

WASHINGTON, D.C. February 19, 2010



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 see below for NCSJ's Weekly News Update.

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. February 19, 2010

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#1a**Chief Russian Rabbi hoping Yanukovich will continue speaking against glorification of Nazism
Interfax, February 12, 2010**

Moscow- Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar has said he is hoping that Viktor Yanukovich, who was announced the winner of the Ukrainian presidential election, will continue to defend tolerance and speak out against "aggressive nationalism" in Ukraine.

While congratulating Yanukovich for his win, Lazar said Yanukovich's position against "attempts to glorify people working for Nazis" largely enabled Jewish communities in Ukraine "to develop dynamically, maintain their spirituality and pass it on to the younger generation."

"I sincerely hope that now that you have been elected to this high state post your policy will be determining for the entire country," Lazar said in an interview supplied to the Interfax-Religion by Lazar's press service on Friday.

Lazar called Yanukovich "one of the most experienced politicians in Ukraine," who many hope will improve the situation in the country.

#1b

Kosher Products in Former Soviet Union Expand Global Reach Chabad.org, February 14, 2010

As the market for kosher food expands worldwide, traditional Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union are seeing new products such as specialty cheeses and cakes hit the shelves, all while local companies cater to demand abroad.

In the former republic of Armenia, where the Jewish population numbers just a few hundred people, ventures that began in 2003 with the export of kosher-certified aluminum foil have expanded to include canned vegetables, beer and lemonade destined for Israel, France and the United States; and pomegranate wine, natural juices, flavored vodkas and fruit jam for local consumption.

According to the Yerevan-based Rabbi Gersh Meir Burshtein, a Chabad-Lubavitch emissary and the country's chief rabbi, the revamping of a local cheese factory – which has produced small quantities of strictly-kosher cheeses under the rabbi's supervision for the past eight years – will allow its entire product line to conform to the kosher standard known as chalav yisrael. He predicted that kosher exports from Armenia would further expand in coming years.

Elsewhere, kosher dairy products from Moscow are giving consumers more choices, such as in S. Petersburg, where shoppers can now find a line of products under the "Tevye the Milkman" label. Produced under the supervision of the Chief Rabbinate of Russia, the offerings include strictly-kosher milk, yogurt, sour cream, cottage cheese, butter, miniature cheesecakes and other sweets.

#1c

Bibi-Medvedev meeting focuses on Mideast peace JTA, February 16, 2010

JERUSALEM -- The Middle East peace process was the main topic of discussion during a meeting in Moscow between Benjamin Netanyahu and Dmitry Medvedev.

The Israeli prime minister and the Russian president met Monday as part of Netanyahu's first official visit to Russia.

"Israel is more than just a partner in the ordinary sense for us, but is a country with whom we are bound by long-standing relations and with whom we share much in common in terms of the nature and makeup of our populations," Medvedev told Netanyahu at the beginning of their meeting.

"Advancing peace, advancing our mutual relations and rolling back those who destroy peace and threaten the stability of the Middle East and the world is something I very much look forward to discussing with you," Netanyahu responded.

Netanyahu reportedly pushed for Russian support of tougher sanctions against Iran during his meeting with Medvedev.

Netanyahu made a clandestine visit to Moscow in September to discuss the threat from Iran.

#1d**Russia to build Holocaust museum; Israel to erect memorial to Soviet Army
World Jewish Congress, February 17, 2010**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has told his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu that Russia would soon build a museum dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. Netanyahu in response said Israel would erect a memorial dedicated to the efforts of the Soviet Army in liberating Europe during World War II. Netanyahu said the gesture, which he intends to move forward, was in honor of the 65th anniversary of the victory over the Nazis later this year. "No one has the right to forget those terrible losses among the Jewish people in this disaster, though some do. No one has the right to forget the decisive role that Russia, the Soviet Army, played in defeating Nazi Germany," he said.

Putin pointed out that he was currently in discussion with Moscow's chief rabbi about the possibility of establishing a Holocaust museum in Moscow.

Netanyahu expressed hope that the memorial for the Red Army would be ready before Putin's next visit to Israel, expected within the year.

#1e**Armenia Warns Azerbaijan Against Hampering Karabakh Settlement
RFE/RL, February 18, 2010**

YEREVAN -- Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian has warned Azerbaijan against disregarding the principle of self-determination in negotiations to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Nalbandian's remarks on February 16 came in response to Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mamadyarov's statement the previous day stressing that "Baku sees Nagorno-Karabakh's future status within Azerbaijan and the main issue is the solution to the problem of occupied territories and the return of Azerbaijani refugees to their former homes."

Nalbandian said in a statement that "what is important is not who sees what, but who decides. And this [issue] is up to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to decide. This is also expressly stated in some provisions of the Madrid document that were published [during last year's G8 summit in L'Aquila] immediately after the statement by the presidents of Russia, the United States, and France."

He continued that "if Azerbaijan is against this basic principle, then it in fact obstructs the settlement process. It also obstructs the settlement by opposing Nagorno-Karabakh's participation in the negotiations, because it is impossible to achieve progress in the settlement without Nagorno-Karabakh's direct participation."

#1f**OSCE Envoy Wants Regular Trips To Abkhazia, South Ossetia
RFE/RL, February 18, 2010**

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) special envoy for conflict regions says he wants to establish regular OSCE visits to Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, RFE/RL's Echo of the Caucasus reports.

Bolat Nurgaliev, the OSCE's special envoy for protracted conflicts, told RFE/RL in Tbilisi on February 17 that such visits could be the first step towards reestablishing an OSCE presence in Georgia and its conflict areas.

The OSCE office in Tbilisi and its field office in South Ossetia were closed following the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008.

He added that the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Center in Vienna would play a crucial role in planning the new visits.

Nurgaliev said "talks are being held with all conflicting sides in order to outline the ways [in which] the presence could satisfy all sides."

He said the OSCE has a preliminary agreement with Georgian authorities about making such visits and that he will meet with Abkhaz and South Ossetian officials in March in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, respectively.

Nurgaliev said the OSCE cannot be "an effective cochairman of talks in Geneva regarding Georgia's conflict regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia" without maintaining a presence in Tbilisi and the breakaway regions.

After the conflict between Georgian and Russian forces in South Ossetia, Tskhinvali officials refused to allow OSCE military observers to enter the breakaway territory.

#1g
Belarusian Police Detain Dozens At Valentine's Day Rally
RFE/RL, February 15, 2010

MINSK -- Belarusian police dispersed a St. Valentine's Day gathering in Minsk and detained some 30 young political activists, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports.

