

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 17, 2009



TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

In Brief: Rosh Hashanah

Dear Friend,

The last year has been an eventful one for the Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union. We continue to witness many positive developments and challenges for our brothers and sisters.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, thank you for your ongoing support of NCSJ's vital mission. We will continue to look for ways to expand our communications, including the Weekly Update.

On behalf of the NCSJ leadership and staff, we wish you a Shana Tova Umetukah.

Sincerely,

Richard B. Stone
Chairman

Alexander Smukler
President

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 17, 2009

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#1a

Russia: Deciding Candidacy Jointly By Clifford J. Levy New York Times, September 11, 2009

Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin, who is widely considered Russia's paramount leader, said Friday that he and his protege, President Dmitri A. Medvedev, would decide together who would run for president from their party in 2012. Mr. Putin did not say that he would be a candidate, though he did not go out of his way to dismiss the possibility. Speaking to an annual gathering of Russia experts, Mr. Putin said he and Mr. Medvedev got along well, emphasizing that they would not compete against each other in 2012. After two terms as president, Mr. Putin could not run for a third consecutive term because of term limits. He instead endorsed Mr. Medvedev, who took office in May 2008.

#1b

Kazakh Party Proposes Presidency-For-Life For Nazarbaev RFE/RL, September 14, 2009

ASTANA -- Kazakhstan's Presidential Nur-Otan party is proposing legislation that would allow Nursultan Nazarbaev to remain president for life, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Nur-Otan First Deputy Chairman Darkhan Kaletaev told journalists that his party is initiating "a project on defining the status of the country's leader."

Kaletaev said the law might include granting a lifetime presidential term for Nazarbaev, who in July marked his 20th year as the leader of Kazakhstan.

Nur-Otan is officially headed by Nazarbaev and the party holds all 77 seats in parliament's lower chamber, the Mazhilis.

Zakratdin Baidosov, a professor in the northwestern city of Aqtobe, allegedly proposed that Nazarbaev be named president-for-life during a recent visit there.

In 2007, the Kazakh parliament adopted an amendment to the constitution extending the presidential term to seven years and lifting the limit on the number of terms that Nazarbaev could serve.

The next presidential election in Kazakhstan is scheduled for 2012.

Kazakhstan will take over the leadership of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in January.

#1c

Skinheads arrested in Russian synagogue attack JTA, September 14, 2009

JERUSALEM -- Four skinheads were arrested in a firebombing on an eastern Russian synagogue.

The suspects, aged 15 to 23, are accused of hurling Molotov cocktails late Saturday night or early Sunday morning at a synagogue in Khabarovsk. They also allegedly firebombed the home of a police officer who investigates racist crimes, the French news agency AFP reported.

If found guilty, the four could spend five years in prison.

#1d

Kiev HIAS vandalized JTA, September 15, 2009

NEW YORK -- Vandals defaced the front door of The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev with Nazi symbols.

A HIAS guard reported that three vandals, aged 17 and 18, spray-painted a Nazi eagle on the door with a stencil on Sunday morning. Also, a swastika on the front door was made with masking tape.

HIAS filed a formal complaint with the Ukrainian police. The use of Nazi symbols, although banned in Germany and other European countries, has not been banned in Ukraine.

#1e

ORT eyes expansion in Moldova JTA, September 15, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- The Moldovan government gave its approval to a World ORT plan to invest in vocational training in the country.

ORT leaders presented the initiative to acting Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin on Sept. 8, just days before he resigned. The research and analysis project will be conducted in cooperation with the government.

World ORT Director General Robert Singer, ORT Moldova President Ilan Shor and World ORT representative to the countries of the former Soviet Union David Benish told Voronin that they plan to learn more about the Moldovan economy in order to invest in vocational training in the country, and their intention of providing relevant courses to help people acquire jobs.

Voronin approved ORT Moldova's plan to set up an "E-bus" program, a mobile computer center that will visit regional centers to provide information and communications technology training that the communities otherwise would have little chance of having. The president asked the ORT delegation to look into training that will help Moldovans provide distance services such as call centers that can bring vital foreign income to one of Europe's poorest countries.

"I would like to thank ORT for its fruitful work in increasing the standard of living and well-being of Jews and non-Jews in Moldova through its training and education," Voronin said. "We share a common goal in using the newest technologies to raise the standard of living.

"If this meeting is anything to go by, then ORT's operations in Moldova will expand significantly in the coming years," Benish told JTA.

Last week's meeting was the climax to a four-day tour of select ORT schools and programs in Ukraine and Moldova.

#1f
Pre-Rosh Hashanah Concert at Shaarei Tsedek
FJC, September 16 2009

MOSCOW, Russia – In Moscow, the Shaarei Tsedek Charity Center held its traditional concert in the lead-up to Rosh Hashanah. Leah Ratner, the director of charity programs, opened the program with wishes to everyone for a sweet and happy year. She extended an invitation for all those in attendance to participate in the center's wide array of programs.

Rabbi Reuven Kuravsky, a Chabad-Lubavitch emissary serving in the region, spoke next and announced that he would play a musical instrument. "This is a very ancient Jewish musical instrument... it's called a shofar," he stated jovially. He explained that the shofar is customarily blown throughout the month of Elul preceding Rosh Hashanah to summon the hearts of all Jews to repentance. On Rosh Hashanah it is a mitzvah (commandment) to hear the shofar blown and Rabbi Kuravsky invited everyone to come to the synagogue this coming Sunday to hear the shofar.

Lector David Nissengolts explained the meaning of Rosh Hashanah, its significance and customs.

The highlight of the event was a performance by the classical music ensemble "Forum-Classics," which performed works by Bach, Mozart, Chopin, Handel and other famous composers. The musicians received a standing ovation from the participants, an enthusiastic response in the lead up to the Jewish New Year.

#1g
World Union Facilitates Transfer of URJ Laptops to FSU
World Union for Progressive Jewry, September 17, 2009

The World Union for Progressive Judaism stepped in to assist an affiliate in the former Soviet Union that was badly in need of computers by facilitating the transfer of four reconditioned laptops no longer needed by the Union for Reform Judaism.

"We all did a mitzvah (or four)," writes Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, the World Union's vice president for philanthropy. "In the end, the URJ's downsizing and reorganization helped uplift one of our communities. Yasher koach!"

Bretton-Granatoor singled out Peter Weinrobe, the URJ's chief information officer, and Rabbi Dan Freeland, its senior vice president, for having helped make the transfer possible.

Vladimir Aerov, president of the Odessa congregation, and its community worker, Vladimir Torchinsky, wrote that the computers will enable the members of Emanu-El to "communicate, receive information and study more successfully. In the name of the entire community, we express our gratitude for this donation."

A 2002 graduate of the Institute for Modern Jewish Studies, the World Union's three-year training program in Moscow for Progressive Jewish communal workers, Torchinsky, 33, is considered a rising star among the movement's professionals in the FSU, where he has long been known for his knowledge and leadership skills. He is also known for his musical talents (he plays guitar and sings - two invaluable tools in community work) and his poetry writing, and has already made a name for himself as a filmmaker.

#1h
Lukashenko Touts Russia as an Ally
AP, September 17, 2009

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko said Wednesday that he was not about to change his authoritarian ways just to gain favor with Europe, stressing that his country would remain a strategic ally of Russia.

"Europeans must understand they can't make us to do something that we do not want," he told an economic forum in Vilnius. "We know what are the best interests of our nation."

