

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 9, 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. On behalf of the entire NCSJ leadership and staff, Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach.

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. October 9, 2009

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#1a

Ukraine's first lady honors righteous gentiles JTA, October 4, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine -- Ukraine's first lady attended a ceremony in Kiev to honor righteous gentiles who rescued Jews from the Nazis.

Kateryna Yuschenko, wife of Ukrainian President Viktor Yuschenko and chair of the Supervisory Board of the Ukraine 3000 International Charitable Foundation, joined Zina Kalay Kleitman, Israel's ambassador to Ukraine, in honoring and awarding the Righteous among the Nations in Galitzky synagogue in Kiev.

Rabbis and representatives of other religions, Jewish leaders and the mayor of Kiev took part Thursday in the award ceremony to honor representatives of 14 families, non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from extermination by the Nazis, rescuing Jews between 1941 and 1945. The representatives of the families received diplomas and medals from Kleitman.

"I am proud that you have recognized so many righteous in Ukraine. I am proud also that the State of Ukraine bestows an award on each and every individual you have recognized as righteous," Kateryna Yuschenko said to the participants.

"In a few days, it will be Shabbat for some of us, then for others of us it will be Sunday, our day of worship. I ask that during these holy days, we pray for a similar thing – that our peoples will no longer be put through trials such as war and hunger, not to mention the Holocaust and Holodomr," Kateryna Yuschenko added. According to Yad Vashem there are 22,765 Righteous among the Nations in the world, and 2,246 in Ukraine.

#1b

Sharansky: Jewish Agency will resume work in Odessa JTA, October 4, 2009

KIEV, Ukraine – The Jewish Agency will resume its work in Odessa, Natan Sharansky announced.

Sharansky, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, made the announcement Thursday during a visit to Odessa City Mayor Eduard Gurvits.

During a private visit to Odessa, Sharansky met with Gurvits and local Jewish leaders.

Sharansky visited Dnepropetrovsk and Kiev on Sept. 29-30, marking an expansion of the organization's activities in Ukraine aimed strengthening Jewish identity, particularly among teenagers and young people.

In Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk, the chairman met with local Jewish leaders.

Sharansky was an honored guest at a ceremony dedicating the new Matzeva Memorial to Holocaust victims in Dnepropetrovsk, where he said that his wife's family was murdered by the Nazis.

Sharansky was born in 1948 in the Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk. After years of persecution under the Soviet regime, he immigrated in 1986 to Israel. Ten years after arriving in Israel, Sharansky founded the immigrant political party Israel B'aliya. From 1996 to 2005 Sharansky served as a government minister, as well as deputy prime minister in all successive governments. In 2006 he resigned from the Knesset and assumed the position of chairman of the newly established Adelson Institute for Strategic Studies of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem.

The Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency voted on June 25, 2009, to elect Sharansky as its chairman of the executive board.

#1c

Russian Trade Unions Start Five Days Of Protests October 5, 2009, RFE/RL

MOSCOW -- The Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions has begun a five-day mass protest today called "For Worthy Labor!" in several cities across the country, RFE/RL's Russian Service reports.

The action -- which attracted thousands of protesters -- is being used to challenge mass layoffs, overdue salary payments, and worsening living conditions for workers in Russia.

The federation's leaders said on October 5 that the nationwide protests will include marches, pickets, and mass gatherings in various cities and towns.

Unemployment in Russia reached a five-year high of 9.5 percent earlier this year, but has improved in recent months.

Russia's leading automaker, AvtoVAZ, announced last week that it will cut some 28,000 jobs in the coming months, and national airliner Aeroflot announced the laying off of some 2,200 workers.

#1d

Lebanese pair sentenced for embassy plot JTA, October 5, 2009

Two Lebanese men were sentenced to 15 years in prison for plotting to attack the Israeli and U.S. embassies in Baku.

An Azerbaijani court found the pair guilty and handed out the sentences Monday, the French news agency AFP reported.

Four Azerbaijani citizens also were found guilty in the planned attacks. The group was linked to Hezbollah, al-Qaida and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, AFP reported, citing a court spokesman.

Local security forces foiled the attack, which the Los Angeles Times said was in response to the assassination of Hezbollah security chief Imad Mughniyeh. Hezbollah blames Mughniyeh's killing on Israel.

#1e

Ukraine lauded for nixing hotel near Babi Yar JTA, October 6, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Two U.S. lawmakers hailed Ukraine for halting the construction of a hotel near the site of a Nazi massacre.

Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.) and Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) co-chair the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, an agency charged with monitoring and encouraging compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other commitments.

"The city authorities of Kiev deserve credit for their rapid response to concerns from human rights and Jewish groups on this issue," Cardin, who last visited the memorial park in 2007, said last week. "I applaud their swift action to overturn the city council's insensitive decision and respect the memory of the victims at Babi Yar."

The hotel was to be built close to the site of Babi Yar, a ravine near Kiev, where more than 33,000 people were murdered over a two-day period from Sept. 29, 1941. Half were children.

Cardin also commended Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko for his pledge "to protect as a sacred spot the site of the Nazi massacre."

Between September 1941 and 1943, some 150,000 people were executed by Nazi troops in wooded areas on the outskirts of Kiev. Most were Jews, but the total also included ethnic Ukrainians, Russians, Poles and Roma, or gypsies.

#1f

Genesis Group announces \$1.2 million in grants By Jacob Berkman JTA, October 7, 2009

The Genesis Philanthropy Group has announced \$1.2 million in new grants in the former Soviet Union, Israel and North America.

Grant were made to a number of organizations, including Hillel in the former Soviet Union, the UJA Federation of New York, the Claims Conference's Lo Tishkach initiative, and Chabad in Moscow. In Israel, grants went to TV Beit Midrash to enhance Jewish education for Russian speakers and Mohut, which opens dialogue between Russian speaking Israeli soldiers and those still in the FSU.

And in the U.S., grants went to the Jewish Federation of Toronto, Ezra USA and to JTA to expand coverage in the FSU.

"It's a great honor for us to partner with such outstanding organizations as Hillel, Toronto and New York Federations, Conference of European Rabbis, and the JTA," said Stan Polovets, CEO and one of the five founders of Genesis. "With all the challenges currently facing the world of Jewish non-profits, we feel fortunate to be in a position to support the excellent programs of these established institutions, as well as fund innovative projects developed by new entrants to the field of Jewish identity."

#1g

Lively Sukkot in Donetsk Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, October 7, 2009

DONETSK, Ukraine – In the east Ukrainian city of Donetsk, the first two days of Sukkot were celebrated in the prayer hall of the synagogue. A large crowd of people attended festive prayers and the reading of the Torah, after which they went out into the sukkah.

Of course, given that a sukkah is not a permanent structure, it doesn't offer much protection from the rain. Nevertheless, despite a heavy downpour, many people participated in the Kiddush and meals in the big sukkah built near the Donetsk synagogue. The sukkah accommodated many more than a hundred people.

Throughout the intermediate days of the festival, the Jewish Community of Donetsk often offers a lively cultural program. For the community's youngest members, the fun began with a children's concert and then continued with a gathering in the sukkah. Children and parents had a great time, fulfilling the commandments of the holiday and receiving gifts from the community. Other festive events will also take place throughout the Sukkot holiday.