The activists, mainly members of the Youth Front movement, were released by police after about two hours on February 14 and were not charged.

Maryna Manchalouskaya told RFE/RL that she was surprised when police forced her into a bus and took her to the police station.

She said she was holding a sign at the gathering on Liberty Square that read: "I Love Belarus. I Do Not Understand Why I Cannot."

Youth Front deputy head Mikola Dzemidzenka told RFE/RL that police beat the activists, who were forced to lie on the floor of the bus while being driven to the police station.

Dzemidzenka said the police were "very rude" and did not let the activists speak to each other. He added that they used vulgar words while addressing the activists.

Every year, many independent youth organizations in Minsk hold a public gathering on St. Valentine's Day that is usually forcibly dispersed by the police.

#2
Israel asks Russia for Iran "sanctions with teeth"
By Guy Faulconbridge; editing by Michael Stott
Reuters, February 15, 2010

MOSCOW - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday asked Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to punish Iran by backing "sanctions with teeth" against the Islamic Republic's energy sector.

Netanyahu, who met Medvedev in the Kremlin, is trying to harden the resolve of major powers for additional sanctions against Tehran, which the West suspects is trying to make a nuclear bomb.

"What is needed now is very tough sanctions that can influence this regime and severe sanctions that will considerably and convincingly harm the import and export of oil," Netanyahu told reporters in Moscow after the meeting.

"President Medvedev heard from me my position about the need for sanctions with teeth. They can bite only if they have teeth. Diluted sanctions don't work," Netanyahu said. A spokeswoman for the Kremlin declined to comment.

Iran, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, said last week it could now enrich uranium to more than 80 percent purity, close to levels that would be needed for a nuclear bomb, though Tehran denies trying to make atomic weapons.

Israel, seeing a mortal threat, has hinted it could attack Iran's nuclear facilities pre-emptively if it deems international diplomacy a dead end. The United States on Monday denied it was preparing to attack Iran.

Until recently, Russia had resisted calls by the United States and major European powers for additional sanctions on Iran, but Russian officials have in recent days indicated that Moscow could support a tougher stance.

SANCTIONS?

Russia -- which wields a veto in the United Nations Security Council -- has been deeply disappointed by Tehran's refusal to send uranium abroad for enrichment in Russia, a deal Moscow hoped could allay Western fears.

Russia has trade ties worth \$3 billion annually with Iran -- just under double its trade turnover with Israel -- and is putting the finishing touches to Iran's long-delayed nuclear power station in Bushehr.

"Russia certainly understands there is a need to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and it understands that certain steps must be taken against it," Netanyahu said.

Neither Medvedev nor Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has publicly commented on the Iranian situation for weeks.

Israel has repeatedly asked Russia to scrap a contract to sell an air defense system known as the S-300 to Iran and Netanyahu said he had received assurances from Medvedev that Moscow understood the seriousness of the issues involved for regional stability.

"I trust what I heard from President Medvedev on this issue. I know that on this issue Russia is guided by considerations of regional stability," Netanyahu said. He will meet Putin for talks on Tuesday.

The truck-mounted S-300, which can shoot down hostile missiles or aircraft up to 150 km (90 miles) away, could help Iran thwart any attempt by Israel or the United States to bomb its nuclear facilities.

#3

Russia delays missile delivery to Iran

By Alexander Osipovich

AFP, February 17, 2010

MOSCOW - Russia has delayed the delivery of advanced air defence missiles to Iran for technical reasons, a top Russian official said Wednesday, in the latest sign of strained ties between Moscow and Iran.

The comments on the delay in Russia's controversial sale of S-300 missiles to Iran came a day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow in a bid to rally support for tougher action against Tehran.

"The delay is due to technical problems. The delivery will be carried out when they are resolved," Alexander Fomin, deputy head of Russia's Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, told the Interfax news agency.

Russia's S-300 contract with Iran has raised hackles in the United States and Israel, which believe that Tehran could use the sophisticated air defence missiles to defend its nuclear facilities against attack.

Western powers suspect that Iran is seeking to build an atomic bomb under the guise of its civilian nuclear energy programme, although Tehran says the programme is peaceful in nature.

Neither the United States nor Israel have ruled out air strikes in order to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Analysts say that S-300s could greatly complicate such air strikes.

Fomin, whose service oversees Russian arms exports, made the comments in an interview with Interfax while attending a defence exhibition in New Delhi, DefExpo India 2010.

He did not clarify what the technical problems were or how long it would take to fix them, Interfax reported.

Netanyahu, who has urged Moscow to stop the S-300 delivery, left Moscow on Tuesday after a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Russian media have speculated that Israel could agree to stop selling arms to Moscow's foe Georgia in return for a Russian agreement to block the S-300 sale to Iran, which the Jewish state sees as its main threat.

Netanyahu did not deny such a quid-pro-quo in an interview published Wednesday in the Russian daily newspaper Kommersant.

"Whenever it comes to arms sales, we always take into account the concerns of all sides and we expect Russia to do the same -- to act in the interest of stability in unstable regions," Netanyahu said in response to a question on Georgia.

Israel supplied unmanned aerial drones to Georgia and helped train Georgia's military before the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008.

Russia has been secretive about the Iran missile contract, but Interfax has reported that it calls for Moscow to sell Tehran five batteries of S-300PMU1 missiles for around 800 million dollars (530 million euros).

The S-300PMU1 -- codenamed the SA-20 Gargoyle by NATO -- is a mobile system designed to shoot down aircraft and cruise missiles.

Iran has expressed frustration with the delay in the missile delivery, and last week a top Iranian military commander said Tehran would build its own air defence missiles that would be even better than the S-300s.

Russia's once-warm relations with Iran have recently become strained amid the international dispute over Tehran's nuclear programme.

On Tuesday, Russia joined the United States and France in criticising a new push by Iran to step up uranium enrichment, and Moscow said it could not exclude a new round of sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Moscow has long had close ties with Tehran and is building Iran's first nuclear power plant in the city of Bushehr.

#4
Secularity in Azerbaijan Has Many Advantages
By Matthew Collin
Moscow Times, February 15,2010

As morning prayers reach their climax at a synagogue in the heart of Muslim Azerbaijan, an elderly man in a skull cap forcefully raises the Jewish holy scroll, the Torah, above the heads of his fellow worshippers. The synagogue itself is airy and modern, expensively constructed less than a decade ago with the full approval of the authorities. There's even a photograph in the entrance hall showing Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, shaking hands with the head of the Ashkenazi Jewish community, Gennady Zelmanovich.