Lukashenko made a rare visit to neighboring Lithuania — his first in 11 years — and the second trip to a European Union and NATO member since an EU travel ban on top Belarussian officials was lifted earlier this year.

Many Lithuanians were critical of the decision to invite Lukashenko. A dozen protesters jeered him near the presidential palace by waving signs and calling for an end to political repression in Belarus.

#2

Getting a yes on Iran Advocacy Day

By Eric Fingerhut

JTA, September 11, 2009

WASHINGTON -- More than 300 Jewish communal leaders came to the nation's capital to push for increased pressure on Iran -- and they were pleased by what they heard.

The chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee said he would move forward on Iran sanctions legislation next month "absent some compelling evidence why I should do otherwise."

Speaking Sept. 10 at the National Jewish Leadership Advocacy Day on Iran in Washington, U.S. Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) said that next month he will mark up the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act and "begin the process of tightening the screws on Tehran" if Iran "does not reverse course."

The legislation would allow the sanctioning of companies that help Iran import or produce refined petroleum, which is seen as potentially having a large impact on Iran's economy because the country imports 40 percent of its refined petroleum.

Berman said the clock has "almost run out" on Iran.

"If the Iranians are going to engage in a meaningful and significant way that will spell the end of their nuclear enrichment program, we'll open a new chapter with them," Berman said. "But let's clarify 'meaningful' -- we're not going to be conned by an Iranian rope-a-dope, its stalling efforts. We have no intention of spending months analyzing old proposals which are offered merely to delay imposition of sanctions."

The Obama administration has signaled that it will reconsider its efforts to engage Iran on its pursuit of nuclear weapons if no progress has been made by the end of September.

In addition to Berman, Jewish community leaders heard House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and House Minority John Boehner (R-Ohio) both say they were ready to proceed with sanctions legislation as well. Hoyer, speaking before Berman, said he had told his colleague that "once you move it, my intention is to bring it to the floor shortly thereafter."

Also speaking were House Minority Whip Eric Cantor (R-Va.), House Foreign Affairs Committee ranking member Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.)

If anyone had any doubts about how important the Iran issue is to the leadership of the mainstream American Jewish community, the powerful lineup at the Sept. 10 panel discussion during advocacy day should have erased them.

AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr, Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham Foxman, American Jewish Committee Executive Director David Harris and B'nai B'rith International Executive Director Dan Mariaschin were seated at the same table on the stage next to panel moderator Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

In addition to talking about the threat posed by Iran with its building of nuclear weapons, the panelists also emphasized the importance of making sure that the entire Jewish community and all Americans were aware of the threat's urgency.

"There is no national sense of urgency" on Iran, said Foxman, who then outlined a "Catch-22" facing the Jewish community in the coming months.

"We do not have the luxury to not lead" on Iran, he said, but in taking the lead, some may dismiss the threat as just a Jewish issue.

Still, Foxman said, "the job will have to be done beyond the Jewish community" and "we have to lead even though it will be perceived as a Jewish issue."

Hoyer in his remarks offered a talking point on Iran that had no relation to Israel or the Jewish community, warning that "250,000 Americans are within range of Iranian weaponry."

Hoenlein as he moderated the panel blasted those in the Jewish community "who seek to get attention by sowing discord" on the Iran issue.

"We need to put aside our differences and stand together" against the threat of Iran, said the chief executive of the Presidents Conference -- the Jewish community's main umbrella organization on Middle East-related issues.

Hoenlein did not specify exactly to whom he was referring, and declined he to do so when asked by JTA. But he appeared to be reacting to a statement released the day before by Americans for Peace Now, a Presidents Conference member, opposing "crippling" sanctions "that target the Iranian people rather than their leaders" and backing "engagement" without "arbitrary deadlines."

The statement contradicted the message of advocacy day, during which leaders were calling for increased economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran and for the passage of the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act. The measure would punish companies that help Iran import or produce refined petroleum.

The advocacy day was organized by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Iran, which is led by the Presidents Conference, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, UJC/Federations of North America and NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia.

Hoenlein stressed that there was wide unity in the community that increased pressure on Iran was necessary, citing the nine rabbinical and synagogue organizations from across the denominational spectrum that released a joint statement on the issue a few days earlier and the representation of a huge array of Jewish groups at advocacy day.

Hoenlein also noted that the term "crippling sanctions" in regard to Iran was actually first used by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton earlier this year, and said that such sanctions are "not targeting people."

That was a point made by others at the event. Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, pointed out in an interview that advocates looked at how past sanctions placed on countries such as Iraq worked before deciding how to handle Iran.

"These sanctions are much more targeted," he said, and were selected because they were not aimed at the Iranian people.

President Obama said during the campaign that he would have the most transparent administration in history -- but apparently not when it comes to discussing Iran policy.

At the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue, the appearance by top National Security Council official Dennis Ross and Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns was declared off the record, and reporters were told to leave the synagogue sanctuary for the duration of the administration's presentation.

Organizers wanted the session to be open to reporters -- indeed, they had sent out a news release inviting reporters to the Sept. 10 event -- but were told of the administration demand the previous evening.

A couple of people who did hear the remarks of Ross and Burns said the two men stressed that the engagement process with Iran is "not open-ended" and that they had no illusions about the Iranians, with Ross at one point saying the process with Iran was "not about trust."

One person noted that there was nothing particularly fresh or new, with much of what Ross and Burns said having been said by Obama in earlier speeches and news conferences. They apparently avoided specifically saying whether the administration would support the passage of the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act.

#3

The Retreat of the Tongue of the Czars

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, September 13, 2009

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine -- In a corner of Bukvatoriya, a bookstore here in the capital of the Crimean Peninsula, are some stacks of literature that may be as provocative to the Kremlin as any battalion of NATO soldiers or wily oligarch.

The books are classics — by Oscar Wilde, Victor Hugo, Mark Twain, and Shakespeare — that have been translated into Ukrainian, in editions aimed at teenagers. A Harry Potter who casts spells in Ukrainian also inhabits the shelves.

Two decades ago, there would have been little if any demand for such works, given that most people in this region are ethnic Russians. But the Ukrainian government is increasingly requiring that the Ukrainian language be used in all facets of society, especially schools, as it seeks to ensure that the next generation is oriented toward Kiev, not Moscow.

Children can even read Pushkin, Russia's most revered author, in translation. (This tends to bother Russians in the way that "The Star-Spangled Banner" sung in Spanish can touch off cross-cultural crankiness in the United States.)

The Ukrainian policy has become a flashpoint in relations between the two countries and reflects the diminishing status of the Russian language in not just the former Soviet Union, but the old Communist bloc as a whole.

The Kremlin has tried to halt the decline by setting up foundations to promote the study of Russian abroad and by castigating neighbors who shove the language from public life. In some nations, a backlash against Russian has stirred its own backlash in the language's defense.

Still, the challenge is considerable. At stake is more than just words on a page.

Language imparts power and influence, binding the colonized to the colonizers and, for better or worse, altering how native populations interact with the world. Long after they gave up their territories, Britain and France and Spain have retained a certain authority in far-flung outposts because of the languages that they seeded.

Czars and Soviet leaders spread Russian in the lands that they conquered, using it as a kind of glue to unite disparate nationalities, a so-called second mother tongue, and connect them to their rulers. That legacy endures today, as exemplified by the close relationship between Russia and Germany, which stems in part from Chancellor Angela Merkel's ability to speak Russian. She learned it growing up in Communist East Germany.