All of the children attending the Jewish kindergarten have also visited the sukkah, set up near their building. There, they listened to a talk by Chief Rabbi of Donetsk Pinchas Vyshedsky, who is also a Chabad-Lubavitch emissary serving in the region. The youngsters performed the commandments of the holiday, including reciting the blessing over the lulav, etrog, willow and myrtle, eating treats in the sukkah, singing songs, and playing games. The joy was palpable as it should be as Sukkot is the most joyous among Jewish holidays!

The Jewish community of Donetsk is a thriving member of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine.

#1h
EU May Grant \$150 Million To Crisis-Hit Moldova
RFE/RL, October 8, 2009

CHISINAU -- An EU envoy says the European Commission could give Moldova at least 100 million euros (\$147 million) to help it cover its growing budget deficit, RFE/RL's Moldovan Service reports.

The announcement was made on October 7 in Chisinau by Wolfgang Behrendt, a member of the EU delegation in Moldova.

Behrendt said the EU will discuss Moldova's needs with an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission that is expected to start negotiations for a loan agreement in Chisinau next week.

Moldovan officials have said the country's budget deficit could hit 12 percent of GDP this year, mainly because of the economic downturn in Moldova's main export markets and a fall in remittances sent home by Moldovans working abroad.

Aside from the EU and IMF, the World Bank, and Russia have offered to help Moldova overcome its financial crisis.

#1i
Ukrainian President Honors Sevastopol Hillel Director
Hillel.org, October 8, 2009

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushenko recently awarded Sevastopol Hillel Director Natella Abeleva the title of Honored Artist of Ukraine for "significant contribution to the advance of culture, high professionalism, and active participation in organizing the Art Festival of Ukraine." Before joining Hillel, she ran cultural and educational programs at Sevastopol Hillel while continuing to play leading roles in the local theater.

#1j
Ukraine Appoints Yushchenko Ally As Foreign Minister
Reuters, October 9, 2009

KYIV -- Ukraine's parliament has approved Petro Poroshenko, an ally of President Viktor Yushchenko and a senior central bank official, as foreign minister.

The ex-Soviet country has been without a foreign minister since March when parliament sacked Volodymyr Ohryzko after a row with Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko.

The position of foreign minister is one of two cabinet posts proposed directly by the president.

Improvement of poor relations with former Soviet master Russia remains a foreign policy priority.

Yushchenko and Tymoshenko are embroiled in a power struggle ahead of a January 17 presidential election in which both are expected to run.

#2

W.T.O. Chief Sees Russian Interest in Joining Waning

By Matthew Saltmarsh

New York Times, October 3, 2009

PARIS — Russia's appetite for joining the World Trade Organization appears to have evaporated, even though the trade group has been proving its mettle in discouraging protectionist reactions during the recent financial upheaval, the head of the W.T.O. said Friday.

Russia, the most important country outside the W.T.O., has been pursuing membership for 16 years. In 2004, the country signed a trade deal with the European Union to pave the way for its admission to the global trade body.

Today, Russia seems to be less interested, Pascal Lamy, who last month started his second term as director general of the W.T.O., said during an interview.

He pointed to the announcement in June by the Russian prime minister, Vladimir V. Putin, that Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus would pursue W.T.O. membership jointly as a customs union — something for which there is no precedent under W.T.O. rules.

"It will make the application of Russia much more complex, it will run even longer," Mr. Lamy said.

"The fundamental reality is that there is no energy in Moscow to join" any more, said Mr. Lamy, who five years ago, as the European trade commissioner, negotiated the deal with Moscow.

The reasons for the waning enthusiasm, analysts say, are tied to domestic politics, the composition of Russia's energy-heavy exports and a suspicion of the motives of the West. Joining the group that sets rules for globalization had been a major foreign policy goal of Mr. Putin, so his pivot this summer — to say that Russia would join only in a customs union — baffled trade negotiators.

In Moscow, however, the change in stance was seen as reflecting a fault line in the government over economic policy.

Aides to President Dmitri A. Medvedev had been pushing W.T.O. membership as a tool to help diversify the economy away from oil exports. Supporters of Mr. Putin have argued instead for an emphasis on increasing earnings from oil and raw materials exports.

By last month, the apparent rift had grown so wide that Mr. Medvedev felt compelled to contest the characterization of the W.T.O. membership debate as signifying a public split with the powerful Mr. Putin. "In the W.T.O., they started to say that the president has one point of view, the prime minister another on this question," Mr. Medvedev said, according to the news agency Interfax. "That's a mistake. The decision on how we will join has been taken."

Joining through the customs union will probably mean a long delay for Russia's accession. The attitudes of Russia and China toward the W.T.O. have been "like night and day," Mr. Lamy said.

That might largely be explained by China's much greater dependence on exports of manufactured goods. Beijing joined the W.T.O. in 2001 "as an insurance against protectionism, to enhance domestic development," Mr. Lamy said.

That insurance policy seems to have paid off — so far — during the global slowdown, he said.

"For many, the importance of discipline is even higher today than it was before the shocks," he added.

But the "real stress test for the W.T.O." is likely to come in the next year or two as unemployment is expected to rise in developed countries, even as economies recover, putting the global trading system under additional pressure.

Mr. Lamy said he believed that additional stress meant that progress on the next round of removing trade barriers, known as the Doha round, was even more imperative, to provide more "predictability" to the system.

Those talks were kicked off in Doha, Qatar, in 2001 and have progressed bumpily. They have been marked by a newfound assertiveness on the part of a group of developing countries in the face of the established Western economic powers.

The financial crisis has "hugely increased the importance of these W.T.O. negotiations for developing countries, which depend much more than developed countries on trade," Mr. Lamy said. "They don't have access to huge public funds to bail out their industry, so for them, trade is the only way out."

During its meeting last month in Pittsburgh, the Group of 20 countries called for a Doha deal to be completed by the end of 2010. Whether that is realistic will depend on three weeks of intensive negotiations from now through December in Geneva, Mr. Lamy said.

"We've done 80 percent of the negotiation," he said, stressing that the remaining 20 percent would be problematic because it came down to all members agreeing on everything. "Everyone still has to make gestures," he said.

While clearly frustrated with the complexities of the U.S. political system, which gives Congress a large role in setting trade policy, he was reluctant to criticize the new administration of President Barack Obama, saying its trade agenda was still "unclear."

The main matters to be resolved, Mr. Lamy said, include the well-aired issue of safeguards for possible surges of agricultural imports for developing countries. While a basic political agreement on this appears to be in place, the technical parameters of what constitutes a "damaging surge in imports" are still on the table.

"India is now in the game of a final deal," he said, noting that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had removed his previous trade minister, Kamal Nath, who was seen by some analysts as an obstruction to a deal, and replaced him with Anand Sharma. "We now need to see whether they will come to the table in the coming weeks and months and are willing to compromise," he said of New Delhi.

This debate has been portrayed by some as a U.S.-India duel, but Mr. Lamy said it was more complex. For example, the United States is supported by agricultural exporters like Brazil, Argentina and Thailand, while India is backed by the Philippines and some African countries.

Within the United States, a crucial issue will be how far the American Farm Bureau, a lobby group, is able to persuade Congress to move and the timing of such an approach. "Are they playing a game for a better deal or do they really have constraints?" Mr. Lamy said. "It's not clear to us."

More broadly, he said, the Obama administration has “quite a loaded agenda with Congress, including health care, the environment and financial regulation.”

“Trade is not top of that list in terms of Congressional politics,” Mr. Lamy said, noting that only two of five members of the administration’s trade negotiating team had been approved by the Senate.