“We live together like a family, and we are regarded as equals,” Zelmanovich says, smiling when I ask him how Muslim Azeris treat the tiny Jewish minority here. “There has never been any anti-Semitism in this country.”

Although I’ve occasionally heard anti-Semitic remarks from taxi drivers in the capital, Baku, there are almost no reports of persecution or violence against Jews. Unlike neighboring Iran, Azerbaijan is a secular Muslim state with an official policy of religious tolerance and a laid-back attitude to Islamic customs shaped by decades of atheist Soviet rule. This means there are more stiletto heels than headscarves on the streets of downtown Baku. The government has also been developing an increasingly lucrative trading partnership with Israel.

Radical Islam is seen as a potential threat to stability and prosperity in this energy-rich country, and it’s dealt with harshly. After uncovering alleged plots to attack the U.S. and Israeli embassies, the authorities introduced new legislation last year to increase their control over religious groups. Several mosques were shut down, and a couple of them were even demolished, while police are reported to have detained suspected radicals and shaven their beards off.

But the vast majority of the country’s Muslims are resolutely moderate, and free-speech campaigner Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, a liberal imam who was evicted from his own mosque several years ago, claims that the authorities have been exaggerating the extremist threat to give themselves more powers. “In terms of human rights, this new law has been a disaster,” he insists.

Back at the synagogue, the Jews of Baku continue to worship in peace, knowing that Islamist literature is being seized and banned, and suspected militants are being monitored and arrested. “We don’t worry about radicals,” Zelmanovich says with confidence, “because the authorities have the situation under control.”

#5

Opposition Chief Is Named Victor of Ukrainian Vote

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, February 15, 2010

MOSCOW — Ukraine’s Central Election Commission certified Viktor F. Yanukovich as the winner of the Feb. 7 presidential election on Sunday, even as his opponent, Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko, vowed to challenge the decision in court.

The commission announced that Mr. Yanukovich, the opposition leader, had prevailed by 3.48 percentage points, or 887,909 votes.

On Saturday night, Ms. Tymoshenko said she would not concede and asserted that Mr. Yanukovich’s campaign had used extensive fraud to steal the election. She pledged to overturn it through legal means, and not organize street protests, saying she did not want to cause more political instability.

European election monitors have described the voting as honest and fair. Prominent foreign leaders, including President Obama, have congratulated Mr. Yanukovich, suggesting that they do not believe that Ms. Tymoshenko has a strong case.

Over the weekend Mr. Yanukovich’s aides described Ms. Tymoshenko’s accusations as desperate. They contended that their side, in fact, had been the victim of malfeasance, saying that the Tymoshenko campaign had stuffed ballot boxes.

Despite losing the presidential race, Ms. Tymoshenko remains prime minister, and is rebuffing Mr. Yanukovich’s demand that she resign. He can now try to assemble a coalition in Parliament to dismiss her or seek parliamentary elections.

In an interview with Russian television, Mr. Yanukovich dismissed speculation that he would reach a deal with Ms. Tymoshenko to keep her as prime minister. He said he hoped she would give up her post voluntarily.

Mr. Yanukovich offered an olive branch to supporters of Ms. Tymoshenko, as well as those of candidates in the first round of voting in January.

"The question is not about my personal ambitions," Mr. Yanukovich said, "but about the fact that we now need to find ways to convince people who voted for Tymoshenko, as well as for other candidates, that the current authorities are capable of improving their lives."

#6

Russia tells Netanyahu it will hold off on Iran arms deal

By Barak Ravid

Haaretz, February 15, 2010

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Monday assured Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that it would hold off on its contract to sell an advanced air defense system to Iran.

Israel has repeatedly asked Russia to scrap its contract over the sale of the S-300 system to Iran. Netanyahu said he had received assurances from the Russian leader during their talks on Monday that Moscow understood the seriousness of the issues involved for regional stability.

"On this issue Russia is taking into consideration the needs for stability in the region," Netanyahu told reporters.

The truck-mounted S-300, which can shoot down hostile missiles or aircraft up to 150 km [90 miles] away, could help Iran thwart any attempt by Israel or the United States to bomb its nuclear facilities.

Netanyahu on Monday made good during the meeting on his promise to pressure Moscow to join international efforts to impose harsher sanctions against Iran over its contentious nuclear program.

Netanyahu stressed to the Russian leader that Iran's nuclear ambitions must be halted before it could succeed in developing an atomic bomb and implored Medvedev to back "sanctions with teeth" targeting Iran's energy sector.

"What is needed now is very tough sanctions that can influence this regime and severe sanctions that will considerably and convincingly harm the import and export of oil," Netanyahu told reporters in Moscow after the meeting.

"President Medvedev heard from me my position about the need for sanctions with teeth. They can bite only if they have teeth. Diluted sanctions don't work," Netanyahu said.

Prior to Netanyahu's visit, Russia defended S-300 sale

An hour before Netanyahu's plane took off on Sunday, Russian officials said that Moscow sees no reason to delay the sale of the S-300, a powerful air-defense system, to Iran. In addition, on Friday, Russian intelligence officials leaked comments expressing their displeasure with plans by an Israeli firm to close a major arms deal with Georgia.

"There is a signed contract [for the S-300 missiles] which we must follow through on, but deliveries have not started yet," Vladimir Nazarov, deputy secretary of Russia's Security Council secretary, told Interfax news agency in an interview. "This deal is not restricted by any international sanctions, because we are talking about deliveries of an exclusively defensive weapon."

Nazarov added that a military strike on Iran would be a big mistake and that the problems linked to Tehran's nuclear program must be resolved by diplomatic means only.

"Any military action against Iran will make the situation explode and will have extremely negative consequences for the entire world, including for Russia, which is a neighbor of Iran," he noted.

Israel has expressed concern in the past over Russian plans to sell Iran the S-300 system, which will be used to defend its nuclear installations against a possible attack. During the past two years, both Israel and the United States have pressured Russia not to implement the agreement with Iran, and there may be other opposition, according to sources in the premier's entourage.

In recent months Russia had promised not to go through with the deal. However, the economic crisis and pressure from the military establishment have resulted in major disagreements within the country's leadership on the issue.

Medvedev recently told President Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman that Russia needs the revenue from the deal and suggested that a different buyer be found.

Russia's declarations about the S-300 system were also meant to send a message to Israel that it does not approve the resumption of its arms sales to Georgia, which were frozen in August 2008.

According to the Russian government news agency, Itar-Tass, Israel resumed the sale of arms to Georgia and "is no longer limiting itself to the sale of UAVs [drones]," which are perceived to be defensive weapons.