But with the language in retreat, there are unlikely to be many future Angela Merckels. For the Kremlin, could there be a more bitter reminder of how history has turned than the sight of young Estonians or Georgians or Uzbeks (not to mention Czechs or Hungarians) flocking to classes in English instead of Russian?

"The drop in Russian language usage is a great blow to Moscow, in the economic and social spheres, and many other respects," said Aleksei V. Vorontsov, chairman of the sociology department at the Herzen State Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg. "It has severed links, and made Russia more isolated."

Russian seems to be faring more poorly than other colonial languages because the countries that had to absorb it have a more cohesive sense of national identity and are now rallying around their native languages to assert their sovereignty.

Russian is one of the few major languages to be losing speakers, and by rough estimates, that total will fall to 150 million by 2025, from 300 million in 1990, a year before the Soviet collapse. It will probably remain one of the 10 most popular languages, but barely. Mandarin Chinese, English, Spanish, Arabic and Hindi head the list.

The situation has not been helped by the demographic crisis in Russia itself, which is expected to shed as much as 20 percent of its population by 2050.

The fall in Russian speakers has not been uniform across the former Soviet Union, and Russian officials praise former Soviet republics like Kyrgyzstan where Russian is embraced.

But countries that felt subjugated by Soviet power, like the Baltic States, have taken vengeance by mandating knowledge of the native language to obtain citizenship or other benefits. (As a correspondent in the former Soviet Union, I find that in some countries, I can often speak Russian with people older than 40 and English with those younger.)

The dispute is vitriolic in Ukraine, especially here on the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea, a former Russian territory where about 60 percent of the population of two million is ethnic Russian and others also speak Russian as a first language. Many residents here would prefer that Russia reclaim Crimea.

Ukraine's pro-Western president, Viktor A. Yushchenko, indicated this month that a deepening understanding of the Ukrainian language is one key to keeping Moscow at bay. "With our native language, we preserve our culture," Mr. Yushchenko told the German magazine Spiegel. "That greatly contributes to preserving our independence. If a nation loses its language, it loses its memory, its history and its identity."

The policies in Ukraine, the Baltics and other countries have often drawn the ire of not only the Kremlin, but also local Russian speakers.

At the Bukvatoriya bookstore in Simferopol, the manager, Irina P. Germanenko, said locals were upset by “Ukrainization” — laws compelling the Ukrainian language in government, on television and in other areas.

Many schools in Crimea use Russian as their primary language, but they often must teach courses in subjects like geography and math in Ukrainian. And important national examinations are given only in Ukrainian.

Most of Bukvatoriya’s stock is in Russian, but Ms. Germanenko said sales of books for teenagers in Ukrainian showed the policy’s impact. “It’s an unfortunate process that is occurring,” she said. “People should be able to have freedom of choice in their language.”

The resentment can bubble up in unexpected locales. When Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic in Central Asia, said this summer that it would demote the status of Russian, requiring government documents to be only in the Tajik language, an outcry arose from those who saw Russian as a bridge to Russia and the outside world. And in former Soviet satellites in Europe, where Russian was essentially purged after Communism, there has been a small but noticeable revival.

The language is obviously helpful in doing business in Russia’s sizable market, so interest in Russian-language classes is rising. The lingua franca of Communism, it seems, is now an asset in the pursuit of capitalism.

#4

Venezuela Says It Will Buy Russian Missiles

By Simon Romero

New York Times, September 13, 2009

CARACAS, Venezuela — President Hugo Chavez said Friday night that Venezuela had reached an agreement to buy short-range missiles from Russia, part of a deepening security relationship with Russia as Mr. Chavez chafes at a plan by the United States to increase its military presence in neighboring Colombia.

The missiles, if the deal goes through, would put within firing range locations in Colombia or American military installations on the islands of Aruba or Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles off Venezuela’s coast, where the United States operates surveillance flights. But Mr. Chavez insisted that the weapons were solely for defensive purposes.

“We are not going to attack anybody,” Mr. Chavez said in a speech from the balcony of the presidential palace after his return from a whirlwind trip to Russia, Iran, Libya, Algeria, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Spain and Italy. “These are just defense tools, because we are going to defend our country from any threat, wherever it may come from.”

Mr. Chavez did not specify the type of Russian-made missiles that Venezuela hoped to buy, but he said that they had a range of about 186 miles. He also did not say how many of the missiles Venezuela would receive, where they would be deployed or how much they would cost.

If he goes ahead with the deal, Mr. Chavez would have to find a way to pay for the missiles while he struggles to meet other obligations. With oil prices dropping sharply from their peak last year, Venezuela owes an estimated \$10 billion to \$15 billion to a wide variety of foreign companies, including suppliers of basic items like food.

So far this decade, Venezuela has announced plans to buy more than \$4 billion in weapons from Russia. Some of these deals have materialized, like the purchase of Sukhoi fighter jets and SA-24 shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles.

Other deals, like a plan to build a Kalashnikov rifle factory in Venezuela, have faced lengthy delays.

Mr. Chavez has played up Venezuela's ties with Russia and the country's expanding weapons arsenal as he has lashed out at a plan by Washington that could raise American troop levels in Colombia, a nation where the United States has already disbursed more than \$5 billion in security aid to combat guerrilla insurgencies and the cocaine trade.

#5

Terms of Engagement

By Chester A. Crocker

New York Times, September 14, 2009

PRESIDENT OBAMA will have a hard time achieving his foreign policy goals until he masters some key terms and better manages the expectations they convey. Given the furor that will surround the news of America's readiness to hold talks with Iran, he could start with "engagement" — one of the trickiest terms in the policy lexicon.

The Obama administration has used this term to contrast its approach with its predecessor's resistance to talking with adversaries and troublemakers. His critics show that they misunderstand the concept of engagement when they ridicule it as making nice with nasty or hostile regimes.

Let's get a few things straight. Engagement in statecraft is not about sweet talk. Nor is it based on the illusion that our problems with rogue regimes can be solved if only we would talk to them. Engagement is not normalization, and its goal is not improved relations. It is not akin to detente, working for rapprochement, or appeasement.

So how do you define an engagement strategy? It does require direct talks. There is simply no better way to convey authoritative statements of position or to hear responses. But establishing talks is just a first step. The goal of engagement is to change the other country's perception of its own interests and realistic options and, hence, to modify its policies and its behavior.

Diplomatic engagement is proven to work — in the right circumstances. American diplomats have used it to change the calculations and behavior of regimes as varied as the Soviet Union, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Cuba, China, Libya and, intermittently, Syria.

There is no cookie-cutter formula for making it work, however. In southern Africa in the 1980s, we directed our focus toward stemming violence between white-ruled South Africa and its black-ruled neighbors. This strategy put a priority on regional conflict management in order to stop cross-border attacks and create better conditions for internal political change. The United States also engaged with the Cubans in an effort aimed at achieving independence for Namibia (from South Africa) and at the removal of Cuban troops from Angola. In Mozambique, engagement meant building a constructive relationship with the United States, restraining South African interference in Mozambique's internal conflicts and weaning the country from its Soviet alignment.

More recently, the Bush administration's strategy for engagement with Libya ultimately led to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and the elimination of that country's programs to develop weapons of mass destruction.

While the details differ, each case of engagement has common elements. Engagement is a process, not a destination. It involves exerting pressure, by raising questions and hypothetical possibilities, and by probing the other country's assumptions and thinking. Above all, it involves testing how far the other country might be willing to go. Properly understood, the diplomacy of engagement means raising questions that the other country may wish to avoid or be politically unable to answer. It places the ball in the other country's court.