To get Congress to ratify trade legislation, “the administration needs a package that is broad enough to balance concessions in some areas with gains in others,” Mr. Lamy said. That, he said, will probably require some concessions to Washington from India, Brazil, China and others.

Another major stumbling block is cotton where, because of the crop’s importance in Africa, many developing countries want subsidies lowered faster and further than with other products. But U.S. negotiators appear reluctant to present concessions to Congress too early for fear of a backlash by lawmakers from cotton-growing states.

The final impediment appears to be industrial tariffs and whether cuts would be above or below draft formulas for certain sectors.

Mr. Lamy said a deal on services was likely to come only at the last minute because of the complexity of negotiating sectoral accords that did not involve direct tariffs.

#3

Russian Anti-Americanism

By Vladimir Shlapentokh

New York Times, October 5, 2009

Xenophobia exists in all societies, past and present. It goes back to the socio-biological nature of human beings and the distinction of “ours” and “others” in the human psyche.

Aggressive xenophobia, however, with its open declaration of hatred, discrimination against and physical persecution of “others,” is a purely social phenomenon. It is almost always, in my opinion, a product of policies shaped by a ruling elite in order to acquire and preserve political and economic power.

The case of anti-Americanism in contemporary Russia is a perfect illustration.

It is generally believed in Russia today, as well as in the rest of the world, that anti-Americanism stems from deep-seated feelings held by the average citizen.

This view of anti-Americanism as originating from below, as embedded in the psychology of the masses, is consistent with the opinions of many Russian political scientists, sociologists, journalists and politicians, who spread the notion that most Russians dislike and object to democracy. Some see this as a consequence of a thousand years of Russian authoritarianism; others attribute it to the heritage of Soviet communism.

In my opinion, both schools of thought strongly exaggerate the impact of authoritarian tradition on the Russian people. While traditions may contribute to the character of a society, I believe the crucial role in shaping Russian public opinion belongs to the current regime.

Available data does not support a “visceral hatred of America” of the sort portrayed by many journalists and politicians in Russia. Anti-Americanism in Russia comes from above. It is the elite, through its ability to control and manipulate the media, education and literature, which has the power to either foster or stifle xenophobia.

There is no question that Russians have xenophobic tendencies, fed over the centuries by the czars and the Russian Orthodox Church. In the first decade after the Russian Revolution, the new elite chose ethnic tolerance as their strategy, and generally succeeded in implementing it. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Stalin

called upon the Russians to combine “Russian revolutionary elan with an American business-like approach to everything.”

But in the early 1930s, Stalin replaced ethnic tolerance — which the Bolsheviks called termed “internationalism” — with an ideology of Russian chauvinism and anti-Semitism.

This new turn in the Kremlin’s ethnic policy was again supported by the masses. As a student at Kiev University in the late 1940s, I watched with great sadness as the plague of anti-Semitism spread throughout society. My friends, both Russian and Jewish, who strongly believed in Lenin’s “internationalism” as an unshakable revolutionary dogma, were similarly amazed and horrified.

After World War II, the United States became a major target of Soviet propaganda, and that lasted until the end of the Soviet system. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Russian sociologist Boris Grushin found that the average Soviet citizen had a very negative image of America.

With Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika, the Kremlin’s ethnic policy shifted once more to ethnic tolerance. The change was remarkable — the image of America in Russian public opinion changed radically and quickly for the better.

When I returned to Russia as a visiting American scholar in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I saw — this time with joy — how anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism was fading away.

Now, under Vladimir Putin, xenophobia has been restored as a leading element of the official ideology. This is evident by the conformist anti-American bias expressed by all members of the government, as well as most deputies in Parliament and most of the journalists, political analysts, writers and cultural figures loyal to the regime.

The animosity toward the United States is fomented by Russia’s leaders primarily for domestic consumption — to sustain and cultivate the image of Russia as a besieged fortress and of Putin as the savior of the country.

Russia’s cultivation of hatred for its neighbors Ukraine and Georgia, as well as for Poland and the Baltic republics, is a part of the same strategy, in which ideology clearly takes precedence over the actual geopolitics.

The roots of anti-Americanism in Russia do not go very deep. Most ordinary Russians are rather receptive to Americans, their lifestyle and their political and economic system. These positive feelings would be quickly revealed if the Kremlin changed its policy toward the United States.

Vladimir Shlapentokh is a professor of sociology at Michigan State University.

#4

Russian FM: Iran enrichment deal needs finalizing AP, October 5, 2009

MOSCOW – Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Monday that an agreement reached between Tehran and six world powers last week for Russia to help enrich uranium for an Iranian reactor has yet to be finalized.

Lavrov said that experts would have to work out specifics of the deal involving the United States, France, Russia and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran insists its nuclear program is purely peaceful, and needs the fuel to power a research reactor in Tehran.

"A meeting of experts will be held in the near future in order to implement that plan," Lavrov said after a meeting with his Austrian counterpart.

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei has said experts will meet in Vienna on Oct. 19 to discuss the deal for Russia to take some of Iran's processed uranium and enrich it. He said Iran would take part.

The uranium-enrichment arrangement discussed at Thursday's talks between Iran and the six powers – the U.S., Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany – has increased hopes for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear standoff.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has said Moscow could support tougher U.N. sanctions against Iran if diplomatic efforts to halt its domestic enrichment program fail.

Thursday's talks in Geneva included the highest-level bilateral contact between U.S. and Iranian officials, and Tehran also agreed to allow U.N. inspectors into its covertly built enrichment plant during the talks.

#5

Does Russia Get It?

By Fred Hiatt

Washington Post, October 4, 2009

"I think Russia has begun to see many more indications that Iran is engaging in threatening behavior. Certainly these last incidents seem to confirm that. And, finally, the Russians were very supportive of our sanctions against North Korea. President Medvedev said in this room that sanctions may not be preferable, but they may be inevitable."

--Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Sept. 27, 2009

"I don't have any doubts about Russian concern about the Iranian behavior at this point. I have no doubts about their concerns about it and their desire to do something about it."

--Then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Nov. 9, 2007

"The president will stress our strong conviction that any nuclear cooperation with Iran poses very serious risks for Russia, poses most serious risks for undermining the Middle East peace process, interferes with our aim to stop nuclear proliferation, and the point we'll be making most firmly, it's in Russia's own interest to cease this nuclear cooperation with Iran."

--Then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher, May 4, 1995

"There are many voices in Russia who want to shift the emphasis in Russia's interaction with America and our allies from one of partnership to one of assertiveness, opposition and defiance for its own sake.

If that happens, it would be a double disaster for Russia. . . . After all, Russia needs an effective non-proliferation regime -- and it does need to see that nations like Iran do not acquire nuclear weapons or missiles that can hit its territory."

--Then-Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Oct. 2, 1998

"I think the threat assessment on the Russian side is not that dissimilar from ours. And indeed, many of our Russian interlocutors have said 'We have absolutely no interest in an Iran, for example, that has a ballistic missile capability associated with a nuclear capability that would pose a direct threat to us.' "

--Then-Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs John R. Bolton, March 29, 2002

If you heard Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggest last Sunday that the Russians are beginning to come around to the U.S. way of thinking on Iran, it may have sounded familiar.

For more than a decade, U.S. officials have been patiently explaining to the Russians that their interests are the same as ours in preventing Iran from building nuclear weapons. For just as long, U.S. officials have been telling themselves that the Russians are starting to get it.