A Russian intelligence source was quoted as saying that a private Israeli firm is providing weapons to the Georgian armed forces .

Specifically, according to the Russian news agency Ropadia, a company registered in Cyprus signed a contract for the delivery of 50,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 1,000 RPG launchers, and 20,000 40mm shells for the rocket launchers, in addition to 15,000 assault rifles of different types. The report stated that the arms deal was also carried out through Arsenal, a Bulgarian firm.

Foreign Ministry sources did not confirm the reports, but said that the timing of the leak to Itar-Tass is not coincidental and it appears that certain figures in Russia wish to link the arms sales to Georgia with Israel's demand for a freeze on the S-300 deal to Iran.

Sources at the ministry confirmed that security ties with Georgia were recently resumed, but they involve provision of basic training for the Georgian army by Israeli firms.

Russia denies new Iran fuel proposal

Russia's Foreign Ministry meanwhile denied on Monday a report that world powers had given Iran new proposals to send its uranium abroad for reprocessing, Interfax news agency said.

Russia said that powers had simply confirmed their support for a proposal brokered by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to send much of Iran's low enriched uranium abroad in return for fuel intended for a Tehran research reactor.

"Russia, the United States and France merely confirmed their support for the previously agreed IAEA proposals," an unidentified official at Russia's Foreign Ministry was quoted as saying by Interfax news agency.

The semi-official Iranian ILNA news agency quoted Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy organization, as saying proposals had been received after Tehran opted to step up its own uranium enrichment, a decision it announced last week.

#7

Missile defense not a threat to U.S.-Russia "reset"

By Phil Stewart

Reuters, February 17, 2010

WASHINGTON - The United States has a long way to go before Russia overcomes deeply entrenched skepticism of its missile defense plans, but that does not threaten efforts to "reset" relations, a Pentagon official said on Wednesday.

Moscow has repeatedly demanded clarification from Washington as U.S. missile defense plans in Europe take shape, voicing surprise at Romania's February offer to host interceptor missiles.

News that Bulgaria expressed a willingness to also play a role further raised alarms.

Alexander Vershbow, assistant defense secretary for international security affairs, said that Washington had not asked Bulgaria to host any missile shield elements so far. He added that Moscow knew last year Romania was a possible site.

"So we don't believe that this was as big a surprise as it has sometimes been portrayed," he told Reuters.

Vershbow said Washington would continue to "lay down the facts" to convince Moscow that its missile defense plans were not aimed at Russia, and instead focused on countries like Iran.

"We still have a long way to go. Skepticism in Russia is still deeply entrenched. And we've seen it in public statements in recent weeks. But we'll continue to engage," Vershbow said.

Asked what the U.S. might be able to do differently to assuage Russia, Vershbow said: "I don't think we have any new techniques. We will continue to engage, lay down the facts, try to address the Russian arguments on a substantive basis."

U.S. President Barack Obama rolled out a revised European missile defense strategy in September that focuses more on Iranian short- and medium-range missiles. U.S. officials have expressed hope that Russia might eventually play a role in the strategy.

Russia's most powerful politician, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and other officials have questioned the strategy and called it an obstacle to a successor to the 1991 START nuclear arms reduction pact, under negotiation for months.

COOPERATION ON IRAN

Vershbow rejected the argument, advanced by some analysts, that tensions over Obama's anti-missile system jeopardize efforts to reset relations with Moscow that were often strained under the Bush administration.

"While I think there are concerns that the Russians may raise going forward ... we don't think this is a threat to the reset," he said.

"There is a lot of good things going on in the bilateral relationship. So it's still a work in progress. But I think the reset worked and now we're trying to build a more cooperative, substantive relationship," Vershbow said.

He pointed to increased cooperation in a number of areas, including Iran, as Washington pushes for tough new sanctions over Tehran's nuclear program.

Russia -- which wields a veto in the United Nations Security Council -- has been deeply disappointed by Tehran's refusal to send uranium abroad for enrichment in Russia. The Kremlin said on Tuesday that Iran could face harsher measures if it failed to dispel fears about its nuclear program.

The United States has expanded land- and sea-based missile defense systems in and around the Gulf, in what Vershbow called "a deterrent, a potential defense against Iranian attacks."

"And I think this takes on new importance as the international community's efforts to persuade Iran to accept a political solution to the nuclear issue are running into difficulties and we're moving toward the pressure track, and in particular toward the preparation of (sanctions)," he said.

#8

Russia Seeks Quid Pro Quo to Rein Iran In

By John Vinocur

New York Times, February 16, 2010

Russia, it would seem, is finally making some of the right noises about tougher sanctions against Iran. Excellent.

But is it being reflexively suspicious to ask what's the deal, where's the catch, the quid pro quo that the United States and/or its friends will be pressed to concede in return?

You can assume that Russia, never amused by the notion of a potential nuclear armed Islamic power on its southern flank, has been waiting for the right moment when its status as Iran's major arms supplier and purveyor of civilian nuclear wherewithal could be leveraged into maximum yield.

Last week, Nikolai Patrushev, the usually hawkish secretary of Russia's Security Council, suggested that his bosses regard that this propitious interval starts now.

He offered up an acceptance of the obvious — for years withheld by Moscow — saying, in effect, that the mullahs want to make a bomb. And he combined that revelation with the not fully articulated subtext that maybe, just perhaps, we might find a way to slow the project down.

This was not Russia in a cooperative epiphany, or a conversion to sympathy for the West.

That isn't happening. Publication in Moscow the week before of a new military doctrine for the decade, in which the possibility of NATO's expanding its membership eastward was held up as an existential threat to Russian security, certified the opposite.

But while draft papers listing possible sanctions against Iran circulate at the U.N. Security Council — the French are reportedly recommending action to cut off Iranian gasoline imports, the Americans avoiding it — the Russians seem to see the juncture as one where the Obama administration is susceptible to maximum pressure. And one where helping on Iran and dimming the prospect of a fundamentalist theocracy with nukes puts Russia on track for a payoff.

In this line of reasoning, President Barack Obama is susceptible on two levels: 1) Through the largely ineffectual appearance so far of his attempt at engagement with Iran. 2) As a result of still inclusive talks on a strategic nuclear weapons with Russia, which the president dearly wants as a symbolic triumph but whose failure or challenge in a ratification debate in the Senate could threaten his domestic constituency's support and his international prestige.

The Russians clearly see profit in the Obama administration's entanglement.