Engagement, of course, comes with risks. One is that domestic opponents will intentionally distort the purposes of engagement. Another risk is that each side may try to impose preconditions for agreeing to meet and talk — and ultimately negotiate. But we will not get far with the Iranians, for example, if we (and they) insist on starting by establishing the other side's intentions.

Another risk is that, no matter what we say, the rogue regime may claim that engagement confers legitimacy. A more consequential danger is that a successful engagement strategy may leave the target regime in place and even strengthened, an issue that troubled some critics of the Bush administration's 2003 breakthrough that led to the normalizing of relations between the United States and Libya.

But by far the greatest risk of engagement is that it may succeed. If we succeed in changing the position of the other country's decision-makers, we then must decide whether we will take yes for an answer and reciprocate their moves with steps of our own. If talk is fruitful, a negotiation will begin about taking reciprocal steps down a jointly defined road. Engagement diplomacy forces us to make choices. Perhaps this is what frightens its critics the most.

As the Obama team works to fend off accusations that it is rushing into Russian, Iranian, Syrian or even North Korean arms, it will need to get the logic and definition of engagement right. In each case, we will need a clear-eyed assessment of what we are willing to offer in return for the changed behavior we seek. Engagement diplomacy may be easier to understand if the Obama administration speaks clearly at home about what it really requires.

Chester A. Crocker, a professor of strategic studies at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, was an assistant secretary of state for African affairs from 1981 to 1989.

#6

Medvedev Is Alone and Sleepless in the Kremlin

By Vladimir Frolov

Moscow Times, September 14, 2009

With President Dmitry Medvedev going online to appeal to the Russian people for their support for his modernization agenda, one wonders whether he feels he has reached the limit of his power to bring change to this country.

Last week, Medvedev posted a long essay in a number of online publications where, in a poignantly emotional style, he called for a different future for Russia. His analysis of the nation's challenges is honest to the point of being humiliating to Russia's elites. The Russian economy, like in Soviet times, continues to churn out shoddy products few people in other countries want to buy. Russian companies, with rare exceptions, trade in goods and services they themselves never created, like energy and imported consumer goods. Energy efficiency and labor productivity at some of the best Russian companies are shameful by global standards, but their owners and managers are blissfully unfazed about this. Democratic institutions are stable, but people show little interest in democratic self-rule and continue to look to the government to solve problems they should tackle themselves as a community.

Medvedev's program to turn Russia into an innovation-based economy is transformational. He makes a clear break with a tradition of forced modernization from the top at a horrible human cost. He wants modernization to unfold from within by unleashing the creative instinct in every Russian citizen.

He views the modern Russian state as a facilitator of innovational impulses by private companies and individuals, not a brutal instrument that builds giant plants and cities in the middle of nowhere. He thinks modernization is a natural byproduct of personal freedom → a mental breakthrough for a Russian ruler.

Medvedev views innovation, democracy and freedom as an individual responsibility, not a government function. He challenges us to take personal risks with our freedom → a prospect many in Russia would deem scary.

It is hard not to endorse Medvedev's platform of change. Yet, he warns against those with entrenched interests who would seek to torpedo it and appeals directly to the people to help him build a new Russia.

But he offers few, if any, insights as to how he intends to implement his roadmap for building a technologically advanced and socially progressive Russia. You walk away feeling that the guy may be alone and sleepless in the Kremlin.

Vladimir Frolov is president of LEFF Group, a government-relations and PR company.

#7

Kremlin aide sees Russia oligarchs loosening grip

By Janet McBride

Reuters, September 12, 2009

The global financial crisis will loosen the grip of a small business elite on Russia's economy and force the pace of modernisation and reform, a top Kremlin aide said on Saturday.

Kremlin economic adviser Arkady Dvorkovich cautioned that Russia's recovery - the economy has returned to month-on-month growth - cannot yet be considered sustainable.

"People will survive but not the oligarchs," Dvorkovich told the Valdai discussion group of Russia experts.

He forecast that in two to three years, the economic influence now wielded by a dozen or so oligarchs, who emerged in the rapid sell-off of state property in the post-Soviet 1990s, would be in the hands of hundreds of entrepreneurs.

The economic downturn has piled debts on Russia's most powerful businessmen, forcing asset sales and raising the possibility some of them may fall.

Analysts and academics at the briefing generally interpreted Dvorkovich's comments as illustrating Kremlin efforts to raise productivity and encourage investment, not a veiled threat.

President Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday gave a sober assessment of Russia's economy and promised to modernise industry, fight corruption and reduce the state's role.

"An ineffective economy, semi-Soviet social sphere, weak demographic trends and unstable Caucasus. These are very big problems even for a state like Russia," he wrote on website Gazeta.ru (www.gazeta.ru/comments/2009/09/10_a_3258568.shtml).

Many Russians view his aspirations with cynicism.

Dvorkovich dismissed suggestions Russia runs a risk of widespread social unrest. Last month 1,500 AvtoVAZ car workers gathered in the city of Togliatti southeast of Moscow to protest over pay cuts and layoffs.

"I am doubtful about the likelihood of any massive social unrest. In most cases there are ways to keep current production going and ways to create new jobs."

ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAGILE

Dvorkovich said economic recovery - much of it driven by a rebound in steel and oil prices - was fragile. Commodity prices may fall in the autumn and unemployment may rise.

"It is not a sustainable recovery yet in Russia or globally because it is based on massive government and central bank intervention."

Officials expect the economy to grow by 3.9-4.5 percent in the second half of 2009 from the first half, when Russia's GDP shrank by a tenth. That fall was in contrast with other emerging economies such as China, India or Brazil.

Lower commodities prices pushed Russia's budget into deficit territory for the first time in a decade in 2009 and next year the country wants to borrow as much as \$20 billion to cover a budget gap of almost \$100 billion.

However, the deficit forecast for 2010 was cut to 6.8 percent from an originally expected 7.5 percent on expectations of higher oil prices.

Dvorkovich warned against excess optimism.

"We are still very cautious about projections over the next few months. A rise in unemployment and a drop in commodities and oil prices are possible in the fall," he said.

Russian jobless rates were unchanged at 6.3 million people or 8.3 percent in July after hitting a peak of almost 10 percent earlier this year, which prompted officials to disburse billions of roubles of aid to firms across the country.

Dvorkovich said Russia should do more to change the model of its economy. Much of its manufacturing sectors were producing outdated goods, he said.

#8

Kremlin Intensifies Pressure as Ukraine Prepares for Vote Russia Lodges List of Complaints Against Neighbor By Philip P. Pan Washington Post, September 14, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Five years after Ukraine defied Russia and turned toward the United States and Europe in a peaceful, democratic revolution, Moscow is poised for a comeback in this former Soviet republic.

The pro-Western president who came to power as the hero of the Orange Revolution is struggling with single-digit ratings just months before he stands for reelection. The man Russia backed in 2004 is leading the race to succeed him. And the next-strongest candidate also appears acceptable to the Kremlin.

But rather than sit out the election, Russia has redoubled its efforts to portray Ukraine as a hostile neighbor, lodging a barrage of complaints against its policies and plunging relations between the two countries to their lowest point since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The vilification campaign has puzzled and alarmed analysts here as well as in Washington and Moscow. Many say Russia is trying to tilt the electoral field even further in its favor. But because that seems unnecessary, some are also asking whether Russian leaders might be laying the groundwork for a more serious confrontation with Ukraine, just a year after a brief war with another pro-Western neighbor, Georgia.