Maybe this time it will turn out to be true. The U.S. logic is, as always, irrefutable: Russia's standing as a nuclear power is diluted every time another country goes nuclear. Iran is particularly, uncomfortably, close. And given Russia's restive Muslim population in the Caucasus region, closer to Iran than to Moscow, Russia's leaders should be especially leery of a revolutionary Islamic regime getting the bomb.

So far, however, the actions of Russia's leaders have suggested that they don't see things exactly as Americans believe they should. They consistently have dangled the possibility of cooperation with the United States while simultaneously undermining alliance unity and maintaining their connections to the Iranian regime. So it might be worth entertaining other theories about Moscow's logic.

It might be, for example, that Russia understands the value of keeping Iran nuclear-free, but values even more the fruits of its commercial and military trade with Iran.

It might be that Russia believes that the stalemate status quo is pretty close to ideal. Iran can be delayed in its progress toward nuclear status but also prevented from normalizing relations with the United States and the West. And as long as those relations are sour -- and the West won't buy Iran's natural gas -- Russia's leverage over Europe, as Europe's main gas supplier, is enhanced.

Perhaps Russian leaders are not united on the question. In the early 1990s, Clinton administration officials persuaded themselves that President Boris Yeltsin accepted their Iran logic but that he wasn't strong enough to control his nuclear-industrial complex, which wanted trade with Iran. Today the theory is different: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev may see the light but is stymied by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Or maybe the Russians accept the logic -- but don't believe Iran can be dissuaded. In that case, their smartest policy would be to hold out hope to the Obama administration that they can be brought along -- thereby continuing to win U.S. concessions on missile defense, arms control and other matters for as long as possible - - while seeking a privileged position in Tehran for the day when Iran goes nuclear.

Their smartest policy, in other words, would look very much like the one we're seeing today.

#6

Pernicious Intent of 'Prague Declaration': "A Project to Delete the Holocaust from European History" Simon Wiesenthal Centre, October 5, 2009

WARSAW -- In a Statement to the 56 member state Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Chief Delegate and Director for International Relations, Dr Shimon Samuels, exposed a new form of antisemitism emanating from East-Central Europe.

Known as the 'Prague Declaration', Samuels Sounded the Alarm on "a Project to Delete the Holocaust from European History":

"Mr. Moderator,

A new and insidious combination of antisemitism and Holocaust distortion has been disseminated from the eastern area of the OSCE, and in particular the Baltics.

Local Jews are branded as the purveyors of Soviet communism (even when these countries' tiny remnant survivor communities are near demographic extinction).

The Wiesenthal Centre shares its concern with the OSCE by exposing a well-coordinated effort to 'rewrite history' to persuade Western Europe to join in jettisoning the historic concept of the Holocaust and to replace it with a model of 'two equal genocides (Nazi and Soviet)'. The goal of this sophisticated, new incarnation of extreme forms of local ultranationalism, antisemitism and racism, is to whitewash the massive Baltic nations' participation in the murder of their Jewish populations (the rate of Holocaust murder in the Baltics was the highest in Europe).

State-sponsored Commissions (known informally as 'red-brown committees') seek to 'equalize' Nazi and Soviet crimes in addressing Western Europe, while at home, in each of these countries' museums, a different tale is told: a bogus account of overwhelming Jewish complicity in Soviet rule, the glossing over of local participation in the killings, and increasingly efforts to tarnish Holocaust victims, survivors and resistance fighters with antisemitic stereotypes of 'Jewish Bolshevik conspiracies'. The state-sponsored 'Genocide Museum' in central Vilnius, for example, has almost deleted the Holocaust while permanently exhibiting antisemitic materials. The State Museum of the [Soviet] Occupation in Riga iconizes the Latvian battalion of Nazi volunteer auxiliaries responsible for mass murder of their Jewish neighbours.

In Lithuania, this campaign is even more revisionist. After persuading Holocaust survivor, resistance fighter and scholar Yitzhak Arad (founding director of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem), to join its commission, an antisemitic newspaper article in April 2006 accused him as a war criminal on the basis of misrepresented passages from his own memoir (published in English decades earlier, in 1979). Two months later, prosecutors, in the service of the state, initiated a 'pre-trial investigation'. In 2008, the 'new investigation' (which has still not included a single charge or subpoena) was expanded to include two women veterans of the anti-Nazi partisans, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky and Rachel Margolis, both now 87. To this day, neither of these investigations has been dropped, and Holocaust survivors remain 'under investigation'. This is most disturbing, all the more so when Lithuania, and the Baltic generally, have the worst record for prosecuting Nazi war criminals since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

It is against this background of history-distorting and victim-blaming, that blatant antisemitic and neo-nazi activity is taking place, while Baltic governments have begun to mislead the European Union and Parliament with resolutions that are ostensibly anti-Communist, but invariably contain language and proposed laws whose real purpose is to erase the Holocaust from history, by introducing a new model of equal genocides, and, alarmingly, as the Economist (http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11958563) has put it, to 'blame the victims'.

On 3 June 2008, the Prague Declaration (<http://praguedeclaration.org>) was proclaimed. It would propose, inter alia, legislation in the European Parliament that would compel European Union countries to 'overhaul [...] European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess Nazi crimes'. It would also insist that Soviet misdeeds be judged 'in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal'.

Most European leaders and media have failed to appreciate the ulterior agenda of the Prague Declaration and the movement behind it, which promotes 'equality of all evils'. Using this instrument, its protagonists have been gathering support, in the European Parliament, through related resolutions being introduced without proper discussion or exposure of their underlying motives. One such effort (April 2009) voted for a new European day of commemoration of Nazi and Soviet crimes equally, the real purpose of which is to supplant Holocaust Memorial Day in Europe.

It is indeed true that Europe and the world at large still do not appreciate the degree of suffering of the East European nations at the hands of Communism, both before the war and in the Soviet near-half-century of occupation after its conclusion. This serious issue needs to be addressed by separate exposure, study and commemoration of Soviet crimes and their victims.

Given the antisemitic, racist and Holocaust distortionist motives and practice associated with the Prague Declaration and related resolutions and proposals, this matter should be of urgent concern to the States

Parties of the OSCE. Thus, the Wiesenthal Centre hereby urges ODIHR to note and condemn the pernicious intent of this campaign."

Samuels acknowledged the role of Professor Dovid Katz, founder of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute, as the principal protagonist in containing "the two equal genocides" campaign, which he has termed "Holocaust obfuscation".

#7

Kremlin Advisers Warn Nashi Youth By Alexandra Odynova Moscow Times, October 6, 2009

Nashi members picketing outside the home of journalist and human rights activist Alexander Podrabinek are violating at least five articles of the Constitution and inciting hatred, the Kremlin's human rights council said Monday.

The watchdog, led by Ella Pamfilova, called the protests "a persecution campaign ... organized by irresponsible adventurists from Nashi" and said the activists were showing open signs of extremism.

The pro-Kremlin youth group enlisted about 100 veterans to continue their protest Monday, which began Sept. 29 after Podrabinek published an article criticizing the Moscow Union of Veterans.

Podrabinek suggested that the veterans group's members were former "camp guards" and "executioners" for demanding that a Moscow restaurant change its name from Antisovetskaya, or Anti-Soviet, to Sovetskaya. The restaurant's owner said he was forced to change the name under pressure from Oleg Mitvol, prefect for the Northern Administrative District. The veterans group had complained to Mitvol.

