistance.

There is little indication Obama will have the votes he needs for a cornerstone of his nonproliferation efforts: Senate ratification of a nuclear test ban treaty. If Obama can't get the treaty approved, he probably will have a hard time persuading the rest of the world to rein in nuclear weapon programs.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, an advocacy group based in Washington, said the Obama administration needs to "work faster and harder" to build support in the Senate.

The absence of progress comes as a backdrop to the special U.N. session to be chaired by Obama later this month. The summit Sept. 24 on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's annual ministerial session will seek broad consensus on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Political realities have made focusing on the test ban treaty difficult. Obama's top priorities these days are passing a massive health care overhaul and overcoming violence in Afghanistan. On arms control, his administration is now focused on another goal: securing a successor to a bilateral treaty with Russia that expires in December.

The treaty with Russia would amount to a small step toward the goal of a nuclear-free world that Obama outlined in April in a sweeping speech before a crowd of 20,000 in Prague. In the same speech, he promised to focus on the test ban treaty.

"My administration will immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification," he said.

The administration says it is now working behind the scenes to build congressional support for the test ban treaty.

"We are pushing very hard on all fronts," White House spokesman Mike Hammer said.

But supporters of that goal outside the administration say they have not seen evidence of urgency.

"If this pace continues, there is little chance he will achieve the goals he outlined," said Joseph Cirincione, president of the San Francisco-based Ploughshares Fund, which advocates the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Negotiated in the 1990s, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty specified 44 nuclear-capable countries that must give formal approval before it can take effect. Eight countries besides the United States have yet to ratify the treaty: China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan. In 1999, during the Clinton administration, the Senate rejected ratification overwhelmingly, with all but three Republicans voting against.

Many countries see ratification of the treaty as a test of U.S. commitment to phase out nuclear weapons.

If the Senate doesn't ratify it, Obama could have difficulty persuading countries to support other goals, such as strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, at a review conference in May. The administration also wants a treaty to prohibit further production of weapons-grade nuclear material.

The administration needs 67 votes in the 100-member Senate to ratify the test ban treaty, which means it will need support from some of the 40 Republicans. No Republican has yet declared support, and key Republicans remain skeptical.

Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., a well-regarded arms control and nonproliferation expert, recently told The Associated Press that the administration should build its case and wait at least until the second half of 2010 to push for a vote. But some supporters say that will be too close to congressional elections in November, and they worry that after that Obama may not have the large Democratic majority he now enjoys.

Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., who opposes deep reductions in arsenals and led opposition to the 1999 vote on the test ban treaty, remains opposed. He believes a test ban would constrain the United States and undermine its technological superiority.

Kyl and other opponents also say it will be difficult to verify whether other countries are conducting secret tests and to ensure that the U.S. arsenal can be maintained and improved without testing.

The administration argues that technological advances, including the capability of computer simulation, have made testing unnecessary and have also made it easier to detect tests in other countries. It has commissioned a National Academy of Sciences report on how to maintain the arsenal and an intelligence estimate on detecting nuclear explosions. The administration hopes the reports, expected early next year, will help win ratification.

Kyl told the AP he believes he can defeat Obama's push for the treaty.

"I think they are dead set on ratifying it," he said. "That doesn't mean it is going to happen."

The resistance comes as the administration is already deep into negotiations with Russian counterparts to finish a follow-on agreement to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires in December. The administration hopes ratification of that treaty will give the issue momentum.

Prospects look much better for that treaty, with some Republicans already on board. Kyl said he could support it if the administration backs funding to modernize nuclear stockpiles and infrastructure.