"Wars and conflicts begin with discussion of them as an option," said Valeriy Chaly, a foreign policy scholar at the Razumkov Center, a top research institute in Kiev. "Now, for the first time in years, the word 'war' is being used here, and it's not dismissed as impossible."

Eighteen years after the Soviet Union's collapse, Ukrainian independence still does not sit well with many Russians -- and a sizable minority in Ukraine -- who feel strongly about the country's cultural and historic ties to Russia. Relations have always been strained, but they became especially rocky after the Orange Revolution, when huge crowds protesting election fraud and autocratic rule rejected the Russian-backed presidential candidate and swept in a pro-Western government.

The democratic uprising worried Russia's own authoritarians, and Ukraine's subsequent push to join NATO alarmed them further. Recriminations between Moscow and Kiev became almost routine and culminated in a prolonged standoff over natural gas deliveries to Europe in the winter.

In recent weeks, though, Russian officials have ratcheted up the rhetoric, accusing Ukraine of sending troops to Georgia last year to kill Russian soldiers and of disrupting the operations of the Russian fleet in the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev issued a letter last month that denounced his Ukrainian counterpart, Viktor Yushchenko, and read like a brief for war.

The letter catalogued more than a dozen "anti-Russian" policies, including Ukraine's NATO bid, mistreatment of Russian investors, limits on the use of the Russian language, and efforts to promote a version of history that says the Soviet Union committed genocide against Ukrainians in the 1930s.

In a somber video released with the letter and staged with warships floating in the Black Sea behind him, Medvedev said he would refrain from sending a new ambassador to Ukraine, adding that tensions between the two countries had "hit unprecedented levels."

"Basically, we've entered a cold war," said Oleksandr Tretiakov, a parliamentary leader in Yushchenko's party who argues that Russia is trying to use its economic clout and control of the media to portray Ukraine as a "failed state" and unravel the Orange Revolution, which Moscow describes as a U.S.-engineered coup.

Some say the Kremlin is trying to distract its population from problems at home; polls show that Russians have more negative attitudes toward Ukraine than they do even toward the United States. But the message has resonated with many in Ukraine who are nostalgic for the Soviet era. Ukraine's 46 million people include 8 million ethnic Russians concentrated in the east and south.

A friendly government in Ukraine is a strategic priority for Russia. Ukrainian pipelines carry Russian gas to Europe, and the Black Sea Fleet is based in Sevastopol under a deal that expires in 2017. But there is also an emotional bond, because both Russians and Ukrainians trace their history to a medieval kingdom that was centered in Kiev.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin once argued to President George W. Bush that Ukraine wasn't a real country, and speaking to reporters in late May, he read approvingly from the diaries of an imperial general who referred to Ukraine as "Little Russia."

Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the Kremlin cannot imagine Russia as a great power without Ukraine. The debate among policymakers, he said, is between moderates who want to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and ensure that it continues delivering Russian gas, and officials calling for a proactive strategy aimed at "soft dominance" over the country.

"Recently, it's moving toward the more proactive position," he said.

Both Putin and Medvedev have a personal stake in reversing the Orange Revolution, which was seen in Moscow as a humiliating defeat. Putin, when he was president, recognized the losing candidate as the winner of the election, while Medvedev, then Putin's chief of staff, supervised the heavy-handed campaign effort that backfired.

Mikhailo Pohrebinski, a political consultant who advised Ukraine's former president and often worked with Medvedev, said Russia's president appears to be building a case that Ukraine is violating its 1997 friendship treaty with Russia -- the only agreement in which Moscow has recognized Ukraine's borders.

The escalation of tensions comes at a difficult time for Ukraine, which has been hit hard by the global economic crisis and is struggling to enact painful reforms required for billions of dollars in emergency loans. With the January presidential election approaching, the nation's fractious leadership is even more divided and distracted than usual.

Russia has not endorsed a candidate, as it did five years ago when it backed the then-prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich, who is now leader of Ukraine's largest opposition party and has made progress shaking his old image as a corrupt autocrat.

Though he may still be Moscow's favorite candidate, and is the front-runner in the race, Russia seems to be spreading its bets this time. Only Yushchenko has been attacked by name by Russian media, and he has proven such an unpopular and ineffective leader that he has little chance of winning reelection anyway.

Oleksandr Sushko, research director at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, said the Kremlin is trying to force itself onto the campaign agenda and hold a "casting call" in which the candidates must clarify their positions on the issues Russia cares about.

But all of the major candidates, including Yanukovych, favor further integration with Europe, and none is likely to make as many concessions as Russia demands once in office, he said. As a result, the Kremlin is trying to increase its leverage over them now, while also preparing for a confrontation if that fails.

Yanukovych's strongest opponent in the race is Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a leader of the Orange Revolution and former ally of Yushchenko's who says she will improve relations with Russia without sacrificing Ukraine's independence.

Tymoshenko won praise from Putin after negotiating a deal with him to end the standoff that cut fuel supplies to much of Europe last winter. But she committed Ukraine to buy a fixed amount of gas in the contract, and now, with demand down in the recession, she is trying to renegotiate.

She and Putin emerged from a meeting last month saying Russia had agreed in principle to give Ukraine a break. But critics say Tymoshenko has left herself open to be blackmailed by the Kremlin, perhaps just before the election. For example, Russia has objected to a deal that Tymoshenko signed with the European Union to help modernize and reform Ukraine's gas sector.

Julia Mostovaya, deputy editor of Kiev's most independent newspaper, Zerkalo Nedeli, said Yushchenko's failure to pursue further democratic reforms after the Orange Revolution has left Ukraine vulnerable to Russian influence.

"It's a very dangerous situation now," she said. "We have two leading candidates without principles, and Russia has leverage to influence both."

#9

The Kremlin's think tank

By Tim Wall

Moscow News, September 14, 2009

From the Cold War days, when foreign experts would try to work out who was really in charge in Moscow from the septuagenarian lineup on Lenin's mausoleum, Kremlinology has always been a funny old game.

Proof of this was supplied again last week, when the country's two leaders showed in their different ways that while Dmitry Medvedev may be the president, for many Vladimir Putin is still the boss.

First, Medvedev launched a policy initiative, reiterating the call for liberal reforms he first made while still a candidate for president.

His description of the country was one that many of the Kremlin's toughest critics could agree with in large part: "An ineffective economy, a semi-Soviet social sphere, a weak democracy, negative demographic trends and an unstable Caucasus. These are very big problems, even for a state like Russia."

In fact, if you didn't know who was behind the words, you could almost imagine them being penned by the Kremlin's least-favourite oligarch, Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Officials quickly pointed out that there was no real difference between Medvedev's position and that of Putin, who has always acknowledged the challenges ahead. But the strange thing was the way Medvedev delivered his message.

It wasn't legislation, or even a speech on primetime TV. No, it was a 5,000-word article posted on the Internet - the equivalent of a policy paper prepared by a think tank for the country's leader, not by him.

"You have to ask Medvedev some primitive questions," The Guardian quoted analyst Andrei Ryabov as saying. "What are you doing? You are the president. You have all the constitutional powers."

In contrast, Putin was more straightforward when asked at a meeting with the Valdai Club if he was planning to return to the presidency in 2012. He simply compared the situation to that in Britain when Tony Blair promised the premiership to Gordon Brown and handed him the job without an election.