The Kremlin's human rights council said Nashi was in violation of Articles 23, 24, 25, 27 and 29 of the Constitution. Among other things, the articles guarantee: the inviolability of personal life and home; that a citizen's personal information will not be spread without his consent; the right to choose one's residence; and the rights to freedom of thought and conscience, including a freedom from pressure to retract or alter one's beliefs.

Those who disagree with Podrabinek should answer his article in kind, and if they feel that his criticism infringed on anyone's rights or broke the law they should turn to the courts, the council said in a statement.

"The council expresses its deep regret and disturbance over Nashi's actions, which not only recall the shameful Soviet persecution campaigns against dissenters. ... They also give Russia's young people an unabashed example of legal nihilism," it said, using President Dmitry Medvedev's term for widespread disregard for the law.

It also called on the authorities to investigate Nashi's actions for extremism and to protect Podrabinek.

Podrabinek went into hiding, writing on his blog Sept. 28 that he had received "information from credible sources that a decision has been made at quite a high level to dispose of me in any possible way." The harassment campaign has drawn international attention, including from French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, who said he raised the issue during a visit to Moscow on Thursday.

Podrabinek, a human rights activist since the 1970s and head of the Prima-News news agency, also works for publications such as the Russian-language service of Radio France International and Novaya Gazeta.

Nashi, which has maintained close ties to founder Vasily Yakemenko, now head of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, has been known to hound opponents in the past, including opposition politicians and foreign dignitaries.

Nashi leader Nikita Borovikov defended the picket as part of an attempt to hold journalists and human rights activists responsible for their perceived misdeeds in the media.

“Respect for old age and the trials these people went through are natural for any decent person, and when he loses it, he ceases to be a person. The Nashi movement is a patriotic organization and one of its tasks ... is to defend the honor and dignity of veterans,” Borovikov said in a statement on the group’s web site. “We won’t let Podrabinek continue posing as a victim.”

The group’s statement also included an Associated Press photo showing Nashi activists videotaping the delivery of a letter from the veterans in Podrabinek’s mailbox, which appeared to be open. The activists will continue to place the letter in his mailbox every day, the statement said.

At Monday’s rally, activists dressed in trademark red jackets and veterans rallied with posters carrying World War II symbols and posters saying, “The freedom of the press doesn’t mean lawlessness in journalism.”

Municipal authorities have authorized the ongoing rally.

Tatyana Lokshina, a researcher with Human Rights Watch, said she couldn’t recall any other case where Nashi had campaigned against a journalist. “Hopefully, the [Kremlin] watchdog’s appeal will draw more attention to the problem in the government,” Lokshina said.

#8

Ukraine-Russia Tensions Evident in Crimea Kremlin Asserting Its Influence in Region

By Philip P. Pan

Washington Post, October 6, 2009

SEVASTOPOL, Ukraine -- On maps, Crimea is Ukrainian territory, and this naval citadel on its southern coast is a Ukrainian city. But when court bailiffs tried to serve papers at a lighthouse here in August, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by armed troops from Russia's Black Sea Fleet who delivered them to police as if they were trespassing teenagers.

The humiliating episode underscored Russia's continuing influence in the storied peninsula on the Black Sea nearly two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union -- and the potential for trouble here ahead of Ukraine's first presidential vote since the 2005 Orange Revolution.

Huge crowds of protesters defied Moscow in that peaceful uprising and swept a pro-Western government into power. Now, the Kremlin is working to undo that defeat, ratcheting up pressure on this former Soviet republic to elect a leader more amenable to Russia's interests in January.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev issued a letter in August demanding policy reversals from a new Ukrainian government, including an end to its bid to join NATO. He also introduced a bill authorizing the use of troops to protect Russian citizens and Russian speakers abroad, a measure that some interpreted as targeting Crimea.

A group of prominent Ukrainians, including the country's first president, responded with a letter urging President Obama to prevent a "possible military intervention" by Russia that would "bring back the division of Europe." Ukraine gave up the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the Soviet Union in exchange for security guarantees from the United States and other world powers, they noted.

If a crisis is ahead, it is likely to involve Crimea, a peninsula of rolling steppe and sandy beaches about the size of Maryland. The region was once part of Russia, and it is the only place in Ukraine where ethnic Russians are the majority. In the mid-1990s, it elected a secessionist leader who nearly sparked a civil war.

Crimea is also home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which is based in Sevastopol under a deal with Ukraine that expires in 2017. Russia wants to extend the lease, but Ukraine's current government insists it must go.

"It would be easy for Russia to inspire a crisis or conflict in Crimea if it continues to lose influence in Ukraine," said Grigory Perepelitsa, director of the Foreign Policy Institute in the Ukrainian Diplomatic Academy. "That's the message they're sending to any future president."

Russia's state-controlled media, widely available and popular in Crimea, have hammered the authorities in Kiev as irredeemably anti-Russian, and prominent Russian politicians have been calling for reunification with Crimea.

But five years of policies in Kiev aimed at drawing Ukraine closer to Europe and the United States and at promoting Ukrainian language and history have also alienated the region. Ukraine's president, Viktor Yushchenko, the hero of the Orange Revolution, won only 6 percent of the vote here.

"He tried to force his ideology on us, and he failed," said Valeriy Saratov, chairman of the Sevastopol city council. "We don't feel we were conquered by Russia, but by Europe. We fought the Italians, the Germans, the French, the British. . . . We would never take sides against Russia."

Vladimir Struchkov, a pro-Russia activist and leader of a parents' organization in Sevastopol, said residents are especially upset about a new regulation requiring students to take college entrance exams in Ukrainian, eliminating a Russian option.

While Kiev is playing identity politics, he argued, Moscow has been investing in Sevastopol, building schools, apartments and pools, repairing monuments and even opening a branch of Moscow State University.

The result has been a sharp shift in Crimean attitudes. In 2006, about 74 percent of Crimean residents regarded Ukraine as their motherland, but by last year, that figure had fallen to 40 percent, according to a survey by the Razumkov Center, a top research institute in Kiev.

Crimea became part of the Russian empire in 1783 after a long period of rule by Crimean Tatars, an indigenous Turkic people. During World War II, Germany captured the peninsula. After the war, the Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin accused the Tatars of Nazi collaboration and ordered their mass deportation. The Communists then sought to resettle the peninsula with politically reliable families, mostly Russians with ties to the military or the party apparatus.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, these people suddenly found themselves living in Ukraine instead of Russia, because Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had transferred Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 in a move that had little impact at the time.

Today, about 60 percent of the region's 2.3 million residents are Russian and 25 percent are Ukrainian. But the two ethnic groups are thoroughly intertwined. Opinion polls show majorities of both want the Black Sea Fleet to stay and support reunification with Russia, though there is similar support for greater autonomy for Crimea within Ukraine.

Crimean Tatars, who were allowed to return in the 1980s, make up about 10 percent of the population and are largely opposed to a return to Russian rule.

Refat Chubarov, a leader of the main Crimean Tatar political organization, said Russian media have vilified his people as criminals, playing on fears of Islam and their efforts to reclaim lost homes. But even among the Tatars, frustration with Kiev is rising.

"We are the strongest supporters of Ukrainian sovereignty in Crimea," Chubarov said. "But the disappointment is growing because the authorities have not done enough to provide land and other compensation to returning families."