Frankly, what good tactician wouldn't be looking for a wedge to potential givebacks when "a partner and friend" like America is trying at once to look tough on Afghanistan, terrorism and China while being an advocate of a world without nuclear weapons? Or a leader appearing to offer little clarity, in relation to its allies' sense of urgency, on what should be the level of new pressure on Iran and how fast it must be applied.

I talked to an international security and nuclear arms expert who spent most of a recent week speaking to Russian counterparts. He said there wasn't a conversation that didn't begin without a Russian's saying something like, "The important thing these days is for NATO to make clear it is not adding new members" in the Russian neighborhood.

Is that what Russia wants as quid pro quo on Iran? Or could a tradeoff be in a follow-on agreement to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty whose terms would explicitly link strategic nuclear arms and defenses against them, something that Russia seeks to connect to plans for a U.S. missile shield in Europe against Iranian nukes, and that the United States has resisted?

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reiterated this month that NATO must remain open to all qualified applicants. As to the fine print of the Start treaty's successor, The Associated Press, wondering in a dispatch from

Moscow whether the Americans' language was shifting in Russia's direction, said this might please Russia but noted, "any restrictions on missile defenses would make it difficult for the White House to win approval for the treaty in the U.S. Senate."

So is there a reasonable price to pay for Russia's help?

The expert I talked to didn't go there, but he said he believed Russian assistance would extend to supporting sanctions on the export of refined petroleum products to Iran. Since Iran is dependent on imports for 40 percent of the gasoline for its cars and trucks, this is very arguably the most direct, effective means of convincing the regime in Tehran that it has to negotiate an end to its nuclear arms drive.

But as much as the issue is what Russia expects to get in return for backing sanctions — which would certainly not include its arms or civilian nuclear sales to the mullahs — there's just as big an unanswered question about what the United States feels it needs to do itself to move Iran.

While France seeks sanctions covering gasoline, Reuters reported from the United Nations on Thursday that measures to punish exporters of gasoline to Iran are not among the Americans' proposals in current discussions about a draft resolution.

Such sanctions already exist in bills passed by both houses of Congress, but Mr. Obama has been described in The New York Times as rejecting that approach "at least for now, for fear of the popular backlash it could set off" in Iran. The French disagree with this concern.

This trace of dissonance forces a greater, even ultimate question: in these circumstances, why be beholden to the Russians, who sell no gasoline to Iran? If there is a fourth round of U.N. sanctions, China is likely to make sure they are not the "crippling" ones Mrs. Clinton says are necessary.

The United Nations' role in the West's notional progression of tougher sanctions was always supposed to be providing a steppingstone resolution (or more precisely, legal cover) for the next, hopefully final increment: creation of a coalition of the willing, involving the United States, France, Britain, Germany and other democratic countries wanting to join in.

In the end, if this group actually assumes a let-the-chips-fall-on-Ahmadinejad's-head approach, these friends, not Moscow, would be the ones confronting Iran and its key suppliers of refined petroleum products, since they are identified as Indian, British, Swiss, Dutch-Swiss and French.

Russia's voice might help spook the mullahs. But it is America and the West's resolve that would stop Iran short of a bomb. No bounty the allies could put on offer at this date is sure to simplify the job.

#9
U.S. Ambassador Opens Exhibit in St. Petersburg Commemorating Father's Feats in WW2
Interfax, February 18, 2010

ST. PETERSBURG - U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Beyrle on Thursday told reporters the story of his father Joseph, who fought against fascism during World War II with both the American and Soviet armies.

Beyrle recalled at a press conference in St. Petersburg on the occasion of the opening of an exhibit featuring his father's life, that with his sister he would often ask his father questions about the war.

"Do Russians drink vodka? Did you drink with them?" I and my sister would ask him. "Yes, we drank vodka," he would reply. "And here is a toast we had: For Roosevelt, for Stalin, for Studebaker!" the U.S. ambassador recalled.

Beyrle said they could not understand what "Studebaker" meant until their father told them about the lend-lease plan which brought American vehicles to the Soviet Army in Europe.

The exhibit, titled "A Hero of Two Nations" features the life of Joseph Beyrle as an American paratrooper, who fought against fascism during World War II in both the American and Soviet armies.

Two hundred and sixty objects from Joseph Beyrle's collection are on display, including awards, medals, badges, items of clothing, things used by soldiers in the time of war, as well as photographs and archive materials, the Russian Museum said.

"His record as a paratrooper began on the day the Second Front was opened and ended up near Berlin with a Soviet tank battalion of the 2nd Belarussian Front," the press release says.

Joseph Beyrle is considered to be the only soldier in World War II to have fought against Nazi Germany with both the American and Soviet armies.

He was presented with commemorative medals for his unique service during World War II at a ceremony in the White House in Washington in 1994, marking 50 years since the Second Front was opened. The awards were presented to the heroes by the then U.S. President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Joseph Beyrle died on December 12, 2004.

#10

Russia's Public Schools to Embrace Religious Education

By S. Fridman

Lubavitch.com, February 16, 2010

When Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev met several months ago with leading representatives of his country's major religious faiths, one of the items on his agenda was the development of a course on religious education for elementary state schools.

The result is a new six-volume series on Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and two additional volumes on the history of world religions and secular ethics.

Come September 2010, The Foundations of Jewish Culture, as the Jewish volume is named, will be delivered along with the other volumes, to 4th and 5th grade classrooms in 19 regions of the State. The 95-page textbook offers an authentic review of Judaism including an introduction to Jewish spiritual tradition, the foundations of faith, the Exodus from Egypt, Jewish holidays, traditions and customs.

It's a dramatic shift and a first for the country's elementary school children since the rise of communism nearly a century ago, when state education denied students exposure to religious studies.

"Religion was altogether in another world when I was growing up," says Andrey Glotser, an aide to Rabbi Berel Lazar and a member of the team who worked on the Jewish volume. Glotser graduated from Russia's State University of the Humanities in 1980, under communist rule. "This is an amazing victory for democracy."

Barely one percent of the public school children who will be using the book are Jewish. All the more important then, says Russia's Chief Rabbi Lazar, for the Jewish child who may find himself a minority in his class. "The idea that a Jewish child is offered by his teacher the option of exploring his heritage gives the student who may otherwise feel outnumbered and isolated, an important sense of legitimacy."

"We tried to make the material simple and accessible so that it would be understandable for children from Jewish families, as well as from other faiths," says Glotser, who worked with Mikhail Chlenov, a Professor of Jewish Studies and the Director of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, and Galina Mindrina, a teacher at an Ohr Avner school in Volgograd, under severe time constraints to complete the volume.