In 2012, Putin said he and Medvedev would take a decision about who would stand for president - just like they did in late 2007. If that decision is anything to go by, it will still be Putin calling the shots - and showing he's very much in control. And that, when the country is seeking strong leadership in the depths of a economic crisis, was precisely the message the boss wished to convey.

#10

At Limmud in Siberia, some unique challenges

By Grant Slater

JTA, September 15, 2009

BIROBIDZHAN, Russia -- As the maroon bus trundled its way past the collective farms where Yiddish-speaking communists once struggled to tame the muddy earth, a commotion arose from a row of seats in the rear.

"Moooo-shiach!" shouted four teens in the back of the bus.

Their cheers for the Messiah drew the attention of 22-year-old Kristina Faibushenko, a young reporter for a local paper whose masthead is in Yiddish.

When the bus stopped, Faibushenko approached Zhenya Vladykin, a 13-year-old in a kippah and tzitzit, with a question: What does it mean to observe Shabbat?

"It means you can't do anything," he said.

The young Russians' exchange reflects the patchwork knowledge and observance of Jewish traditions that defines Russia's largely assimilated Jewish community. That is the case even in this strange and unique region of Russia's Far East known as the Jewish Autonomous District.

But last week some 200 residents of the region converged on the province's capital city, Birobidzhan, for the most remote Limmud Jewish educational conference held to date in the former Soviet Union -- possibly the world.

Nearly 4,000 miles from Moscow, Birobidzhan is the capital of Soviet Union's agitprop-inspired, semi-autonomous Jewish territory in Siberia. It lies on a spot of land on the Russian border with China to which Soviet leader Josef Stalin sought to lure Jews in the 1930s.

In places like Birobidzhan and Khabarovsk, the most populous city in this region, the disparity in access to Jewish life is stark. Outreach programs reach this remote area only in drips.

Enter Limmud FSU, a traveling show run by a Moscow-based core of young Jewish professionals that has played on three continents from the Chinese border to New York City. The conference seeks to provide

participants with a crash course in Jewish education and activity, and a safe haven to make Jewish connections.

Last week's Limmud conference played host to a large contingent from the Hillel in Khabarovsk, which is two hours away by train. These young Jews provided the backbone for the conference in both volunteer effort and knowledge.

Though they live in what is ostensibly a Jewish district -- Yiddish is an official language here -- many of the participants from Birobidzhan never had attended any kind of Jewish conference or educational seminar.

Limmud participants spent the first day at the recently completed Jewish community center and neighboring synagogue and the second day at a compound 40 minutes outside the city. Teens in kippahs mingled with old women who remembered the Jewish songs of their youth and completely secular Russians with distant Jewish roots.

In Birobidzhan, nearly everyone claims some Jewish ancestry, but some locals say they have never met a "real Jew."

Young people in Russia's Far East have limited access to Jewish life. The Chabad-run Federation of Jewish Communities maintains rabbis in Birobidzhan and Khabarovsk, Hillel is very active in Khabarovsk, and there are some Jewish music groups and other programs. But young Jews interested in their roots must actively seek out Judaism, says Roman Leder, the Jewish community leader in Birobidzhan.

Kirill Sahmanov, 17, bounces around the Limmud in iridescent blue skate shoes with tassels hanging out from underneath his cardigan. Limmud's only paid employee in Russia, Jenya Malkina, drafted Sahmanov as a volunteer for the conference.

Two years ago, Sahmanov decided that Hillel no longer provided him with all the Jewish fulfillment he wanted. He decided to become observant and sought out the Chabad rabbi in his hometown of Khabarovsk for instruction.

Sahmanov's descriptions of his Jewish life in Siberia are peppered with the Russian word "klyova," which means cool.

"It's klyova that we have Chabad, and the rabbi is definitely klyova," he said.

Now, Sahmanov says, he wants to travel to Israel for yeshiva, then return to promote Judaism in Khabarovsk.

One purpose of Limmud is to give people that choice -- the how for Russians interested in exploring their Jewish identity, said Chaim Chesler, a co-founder of Limmud FSU.

Malkina says the goal of the program is not to compete with other groups seeking to develop life but to bring them all together under one banner for a few days.

Limmud FSU began three years ago on the outskirts of Moscow with sizable contributions from Western funders. The last year has seen Russian-speaking Limmuds in Israel, Ukraine, New York, Moscow, Belarus and now Siberia.

Along with free choice of programming and involvement, Chesler says it is important that the leaders of the Limmud programs in Russia approach participants in their own language.

"They will speak Russian rather than one American rabbi coming to Russia with his bad Russian and telling them what to do," he said.

Chesler said Limmud FSU's expansion to Russian speakers beyond the old Iron Curtain ruffled some feathers in the Limmud organization, which is based in London and holds volunteer-led conferences all over the world.

“In America, they gave us hell,” he said.

But he pushed forward, and Chesler now says his outreach to Russian speakers largely has been accepted.

Andrew Gilbert, the chairman for Limmud International, says the Russian-speaking branch headed by Chesler has a contract to operate within the former Soviet Union. There is an “ongoing discussion” about their efforts to reach Russian-speaking Jews outside the region, he said.

Limmud FSU has no analog in the world in that it seeks to target a demographic rather than an area, Gilbert said. Limmud FSU has exceeded expectations, but the ideal would be for it to work with local Limmud bodies already in place outside the former Soviet Union, he said.

While Limmuds closer to Moscow now are partially self-sustaining, Chesler and his organization rely on a litany of donors both Western and local to host far-flung conferences among poorer areas like Birobidzhan. He says he has received donations from Jewish businessmen in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, as well as the support of American donors like Matthew Bronfman.

Jewish welfare groups also have been supportive. In particular, Chesler said the Jewish Agency for Israel has been much more receptive and helpful in recent months under the leadership of former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky.

“He understands what we are trying to do in Russia,” Chesler said.

#11

Op-Ed: Step up to help imperiled FSU Jewish community

By Robert Singer

JTA, September 16, 2009

LONDON -- More than 40 years ago, the late Rabbi Israel Miller attended services at Moscow’s Central Synagogue. Later he wrote in The New York Times, “There still echoes in my ears the whispered plea, ‘Do not forget us.’”

That whisper grew into the roar of the Soviet Jewry movement, which mobilized hundreds of thousands of Jews in the West to demand freedom for their co-religionists suffering under the heel of communism.

It is a bitter irony that the communities that went on to reap the fruits of those idealistic days are now in danger of fading away, their cries for help drowned out by the cacophony of financial crisis.

Having survived decades of state-sponsored anti-Semitism and the bloody horrors of the German invasion, the Jewish communities of the former Soviet Union are in danger. We cannot find the \$300 it would take to pay for food, transport, security and teachers’ salary supplements for each of the 11,000 students attending the ORT, Or Avner and Shema Yisrael schools in the region.

For nearly 20 years, Israel’s Education Ministry and U.S. Jewry have nurtured the astonishing renaissance of Jewish schools in the former Soviet Union through a vehicle called Heftsiba, which funds the three Jewish school systems. Now, after years of budget cuts culminating in the Jewish Agency for Israel’s withdrawal of funding for Heftsiba, the wheels are coming off and with them the hopes of reaching our goal of a vibrant Jewish society in the former Soviet Union.

Food, transport, security and wages hardly constitute the exciting, cutting-edge technology for which ORT schools are renowned. But these issues are critical to the very existence of the 44 schools supported by Heftsiba and affiliated with the ORT, Shema Yisrael and Or Avner networks.