Volodymyr Pritula, a veteran journalist and political analyst in Crimea, said the Kremlin has been trying to provoke ethnic conflict in the region, both to undermine the Ukrainian government and provide an excuse for intervention.

Three years ago, Vladimir Putin, then Russia's president, offered to help resolve tensions in Crimea after a clash between Russians and Tatars and suggested that the Russian fleet should stay to "guarantee stability," Pritula noted.

In recent months, he added, the Kremlin has stepped up its activities, with Russian nationalist groups staging protests on Ukrainian holidays and media outlets resuming the attacks on Tatars after a pause last year.

Emotions have been running high since Russia's war last year with another pro-Western neighbor, Georgia. The Black Sea Fleet participated in the conflict, and Ukrainian officials infuriated Russia by suggesting its ships might not be allowed to return to Sevastopol.

Tensions flared again this summer when Ukrainian police stopped Russian trucks three times for transporting missiles in Sevastopol without advance notice. Then came the episode with the bailiffs at Kherson Lighthouse, one of dozens of navigational markers along the Crimean coast that both Ukraine and the Russian fleet claim to own.

Judges have tried to order the fleet to hand over various facilities before, with the Russians routinely refusing and bailiffs departing without incident. But this time, the fleet accused Ukraine of "penetrating the territory of a Russian military unit" and warned of "possible tragic consequences to such actions."

Vladimir Kazarin, the city's deputy mayor, said the bailiffs stepped past a gate because no sentries were posted but quickly found the commanding officer, who asked them to wait while he sought instructions. Five minutes later, he returned with the soldiers who detained the bailiffs.

"Relations with the fleet have generally been good," Kazarin said. "But this just shows that people in Moscow are trying to find any excuse for conflict."

#9

After Russia-Georgia Report, A Sense Of 'What Now?'

By David Kakabadze, Marina Vashakmadze

RFE/RL, October 6, 2009

The release last week of an EU report on the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war is continuing to draw cheers and rebukes respectively from many corners.

The report, drafted by an investigative team led by Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, blamed Georgia for initiating the five-day war but suggested that both Moscow and Tbilisi shared responsibility for bringing the long-simmering conflict to the boiling point.

Among the report's critics is Lithuanian Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas, who said the anger over the war is still too fresh for the EU to attempt to apportion blame.

"The wounds of the conflict and the war a year ago are still very much alive," Usackas said during a two-day trip to Tbilisi. "And I think what's happening now is that we're putting salt on those wounds, which I don't think is helpful, having in mind that we're now in a situation where we have to deal with post-conflict resolution."

Both the Russians and the Georgians have attempted to claim victory in the report's myriad findings.

But the first media headlines following the document's presentation on September 30 saw a tactical defeat for Tbilisi in the EU's conclusion that Georgia officially started the war by firing the first shot -- shelling the breakaway region of South Ossetia on the night of August 7.

The BBC and others led with headlines citing the report's statement that Georgia had started an "unjustified war."

Russian officials quickly stated the report delivered an "unequivocal answer" on who was to blame. Russia's NATO ambassador, Dmitry Rogozin, went so far as to suggest the West owed the Kremlin an apology for its condemnation of Russia's actions during the war.

Moscow Not Spared

Ron Asmus, the head of the German Marshall Fund in Brussels, said the report, in its entirety, is really more nuanced.

"This report is written in a way that different parties will emphasize different parts of it which they think confirm their position," Asmus said. "If I was sitting in the Kremlin, though, I wouldn't want people to read the report too closely, because the more I re-read it, the more there is criticism of various aspects of Russian policy."

The report, among other things, rejects Moscow's claims that it was attempting to prevent "genocide" by entering South Ossetia and eventually moving in Georgia proper.

The report says Russia's retaliation to the August 7 Georgian assault went "far beyond the reasonable limits of defense."

Asmus said the report "was much tougher on Russia than people expected."

Still, Asmus -- who served as a U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state under Bill Clinton -- said focusing on who's to blame is not nearly as important as ensuring that the same mistakes aren't repeated.

The first war, said Asmus, began because Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili wanted to go West and Russia wanted to stop him.

A year later, those basics haven't changed: Tbilisi is still actively yearning for NATO and EU membership, and Russia is still keen to keep Georgia within its sphere of influence.

Preventing Round Two

Even if Saakashvili's actions had disastrous consequences, Asmus said, the months of Russian sanctions and military buildup that preceded the war help explain why he acted the way he did.

It also explains why a future such conflict can't necessarily be ruled out -- especially as Russia continues to build ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and sends coast guard boats into the Black Sea to protect Abkhaz vessels from what it terms "Georgian provocations."

"I think it's part of a pattern of threats and warnings from Moscow, that if you, Georgia, continue to go West, you will pay the price and suffer the consequences," said Asmus.

"That, followed by a pattern of escalation and intimidation, until President Saakashvili felt cornered and felt he had no choice but to act. You can still say his decision was wrong, but why he did it was not a great mystery for me."

Usackas, the Lithuanian foreign minister, said the best steps now are to keep Georgia on a steady path of reform, encourage Russia to respect its original cease-fire commitments, ensure the safe return of people displaced by the war, and allowing EU monitors to work in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Usackas said the European Union and the United States cannot escape criticism for their own failure to prevent the war. He said the West must be more "aggressive" in favoring preemptive diplomacy over postconflict resolution.

"Why, in the 21st century, did we allow two members of the Council of Europe and the OSCE to go to war? What did these organizations do to prevent it -- and if there was something we didn't do, why not?" he asked. "I believe we weren't sufficiently generous, we didn't have sufficient foresight, and we didn't use the preventive means we had."

#10

Putin marks birthday with writers, church praise

By Oleg Shchedrov

Reuters, October 7, 2009

Russia's most powerful politician Vladimir Putin marked his 57th birthday on Wednesday in the company of literary luminaries, lauded by the Orthodox Church for his wisdom, viewed askance by critics sensing a nascent personality cult.

The "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" daily published an "Ode to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin" written in a style typical of poems devoted to former Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

"The country is again at a crossroads wondering whether it might perish or not," the ditty reads. "We congratulate you comrade Putin and ask God to give you another 120 years."

As prime minister and leader of the ruling party, Putin enjoys lavish, uncritical publicity on state television, something which critics say helps explain his high ratings.

As allies and supporters like Belarus's authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko rushed to congratulate Putin on his birthday, some writers said they were boycotting a meeting with the premier on Wednesday in a Moscow literary museum.

"I do not see myself in the role of 'congratulator' or the one who delivers flower and gifts," said writer Dmitry Bykov.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the meeting with writers was not linked to the premier's birthday.

"The meeting will proceed in a format of a free conversation touching upon issues like the role of literature in life, and the publishing business," Peskov said. "A broad range of philosophical and practical problems will also be discussed."

Leading Russian classic writers like Valentin Rasputin and Andrei Bitov, as well as best-selling novelists like Alexander Kabakov will attend. Foreign news media were not invited.

Bykov told Russian News Service radio he was not staying away for ideological reasons but because "when (a meeting) happens on the premier's birthday there is a great chance that instead of a reasonable conversation it will be a formal event."

Putin handed over the presidency in May 2008 to handpicked successor Dmitry Medvedev. He took the more junior post of prime minister but he is widely believed to make all key decisions.