Rabbi Lazar says the new course reflects a general shift in Russia's attitude towards religion. "Russia has made a 180 degree turn away from its anti-religious doctrine." He points to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's recent decision to

lend government support to the construction of the Jewish museum in Moscow, a project of the Jewish community, as an example.

“The government has proven a genuine desire in taking real steps to correct communism’s biggest mistake—which was to remove G-d from life.”

Originally resisted by church-and-state separationists, the initiative offers students the freedom to choose from among any of the six courses corresponding with the volumes, including the one on secular ethics.

Though Rabbi Lazar admits that the majority of the school children will probably choose the course on secular ethics, he insists that the benefit to the students will eventually be appreciated in Russian society at large.

“The Lubavitcher Rebbe insisted that even in public schools, children need to be educated with an awareness of ‘an eye that sees and an ear that hears,’ instilling a sense of accountability for their actions.”

The course will run as a pilot program, with adjustments to be made after teachers evaluate its effectiveness.

#11

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You; Russians are bracing for the results of a nationwide census.

Editorial

Transitions Online, February 12, 2010

An ill-tempered argument among demographers has us musing about the ways leaders use rarified statistical data to set policies for societies undergoing rapid change.

A small fuss broke out last year over an article in Britain's leading medical journal, *The Lancet*, and its finding of a correlation between privatization and rising mortality rates in Central and Eastern Europe in the first years after the end of state socialism. Comments like these show that the article added fuel to the long-running debate over the merits of the "shock therapy" liberalization policies pushed at the time from outside by, notably, the economist Jeffrey Sachs and by liberals within the region.

But the authors of that study got it all wrong, according to a paper published this month by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College London. According to these researchers, the claim of a link between rapid privatization and worsening mortality figures in the post-communist states holds no water. A second article, out this month from an American employment research think tank, also lambastes the methodology presented in the original *Lancet* article.

We take no sides in this scholarly dispute (hell has no fury like a scientist scorned, and we prefer to be well out of the firing line). What we find fascinating is the use of data from all sorts of sources, whether compiled by state authorities or by outsiders relying on "soft" data - numbers of births and deaths, employment figures, measures of democratization and freedom. All this is then run through statistical analysis and the results are presented as verifiable information about the real world. Privatization, when applied too quickly to an inefficient and state-centered market, leads to more people dying from heart disease, cancer, alcoholism, and suicide. Or maybe not.

Not that anyone doubts the social cost of transition in the early 1990s. In a number of countries in the former Soviet Union steep rises in mortality rates, particularly among men, was a major cause in driving down the population to figures that are a persistent cause of worry for policy-makers. In Russia, officials are bracing for the results of the nationwide census to be held this year, the first since 2002. If the numbers turn out as many demographers predict, they may reinforce the belief that the country will have too few able-bodied workers for decades to come, and perhaps add to ethnic tensions.

Some demographers are worried the results will show little slowing in the negative trends seen in the country's health and population surveys since the fall of communism. Some estimates put the population at under 140 million, rather than the official estimate of 142 million - compared with 147 million in 1989.

None of this is news to Russia's leaders, of course, especially the contribution of hard drinking and poor diet to shortening the life span of men in particular. Sporadic efforts to wean Russians off vodka have been tried over the years, notably Mikhail Gorbachev's partly successful program in the 1980s. Dmitry Medvedev has just raised the price of cheap vodka and spoken of the debilitating effects of alcoholism.

Back in 2006 Vladimir Putin launched programs to reverse the population decline through encouraging larger families, cutting the mortality rate, and a more effective migration policy.

The birth rate has in fact recovered in the past couple of years, and while state support to families may explain part of the rise, the long-term trend has many Russian demographers concerned. Many of today's young mothers were born in the 1980s, when the birth rate was still high. But a consequence of the falling birth rates of the 1990s will be a smaller cohort of young women in coming years. Forecasts of the Russian population at mid-century are less dire than in the 1990s, but some pessimists still predict a fall to under 100 million.

Immigration, then, is likely to be a central plank in any Russian government's demographic policy for decades to come. Until the economic crisis hit in 2008, several million mostly temporary labor migrants were working at any one time in Russia, the majority from Central Asia and other former Soviet republics. Many have returned home, but others, often working long hours in badly paid jobs, still manage to earn enough to support families at home, and their remittances make welcome injections to the economies of countries such as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

But migration cannot be more than a small part of the solution to population loss, one demographer believes. Caucasians and Central Asians have trouble assimilating into Russian society because "everything is too foreign for them over here," Sergei Ermakov of the Institute for Demography, Migration, and Regional Development was quoted as saying in a Russia Profile article in April. (That seems a rather odd view, seeing that economic migrants in many countries have always shown a pretty remarkable ability to adapt to foreign ways.)

So it's perhaps not surprising that the Kremlin hesitated over taking a census this year. A few months ago officials were saying they would postpone it for two or three years, citing the high cost. Other factors than that were probably in their minds; there are concerns that the expected finding of continued high birth rates among Muslims will contribute to ethnic tensions. The census may also reveal steeper population declines than official estimates show in regions that have had more than their share of poverty (the far east) and conflict (Chechnya). The Putin-Medvedev administration may wish it had postponed the census after all.

#12

Protests are showing cracks in Kremlin policy

By Masha Lipman

Washington Post, February 19, 2010

MOSCOW - Street protests are not uncommon in Russia, but with very few exceptions they are small and focused on local, socioeconomic issues. In the past month, however, calls for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to resign were heard at rallies in different parts of Russia. These events -- one organized in late January in Kaliningrad, on Russia's western border; the other last week in the Siberian city of Irkutsk -- were not related and are not likely to evolve into a national political movement. But such gatherings underscore the cracks in the Kremlin political system of centralized power, opaque decision-making and unaccountability.

The government is generally tolerant of small-time gatherings. But it can also react fiercely, as when protesters at political rallies in Moscow are beaten and detained. In late 2008, when 5,000 in the Far East rallied against tightened restrictions on used-car imports and demanded that Putin resign, the Kremlin dispatched special police to rough up the protesters. The strong-arm tactics were designed to quell the movement, which indeed faded.

But recent protesters have gotten away with anti-Putin rhetoric, and more rallies are likely to follow.

The Kaliningrad rally of 10,000 was huge by Russian standards. Although economic frustrations sparked the gathering, participants carried signs calling for Putin and for Gov. Georgy Boos to resign. Kaliningrad is a western

exclave with a kind of frontier spirit that is hard to find elsewhere in Russia. Border trade is active, and many residents travel to Poland or Germany more often than they go to Moscow.