High-quality curricula mean long school days. That necessitates nutritious hot meals for students, many of whom come from disadvantaged homes. Many students need subsidized bus service so they can afford to travel the long distance required to reach their Jewish schools. And, sadly, security guards are more important now than they have been in recent years.

Furthermore, in a region where the cost of living is high but where teachers often are paid as little as \$250 per month, the capacity to boost salaries is vital to attract and retain good staff. Parents want the best possible education for their children and the Jewish component is not always a priority. In order to attract them to our schools, we need to be able to compete with the many excellent non-Jewish schools in the cities where we operate.

Heftsiba's demise has seen teachers forced to take pay freezes or cuts and others laid off; meal and transport subsidies canceled; extracurricular activities curtailed; no Israeli teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies; and schools distracted from delivering education by the pressure of seeking new sources of income.

The resulting drop in enrollment is not only a loss to the schools but a personal and Jewish communal tragedy: Children at the precipice of assimilation are losing their link to Jewish education.

This is a far cry from the years following the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, when the creation of our Jewish school networks went hand in hand with an astonishing revival of Jewish identity and affiliation.

"Nowhere in the world have we ever seen a Jewish community of this size reviving from essentially nothing," Russia's chief rabbi, Berel Lazar, said at the time.

Without Jewish education, that revival will be cut short. Thanks to our schools, Jewish heritage has regained pride of place in tens of thousands of homes.

A generation ago, young Jews in the Soviet Union were able to tap into the Jewish knowledge of grandparents who had grown up before state-imposed atheism closed down synagogues, choked off the supply of rabbis and prayer books, restricted access to kosher food and nurtured the promulgation of age-old stereotyping and slander as part of mainstream political discourse.

Now it is the children who have been teaching their parents and grandparents.

What has been painstakingly built up over the past 20 years is nothing short of miraculous; now it could be only weeks away from ruin. Thanks to emergency funds from the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, the situation is not yet past the point of no return. But there is no Jewish organization willing or capable of assuming responsibility for the welfare of Jewish children and their future in the former Soviet Union.

The Jewish Agency's new chairman, Natan Sharansky, has done a tremendous job in securing new funds from local businesspeople. But there are no indications yet that any of the \$6 million pledged by the Genesis Philanthropy Group will be used to fill the hole left by Heftsiba's demise.

The Israeli government accepts the importance of the Jewish school networks in the former Soviet Union and recognizes the need to support them. But in these tough times, support needs to be broad-based.

The task of saving our schools ultimately is up to the Jewish people as a whole. The Jewish federations of North America need to step up.

The fall of communism 20 years ago presented world Jewry with the unprecedented opportunity "to reclaim the Jews for the Jewish people," as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's regional director, Asher Ostrin, said at the time.

World ORT, Or Avner and Shema Yisrael have been doing just that, each in its distinctive way. But without financial support from American Jewry we will lose this opportunity.

(Robert Singer is the director general and CEO of World ORT.)

#12

Reinharz and Charendoff join Genesis advisory board, replace Galperin and Alexeeva

By Jacob Berkman

JTA, September 16, 2009

The Genesis Philanthropy Group, the group made up of Russian oligarchs that has become increasingly important in recent months as it continues to dole out huge sums of money to create a better Russian speaking Diaspora, has announced several personnel changes.

The president of Brandeis University, Jehuda Reinharz, and the president of the Jewish Funders Network, Mark Charendoff, have been named to the group's advisory board, replacing the CEO of The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, Misha Galperin, and the head of the Charities Aid Foundation Global Trustees, Olga Alexeeva.

Genesis also announced that Ken Krug, the Chief Operating Officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles who previously served as the CFO of The RAND Corporation, has joined its Audit Committee.

Here is the release from Genesis:

**Presidents of Brandeis University and Jewish Funders Network Join Genesis Advisory Board
COO of LA Jewish Federation Appointed to the Audit Committee**

September 16, 2009 (Moscow, Russia): Genesis Philanthropy Group (GPG) has announced a number of governance and personnel changes involving its International Advisory Board and the Audit Committee. President of Brandeis University Dr. Jehuda Reinharz and President of the Jewish Funders Network (JFN) Mark Charendoff have joined the GPG Board. They succeed Misha Galperin, Executive Vice President and CEO of The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, and Olga Alexeeva, head of the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Global Trustees.

Other members of the Genesis Advisory Board include Major General (Retired) Elazar Stern, who chairs the board; Natan Sharansky, Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel; Polina Filippova, Director of Programs and Donor Relations at the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF Russia); Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, former president of the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life; John Healy, former president of the Atlantic Philanthropies; Alan Hoffmann, director general of the Education Department at Sokhnut; Avraham Infeld, president of the NADAV Fund and former president of the Stanley Chais Foundation; and Aliza Shenhar, Israeli ambassador to Russia (1994-1997) and president of Max Stern Academic College of EmekYezreel.

"We wholeheartedly welcome Jehuda and Mark to our Advisory Board," said Stan Polovets, CEO and one of the five founders of Genesis. "We have worked closely with both of them since the inception of Genesis two years ago, and have benefited greatly from their wisdom, experience, and advice. We are honored to have such distinguished leaders as our partners in strengthening Jewish life in the various communities where GPG operates."

Polovets added: "We are also very grateful to Misha Galperin and Olga Alexeeva, who were instrumental in the start-up phase of Genesis and who have made a significant contribution to the development of our mission, strategy and grant-making philosophy. Many of our best projects bear their signatures."

"We are at a pivotal time in the Jewish community, with great opportunities for growth and engagement of the Jewish people throughout the world," said Dr. Jehuda Reinharz. "Jews in the FSU and Russian Jews living in US and other countries will be a crucial part of our increasingly global Jewish community. Russian-speaking Jews have a great deal to share about their unique history and ties to our heritage. Learning from them and with them about our common bonds will enrich all of us."

Genesis also announced that Ken Krug, the Chief Operating Officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles who previously served as the CFO of The RAND Corporation, has joined its Audit Committee and will work closely with GPG's external auditors, BDO, to ensure that Genesis and its grantees continue to operate to the highest standards of corporate governance and transparency.

About Genesis Philanthropy Group

Genesis Philanthropy Group was established in the summer of 2007 by Mikhail Fridman, German Khan, Pyotr Aven, Alex Knaster, and Stan Polovets. The mission of the 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 and programming in institutions that are focused on ensuring that Jewish culture, heritage, and values are preserved in Russian speaking Jewish communities across the globe.

In the past 24 months, GPG has made over 40 grants, to organizations such as Taglit-Birthright Israel, Moscow State University, the Israel Defense Force's Education Department, Limmud, Maccabi, and the New York Jewish Museum. Its most significant multi-year grants include \$10.8 million to Brandeis University, \$6 million to the Jewish Agency for Israel, \$4.4 million to the Foundation for Jewish Camp, and \$4.4 million to the Yad Vashem Museum. For more information, visit <http://www.gpg.org>.

#13

Dmitry Medvedev has less than a week to track down U.S. dissidents

By Andy Heil

RFE/RL, September 16, 2009

The Kremlin fumed when U.S. President Barack Obama included a meeting with Russian opposition leaders on his Moscow itinerary back in July. At the time, Obama's administration was responding to criticism over its perceived abdication of the moral high ground by downplaying the role of human rights in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's critics could hardly accuse him of abandoning Kremlin commitments to human rights, since those commitments have been dubious at best. But he's gone on the offensive anyway.