The former KGB spy has become a devout believer since the collapse of communism and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill was among the first to congratulate Putin on his birthday.

"Wisdom based on rich political experience, typical for you, is a guarantee of stability in our state," Kirill wrote in a congratulatory message carried by Russian news agencies.

THE RUSSIAN GENES

Writers in Soviet times could be equally ascerbic, but hid their mockery in articles 'coded' to slip past censors.

One magazine famously carried a story about a pompous and vainglorious writer long overdue for retirement. The item, published ahead of bemedalled leader Leonid Brezhnev's 75th birthday, appeared on page 75.

Putin stepped down from the top Kremlin job after serving the maximum two consecutive terms allowed by the constitution.

But after taking a break from the presidency, speculation is increasing that Putin may run again in 2012, this time for a six-year term, with the possibility of a second to follow it.

Putin himself fanned this speculation by saying he would decide with Medvedev nearer the time which of them would run. Medvedev later said he could run in 2012, but was equally ready for another job "as long as it is useful for the nation."

Igor Yurgens, who heads a think-tank working for Medvedev, told Reuters recently that "the cult of personality is in our genes," citing busts and portraits that appeared after Putin's first term -- though he said Putin himself had resisted it.

"I believe this is the nature of Russian power," Yurgens added. "There is huge inertia living in this secret Kremlin, looking out on those 1,500-year-old towers and churches. Something happens inside you, I guess."

#11

Hundreds rally in Moscow in Politkovskaya's memory

By David Nowak

AP, October 8, 2009

MOSCOW — Hundreds of people urged Russian authorities to find and punish the killers of journalists and human rights activists in Russia, rallying Wednesday to mark the third anniversary of the killing of Anna Politkovskaya.

"The authorities are incapable of solving such crimes," said Mikhail Kasyanov, a former prime minister and now a leader of the opposition. "Even the most honest investigator cannot solve the crime because the government won't let him."

Politkovskaya, an internationally known journalist, was a harsh critic of the Kremlin and exposed widespread human-rights abuses and corruption in Chechnya. Prosecutors have said little about who might have ordered the contract-style killing of her on Oct. 7, 2006, while the suspected gunman is believed to be hiding abroad. Three men accused of playing minor roles in the killing remain under investigation.

Since Politkovskaya's death, at least seven journalists and human rights activists have been killed in Russia, including one who wrote for the same newspaper, Novaya Gazeta.

"There is a political will not to solve the murders," Dmitry Muratov, the newspaper's editor, told the crowd that had gathered in a Moscow park.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton released a statement late Wednesday, saying: "The failure to bring to justice the killers of these journalists undermines efforts to strengthen the rule of law, improve government accountability, and combat corruption."

Some of Russia's most prominent human rights activists and opposition leaders took part in the Moscow rally, which began with a minute of silence at 4:03 p.m. (1203 GMT), the time Politkovskaya was shot in her apartment building three years ago.

The demonstration, in typical fashion, was heavily policed. City Hall had forbidden a gathering of more than 350 people.

Many held photographs of Politkovskaya — who also wrote books critical of the Kremlin and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin — and bouquets of roses, which they later placed outside her apartment building in central Moscow. Dozens more joined them in paying their respects to the slain journalist.

Flowers were taped to the building's wall and placed against a large color poster of Politkovskaya. A smaller poster read: "The smart, honest and brave cannot survive in Russia."

A policeman jotted down the slogans on a scrap of paper.

Neither President Dmitry Medvedev nor Putin, who was president when Politkovskaya was killed, commented about her death Wednesday.

Medvedev came to power 18 months ago on promises of cementing the rule of law, but critics are still awaiting action.

Former Prime Minister Kasyanov said Russia had seen "a significant deterioration" over that time.

Putin, meanwhile, celebrated his 57th birthday Wednesday and marked the occasion by meeting with several writers.

Putin made his first public remarks on Politkovskaya's death days after it occurred, saying it did more to harm to Russia than her articles did.

A Russian journalist who had gone into hiding, meanwhile, made a surprise appearance at Wednesday's rally. Alexander Podrabinek has been followed by Kremlin-friendly youth groups since writing an article several weeks ago that criticized Soviet war veterans.

Podrabinek made a hasty exit after addressing Politkovskaya's supporters about censorship in Russia.

Memorial events for Politkovskaya also were planned in London and Paris.

#12

Blood Brothers No More?

By Ariel Cohen

New York Times, October 9, 2009

WASHINGTON — Is President Dmitri Medvedev of Russia trying to come out from under the shadow of his long-time political mentor and former boss Prime Minister Vladimir Putin? So it would seem.

At a meeting last month with the Valdai Club of Russia experts at his suburban residence in Novo-Ogarevo, Putin — who had ceded the presidency to Medvedev and is now rumored to be planning to take it back — insisted that there had been no competition with Medvedev for the office and that there would be none when the next election is held in 2012.

"We will sit down and have a discussion," he said. "We are people of the same blood."

Putin may have been quoting from Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Book," in which the hero convinces the jungle animals not to fight by appealing to their common blood.

A few days later, however, Medvedev didn't sound enthusiastic about giving up the 2012 presidential prospects: "Maybe I will have to go and take a blood test to find out whether we do have the same blood type," he deadpanned.

Just a few days before the Valdai meeting, Medvedev had published a manifesto, "Forward, Russia!" It read like an electoral platform for a second presidential term and included the first public disagreements with Putin.

The president wrote that Russia had been on the wrong path for the past eight years. The article diagnosed severe ills in Russia's society and economy, including corruption, dependence on oil and gas exports, lack of economic innovation, lousy law enforcement and judicial and a demographic decline.

Medvedev disagreed with Putin on Russia's approach to the much-delayed World Trade Organization membership; sanctions on Iran (Medvedev may support them; Putin opposes them); and the secrecy surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Moscow, apparently to discuss Iran (Medvedev would make it public).

The manifesto sounded like a liberal reformer's political platform. (Someone quipped that Medvedev took his talking points from Vice President Joe Biden, who had blasted Russia's social conditions at a press interview last summer.)

Some symbolic rifts have also surfaced. How one regards past reformers is a litmus test of political leanings in Russia. Medvedev has repeatedly criticized the reformer-czar Peter the Great as too heavy-handed, whereas Putin in the past has glorified the brutal autocrat, and has even had some good things to say about Stalin ("an efficient political manager who left Russia bigger than he received it").

Medvedev has also signaled his differences with Putin by giving interviews to liberal media, such as Novaya Gazeta (where the slain Anna Politkovskaya used to work) or Gazeta.ru, while Putin has preferred call-in marathons on the state-run TV channel. Medvedev also packed the Public Chamber, an advisory body created in 2005 to provide oversight of the government and legislature, with liberals.

The chamber, however, has no teeth. Nor do Medvedev's apparent supporters, most of them moderate economic reformers and lawyers. And he has been too close over the years to Putin to be fully trusted by committed democrats, who accuse him, for example, of failure to release Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the jailed founder of Yukos oil company. Khodorkovsky is currently facing a second trial on what many believe are trumped-up charges.

On the other side, Medvedev's opponents in an open election would include the rich and powerful oil lobby, some of the oligarchs, and the "siloviki" — the powerful law-enforcement and secret service heads who are close to Putin, and who like things just the way they are.

Reforms in Russia have traditionally succeeded only when Russia was militarily defeated, as in the Crimean War (1854-1855) or in Afghanistan (1979-1989). Reforms failed or were only partially successful when the reformers (Czar Pavel I, Nikita Khrushchev, Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin) were perceived as weak. For now, Medvedev is weak.