Kaliningrad depends heavily on trade in used cars and was gravely hit by government constraints on automobile imports. When the Kremlin also raised the transport tax on car owners late last year, Kaliningraders had had enough. About 5,000 rallied in December. Rumors have it that the government simply overlooked those protests. On Jan. 30, twice as many amassed in the city square. The organizers' job was made easier by local residents' resentment of Boos. Since gubernatorial elections were canceled five years ago, Moscow has relied on a complex selection procedure that boils down to presidential appointments of local leaders. Boos had never lived in Kaliningrad, and many see him as caring not about the people but, rather, about perks of power for himself and those he has brought to the region.

The January rally drew figures from Moscow such as Boris Nemtsov, a defiant opponent of Kremlin policies. The political guests may not figure largely in national politics, but their fiery anti-Kremlin rhetoric was cheered. It was only a few minutes, one attendee told me, before demonstrators began to chant "Boos out!" and "Putin out!" But local police did not resort to violence.

The recent protest in Irkutsk was sparked by the reopening of a pulp factory on Lake Baikal. The world's deepest and biggest reservoir of fresh water, the lake is a point of pride for locals. In 2008, the factory was closed after a long environmental struggle. In January, however, Putin revoked the closure -- meaning that waste will again be discharged in Baikal.

Although Putin's decision will bring jobs back to the former factory workers, it caused outrage: Many people saw the lake's water quality sacrificed as a favor to Oleg Deripaska, the billionaire who owned the factory. Protesters in Irkutsk carried no political signs, but some in the crowd called for Putin's cabinet to resign. Irkutsk authorities (the region's governor, like Boos, is an outsider) were apparently alarmed that the protest came so soon after the one in Kaliningrad. Heavily armored vehicles were brought close to the square where about a thousand protesters had gathered. But the Irkutsk gathering also ended peacefully.

Events in Irkutsk and Kaliningrad were thoroughly covered by independent media outlets in Moscow, and video from the rallies is all over the Web. But the national TV channels did not broadcast the protests.

Control over mass-audience television enables the Kremlin to keep undesirable information from the majority. Control over decision-making makes it possible to raise taxes and tariffs or ignore environmental threats. Control over gubernatorial appointments means a governor can be replaced at any time. But when the economic crisis prompts unpopular decisions, resentment has festered into protests. And the unelected governors fail to connect with or quell their constituencies, especially if they lack regional roots.

Controlling the developments across Russia's 11 time zones is an increasing challenge for the centralized government. (President Dmitry Medvedev is adamant about retaining the system of unelected governors, but one of his recent proposals was to reduce the number of Russian time zones.) It was easy for the Kremlin to gloss over governance flaws when it could throw money at problems. But those days are over. The organizers of the Kaliningrad protests have announced plans for another rally in March.

In the meantime, about a thousand people gathered last week in the southeastern city of Samara; calls for the resignation of Putin as well as the local governor were also heard.

Masha Lipman, editor of the Carnegie Moscow Center's Pro et Contra journal, writes a monthly column for The Post.

#13

Trade in “Bush Legs” for Jackson-Vanik

By Edward Lozansky

RussiaBlog.org, February 17, 2010

Back in 1974 Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson and Representative Charles Vanik introduced an amendment to a trade law with the purpose of punishing the Soviet Union and other communist countries for the denial of emigration rights to their citizens. At the time it was a justified decision, but in case someone forgot the evil empire has been gone since 1991. Unfortunately, for one of its former parts which never had any emigration restrictions, the Russian Federation, the Jackson-Vanik amendment remains in force. Strictly speaking, the amendment has been a dead letter since 1994 due to a ritual of annual Presidential waivers based on humiliating compliance reviews. Yet it continues to be a constant irritant in U.S.-Russia relations, and therefore should be repealed for good without further delay. It is easier said than done as both the Clinton and Bush administrations tried to get rid of this amendment but failed miserably since the U.S. Congress has the authority to act and refuses to go along.

It is pretty ironic, if not pathetic, that one of the most important stumbling blocks on the way to the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment are innocent American chickens or “Bush legs,” as they call them in Russia. I am not talking, of course, about these pretty little birds but about one of the most powerful U.S. lobbies called the “Chicken Lobby” or “Big Chicken.” This lobby helps producers sell as much poultry as possible, but as in any trade there are some periodical disputes between the exporters and importers. In normal circumstances, such disputes should be handled through standard commercial negotiation processes. However, “Big Chicken” uses its enormous influence and puts pressure on Congress and the administration to highly politicize this trade and block Russia’s graduation from Jackson-Vanik unless it buys huge poultry volumes.

As former U.S. Secretary of State Collin Powell was once quoted: “The current point of tension between the United States and Russia is not the arms race but Russian barriers to American poultry imports. I am more worried about chickens than missiles going back and forth.”

Another important individual who was and probably still is involved in this issue is none other than VP Joe Biden. On the one hand, Joe Biden recently called for the forceful “reset” in U.S.-Russia relations. However, before moving to the White House, Biden was a senator from the state of Delaware which happens to be a major poultry producer. Therefore, his geopolitical instincts have been to a large extent concentrated on chicken exports. Since Russia occasionally balked at importing “Bush Legs,” Biden threatened retaliation like opposing the lifting of the Jackson-Vanik amendment or blocking Russia’s entrance to WTO.

Of course, the chicken lobbyists are smart enough to use more sophisticated rhetoric saying that today’s Russia is not a fully democratic state, and therefore it is not ready for graduation from Jackson-Vanik. Why in this case did the Congress vote for the repeal of this law for China which is certainly not a beacon of democracy?

The 2010 New Year brings about another chicken war since the announced ban on the import to Russia of poultry meat treated with chlorine came into force on January 1. According to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, “such ban is capable of negatively affecting Washington-Moscow relations.”

Tempers are rising as Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin himself warned the United States that Russia could find other poultry suppliers if U.S. companies fail to meet the country’s sanitary requirements.

Leaving the technical issues aside, I believe Russia now has a good chance to do away with Jackson-Vanik once and for all. Moscow should simply turn the tables and send a message to “Big Chicken” through Tom Vilsack or some other source that if they want to sell poultry to Russia they should lobby the Congress to repeal Jackson-Vanik. We will have to see who blinks first, but the “Big Chicken” lobbying track record definitely proves that it can easily handle the job.