Russia's de facto No. 2 plans to use a visit this month to the United States for a UN General Assembly and a G-20 summit to turn the tables, according to Itar-Tass:

"I think I should speak to dissidents. Let them tell me what problems the United States has," he told members of the Valdai international debate club on [September 15]. "That won't be bad, considering the Soviet experience."

With less than a week to go before the September 22-25 visit, Medvedev's planning team must be in overdrive.

So we'd like to do our part and suggest a few American dissidents who might fit the Kremlin's bill as the payback date approaches. (Note to Medvedev handlers: American regime-bashers come from both wings of the political spectrum, although they often sound indistinguishable.)

Noam Chomsky -- iconic linguist, lecturer, and voice of the left for decades

For: instant cache among the beard-stroking intellectual elite of any nation

Against: makes Marx look like a reactionary; kind of stingy with his Facebook friendships

Rush Limbaugh -- combative radio talk show host of the right

For: millions of fawning American listeners every day

Against: you can't get a word in edgewise

Michael Moore -- documentary filmmaker whose enormous success at Cannes earned him powerful enemies in the U.S.

For: revered in many circles

Against: reviled in nearly all the others

Kanye West -- rapper and record producer

For: influential with the young set; feuding with current U.S. president

Against: tends to go off-message

Sarah Palin -- former vice presidential candidate and Alaska governor

For: close neighbor of Russia's; got on great with Pakistan's president; sees America on the verge of slipping into terminal communism

Against: see McCain/Palin '08; sees America on the verge of slipping into terminal communism

Reverend Jeremiah Wright -- former pastor of the Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago who famously inveighed "God damn America!" from the pulpit

For: friends in high places

Against: out of step with said friends

Gus Hall -- American Communist Party leader who stuck with it through years of persecution and the Soviet collapse

For: though now dead, Hall, too, regarded Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin as "a wrecking crew"

Against: symbolic visits to monuments to dead Communists are no longer the preferred Russian photo op

Sean Penn -- Oscar-winning actor/director and political activist

For: lots of showbiz friends and a cozy relationship with the Huffington Post

Against: less disgruntled since January

Christopher Hitchens -- former flame-breathing Trotskyite turned neocon booster

For: dual nationality lends him trans-Atlantic heft

Against: hard to tell whose side he's on; interventionist bent and outspoken atheism could backfire on the Russian leader; he laid waste to Mother Teresa, for goodness sake

Eric Cartman -- vitriolic "South Park" fourth-grader

For: global recognition and an enemy of political correctness

Against: has variously advocated or committed tyranny, piracy, genocide, pedophilia, murder, misogyny, blackmail, hate crimes, rape, and terrorism

Medvedev's handlers might welcome more suggestions. Got any?

#14

U.S. Dramatically Alters Plans For European Missile Defense RFE/RL, September 17, 2009

U.S. President Barack Obama has announced that his administration is amending plans for a missile-defense system in Eastern Europe that had been a thorn in its relations with Moscow.

Speaking in Washington, Obama said he was giving up existing plans for radar and missile-interceptor bases in Poland and the Czech Republic based on a "unanimous recommendation" from his top military and defense advisers.

In its place, he said, the United States will move ahead with an alternate plan for protecting U.S. allies against threats from what he called Iran's "ongoing" ballistic-missile defense program.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev initially welcomed the decision, adding that he would discuss missile defense during his visit to the United States for a UN address and a G-20 summit, according to Reuters. He added that Moscow wanted to maintain dialogue with Washington.

"Our new missile-defense architecture in Europe will provide stronger, smarter, and swifter defenses of American forces and America's allies," Obama said.

"It is more comprehensive than the previous program. It deploys capabilities that are proven and cost-effective. And it sustains and builds upon our commitment to protect the U.S. homeland against long-range ballistic missile threats. And it ensures and enhances the protection of all our NATO allies."

Not 'Scrapping Missile Defense'

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, in a news conference following Obama's statement, gave details about the new plan, which he said was based on intelligence assessments that Iran's short- and medium-range missiles now pose a greater threat than intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In response to the new assessment, Gates said the U.S. would deploy ships with missile interceptors to defend European allies and U.S. forces against immediate threats.

Gates also said that land-based defense systems were still slated for Eastern Europe, although they would become operational as late as 2015.

"The second phase, about 2015, will involve fielding upgraded, land-based SM-3 [defensive missiles]," Gates said. "Consultations have begun with allies, starting with Poland and the Czech Republic, about hosting a land-based version of the SM-3 and other components of the system."

Gates added that "those who say we are scrapping missile defense in Europe are either misinformed or misrepresenting the reality of what we are doing."

'Beginning To Understand' Each Other?

Moscow had offered a tentative welcome to early-morning press reports the Obama administration was scrapping the original missile-defense plan. That plan, initiated by the administration of the previous U.S. president, George W. Bush, has been a major stumbling block in bilateral relations.

Moscow long dismissed U.S. arguments that the plan was aimed against Iran, saying the program compromised its own security. The Kremlin's reaction may have also been based on its resentment of Washington's growing influence in a region it sees as its sphere of influence.

Speaking ahead of Obama's announcement, Konstantin Kosachyov, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian State Duma, had welcomed the decision as it was characterized in Western media as a step in the right direction.

"The Bush administration didn't understand us at all, but as far as I can judge from today's decision, the Obama administration is beginning to understand us," Kosachyov said. "This is not yet the end. It is not complete harmony and absolute accord, but it is certainly a dialogue, and it is certainly an acceptance of Russia and its arguments as no less significant and serious than the [United States'] own national-security considerations."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, likewise speaking before Obama's announcement, expressed hope the U.S. decision would reflect Moscow's concerns about the missile-defense plan and take into consideration Russian proposals to work together to "neutralize and prevent the proliferation of missiles."

Anxious Allies

The Obama administration had signaled early on that it was reevaluating the value of the Bush missile-defense plans.

Many policy-watchers saw the contentious issue as leverage that Obama could use to gain support from Moscow on other, more critical issues, such as Iran's nuclear program.

Washington has long sought Moscow's cooperation in pressuring Iran to give up its uranium-enrichment work, which the U.S. and other countries believe is destined for nuclear weapons.

The decision appeared to come as a blow to officials in the Czech Republic, who saw the original missile-defense plan as a show of U.S. willingness to stand up to Moscow's ire.

Early in the day, the Czech acting prime minister, Jan Fischer, announced he had received a call from Obama announcing his intention to give up the Czech antimissile radar system.

Former Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, whose government signed the missile-defense deal, spoke regretfully about the decision in comments to reporters in Prague.

"I think this is bad news, first of all, because after 20 years of our moving toward Euro-Atlantic structures and after we settled, very actively within these structures, this process is slowing down," Topolánek said.

Regional Threats

News of the change had prompted speculation earlier in the day that any future antimissile system would be deployed further eastwards, or in mobile bases in Turkey or Israel.

Turkey is the only NATO country with a direct border to Iran. Last week, the Obama administration notified the U.S. Congress of a possible \$8 billion sale of patriot antimissile batteries to Turkey.

The Patriot, a mobile missile system, has proven accuracy in shooting down incoming or overflying missiles. The Pentagon said last week that the proposed sale would help deter regional threats -- a veiled apparent reference to Iran.

However, the Turkish media have quoted diplomatic sources as dismissing the notion that the Patriots would have any role in regional deterrence, but would simply be part of Turkey's own national defenses.