With all this in mind, Moscow political observers facetiously ask whether Medvedev should have focused his manifesto not on demographic decline, rampant alcoholism and an inefficient economy, but on "enemies of Russia" — external and internal. It worked for his predecessors. But this is not Medvedev's style.

Still, it is possible that reforms in Russia can succeed without fear. But they clearly cannot succeed without improving relations with the West. Russia needs tens of billions of dollars of investment and modern management skills and technology to catch up.

And they are sure to wither without clearly articulated support from the political elites and the broad public. Medvedev knows that. So do his political rivals, and that, hopefully, will shape their contest in the 2012 race, rather than blood.

Ariel Cohen is senior research fellow at the Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

#13

New US missile plan raises 'questions': Russia AFP, October 9, 2009

CHISINAU — The new missile plan from US President Barack Obama's administration raises questions and Moscow is waiting for Washington to explain its intentions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday.

"The statements that are constantly being voiced raise more questions than answers," Lavrov told reporters during a visit to the Moldovan capital for a summit of ex-Soviet countries.

"We would like to receive full clarification," Lavrov added, referring to the plan presented by the Obama administration last month to replace an older plan backed by George W. Bush that would have placed missile defence facilities in eastern Europe.

Moscow and Washington are now holding talks so Russia can "understand the configuration" of the new missile defence system, Lavrov said, but he added that reports of some US proposals were raising eyebrows in Moscow.

He said a recent US report that the United States might include Ukraine in its missile defence plans was "rather unexpected."

US defence publication Defense News reported Thursday that Washington might consider Ukraine as part of its new anti-missile programme, and had added the ex-Soviet country "to the list of possible early warning sites."

Defense News cited the source of the report as Alexander Vershbow, US assistant secretary of defence for international security affairs.

"A statement by Alexander Vershbow was rather unexpected," Lavrov said when asked to comment.

"He is a person who's prone to extravagancies," Lavrov added, referring to Vershbow, who is also a former US ambassador to Russia.

Lavrov's comments came ahead of a planned visit to Moscow by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who is due to be in Russia October 12-14.

Lavrov said Russian President Dmitry Medvedev would most likely meet with her during her stay in Moscow.

Lavrov accompanied Medvedev to a meeting of the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States, a group of ex-Soviet nations.

#14

Iran looms over Clinton trip to Europe, Russia

By Matthew Lee

AP, October 9, 2009

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is planning to press for a strong commitment from Russia for the possible use of tough new sanctions on Iran when she visits Moscow next week at the end of a European tour.

U.S. officials said Iran will be at or near the top of Clinton's agenda when she meets Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday in Moscow. Clinton, who departs on her five-day journey late Friday, will make stops in Switzerland, Britain and Ireland before heading to Russia.

Russia and China have long balked at imposing new sanctions on Iran if it fails to come clean about its suspect nuclear program, but Medvedev hinted the Russian position might be shifting after Tehran disclosed a previously secret uranium enrichment site near the holy city of Qom.

But despite recent suggestions from Medvedev that Moscow's position may ease, U.S. officials believe it will be a hard sell to convince the Russians on fresh penalties. That's particularly after Iran agreed to allow U.N. inspectors to visit the Qom site on Oct. 25 and has agreed, in principle, to send most of its low-enriched uranium to Russia for reprocessing.

Iran agreed to allow inspections of the Qom site following six-nation talks between Iran's chief nuclear negotiator and diplomats from the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany last week. The Iranians were given time to decide whether to accept a package of incentives from the six-nation group in exchange for Iran's compliance with international demands to suspend its uranium enrichment or face new sanctions.

The Obama administration is anxious not to let up on the pressure and Clinton will be looking for Russian expressions of support for sanctions and other penalties should Iran continue to refuse by the end of the year, the officials said.

"Iran has not bought an indefinite delay and we want them to know that," said one official, who like the others spoke on condition of anonymity to preview Clinton's talks.

In remarks broadcast Friday, Medvedev said Russia does not want to see any more nations develop nuclear weapons, signaling that Moscow shares U.S. concerns about Iran. But he said nothing about potential sanctions.

"The expansion of the 'nuclear club' is very much not in our interests," Medvedev said in a televised excerpt from an interview taped Wednesday.

According to Russian news agencies, Medvedev also said there is a good chance that Russia and the U.S. can reach agreement on a replacement for the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I, which expires on Dec. 5.

In addition to Iran, Clinton will bring a wide array of other issues to Moscow, including arms control, missile defense and cooperation on convincing North Korea to abandon nuclear weapons, the officials said.

Negotiators from the two countries are racing to reach agreement on a successor to START I and Clinton wants to underscore the urgency of the talks, they said.

She also will explore possible cooperation on missile defense following President Barack Obama's decision not to proceed with Bush-administration plans to base such a system in eastern Europe. Russia had vehemently opposed those plans and has welcomed Obama's new approach.

Clinton will also join Lavrov in chairing a meeting of a commission set up by Obama and Medvedev to improve cooperation and coordination on a variety of matters, including Afghanistan.

On Thursday, the U.S. welcomed the inaugural flight of a U.S. plane carrying lethal materiel to Afghanistan through Russian airspace under a July agreement.

After Moscow, Clinton plans to visit Kazan, the capital of the Russian Republic of Tatarstan, to demonstrate U.S. support for a moderate Islamic entity as it looks to ease anti-American sentiment throughout the Muslim world, which has been exacerbated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Clinton begins her trip in Zurich, Switzerland on Saturday where she will witness the signing of a historic pact between Turkey and Armenia to normalize relations after a century of conflict.

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Turkmenistan shuts door to US volunteers: official AFP, October 9, 2009

ALMATY — Ex-Soviet Turkmenistan has barred an incoming group of aid workers from the Peace Corps, a US government programme for aid volunteers, from entering the country, an agency official said Friday.

The Peace Corps, which has operated in Turkmenistan since 1993, was given no explanation for the last-minute decision to cancel the visas of 47 volunteers, acting country director Chris Leal told AFP by telephone from Ashgabat.

"They were scheduled to come in on September 30, and we received notice about 24 hours before they left Philadelphia that they would not have sites available for them when they arrived in Turkmenistan," Leal said.

"We had the letters of invitation approved, we had their visas in place. Everything was approved by the government. They were all set to come... So it was kind of a shock to us."

Turkmenistan is one of the world's most isolated states, but it is also home to rich gas reserves that are the subject of jockeying by Russia and the European Union.

Ashgabat had taken steps to reach out to the West in recent months, hosting EU delegations and allowing some foreign journalists into the country amid a row with Moscow over gas exports.

Roughly half of the US volunteers were health care professionals assigned to assist in rural areas of Turkmenistan, while the other half were tasked with teaching English in primary and secondary schools, Leal said.

Turkmenistan became deeply isolated under the nearly two-decade rule of dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, who died in 2006.

The eccentric Niyazov forced schools to replace much of their curriculum with lessons from his rambling book of philosophy and religion, the Rukhnama, and closed all hospitals outside of the capital Ashgabat.

Current President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov has eliminated some of the more bizarre signs of Niyazov's personality cult, but critics say the changes are merely cosmetic.

The Peace Corps currently has 70 volunteers in the desert nation and there is no indication from the government that their status will change, Leal said.