Recall how the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a rule in July 2008 that severely limited antibiotic use in hatcheries. The aim, according to the FDA, was to restrict the use of a class of antibiotics due to fears that misuse on farms reduced the antibiotics’ effectiveness for humans. The American Medical Association, the World Health Organization, and many public health agencies around the world applauded this announcement and were delighted

that their concerns had finally been heard. To their huge disappointment, after "Big Chicken" stepped in and three weeks before the ban was to go into effect, FDA policymakers suddenly abandoned their own ruling and you know why.

Comparing this heavy duty FDA lobbying with the repeal of the outlived and now worthless Jackson-Vanik amendment, the latter should be considered a piece of cake. We are talking here about almost a billion dollar trade deal, and one can be sure that poultry producers will cough up the cash for lobbyists. And everyone will be happy, except the consumers, including Americans, who will have to continue digesting the unhealthy stuff, but this is another story.

Edward Lozansky is president of American University in Moscow.

#14

High Court in Ukraine Weighs Appeal on Election

By Clifford J. Levy

New York Times, February 18, 2010

MOSCOW — A high court in Ukraine began Wednesday to consider Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko's request to overturn the results of the country's presidential election, which she narrowly lost.

While it hears her appeal, the court will temporarily suspend the official declaration of victory for Viktor F. Yanukovich, the opposition leader. The move was considered a formality, and the court did not postpone or cancel Mr. Yanukovich's inauguration, scheduled for Feb. 25.

The court, the Higher Administrative Court in Kiev, will probably rule by the weekend on the validity of the Feb. 7 election.

Ms. Tymoshenko lost by 3.48 percentage points, according to official results announced by the Central Election Commission on Sunday.

On Saturday, Ms. Tymoshenko announced that she would not concede, and declared that Mr. Yanukovich's campaign had stolen the election by engaging in widespread fraud.

She said that while she would challenge the election legally, she would not organize mass protests like those that occurred during the 2004 Orange Revolution, which she helped lead.

Mr. Yanukovich's aides have described her accusations as false and desperate. European election monitors praised the election, saying that it was fair and represented an important step forward for Ukraine's democracy. President Obama and other world leaders have already congratulated Mr. Yanukovich for his victory.

While the judicial system in Ukraine can be unpredictable, analysts have said the odds are against Ms. Tymoshenko's overturning the election. They said she was going to court to send a message to her supporters that she would not easily give in.

She may also be seeking leverage to negotiate with Mr. Yanukovich over whether she will be able to remain prime minister. She has rebuffed his call that she resign.

#15

Ukrainian election results suspended on appeal

By Yuras Karmanau

AP, February 17, 2010

KIEV, Ukraine - Ukraine's presidential election results giving the victory to Russia-friendly Viktor Yanukovich were suspended Wednesday pending review of his rival's appeal.

Ukraine's Administrative Court said it would rule on Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's appeal by Feb. 25, when lawmakers had planned to inaugurate Yanukovich.

Tymoshenko has refused to concede, claiming the election was tainted by fraud. Instead of stepping down as Yanukovich prodded her, Tymoshenko ordered her Cabinet to work out a plan for economic reform for the next five years.

Tymoshenko also attacked her rival on another front, launching consultations in parliament to derail Yanukovich's inauguration set for next week. Her campaign chief, Alexander Turchinov, said Wednesday that Tymoshenko's faction in parliament will introduce a motion to postpone the ceremony.

Until the ruling on her appeal, the court said, it was suspending the Central Election Commission's declaration that Yanukovich had won the Feb. 7 vote by just 3.5 percentage points.

On Tuesday, Tymoshenko delivered what she said was evidence to the court, and urged a full re-count of the vote.

She asked her supporters, however, not to hold street demonstrations - as they did in what became known as the 2004 Orange Revolution.

Those pro-Western mass protests led to a court's overturning Yanukovich's presidential election victory that year and ordering a rerun, which was won by Tymoshenko ally Viktor Yushchenko.

It was unclear how strong Tymoshenko's case in the appeal may be or whether the court would be likely to give it credence. Some Ukrainian court decisions are seen as influenced by politics more than by evidence.

International observers have deemed Ukraine's latest election free and fair, dealing a blow to her chances. President Barack Obama and other leaders have already congratulated Yanukovich.

#16

Police Struggle With Bad Reputation

By Alexander Bratersky

Moscow Times, February 17, 2010

Having studied foreign literature and worked as a schoolteacher, Yekaterina made a drastic career change four years ago: She became a cop.

Inspired by her brother, a Moscow homicide detective, she was full of idealism when she joined the force.

"I came here to fight for justice," Yekaterina, 26, said in a recent interview during her night shift at a local precinct.

These days, however, Yekaterina, a police detective in northern Moscow, prefers to hide what she does for a living. When she heads home at night, she dons a jacket to conceal her police uniform.

"I don't want to hear people talking about how corrupt we are," she said.

It would seem difficult for the reputation of the country's police force to get any worse. Public opinion polls show that police are among the country's least trusted institutions, and incidents of police corruption and brutality are reported in the media almost daily.

President Dmitry Medvedev last month ordered Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev to implement serious reforms to weed out corruption and assuage public concerns over police abuses.

But Yekaterina and several other current and former police officers say top officials' ability and desire to conduct meaningful reform are negligible. The system of rewards in place is so perverse, and salaries so meager, that even good cops have to cheat and take bribes in order to make ends meet, they say.

In response to Medvedev's order, Nurgaliyev issued a directive late last month that he claimed would eliminate a ministry-wide system of promotions and pay raises based on officers' clearance rates. The system rewards officers for a high percentage of solved crimes, providing little motivation for tackling hard-to-solve cases and encouraging officers to fabricate charges, experts say.

Subsequent analyses of the directive, however, suggest that the notorious evaluation system was left largely intact. In an online survey of 700 police officers conducted by the independent Moscow Police Trade Union, 90 percent said the directive was almost identical to a similar Nurgaliyev order from 2005.

"The system works for statistical purposes, so the daily life of a police officer is to push the statistical points higher, but not to solve actual crimes," said Yevgeny Vyshenkov, a former St. Petersburg police detective and current deputy head of the Agency of Journalistic Investigations in the northern capital.

One case described by Andrei, a Moscow beat cop who spoke on condition of anonymity, highlights the petty bureaucratic manipulations that police often undertake to improve their job performance on paper.

A woman came to him once claiming that she had been robbed while waiting on the platform for a commuter train, Andrei said. He told her to file the complaint with police in another district because it was outside his jurisdiction.

But later that day, Andrei said, he and his partner nabbed two thieves who, it turned out, had the woman's cell phone. The suspects confessed to robbing the woman, and her possessions were returned to her.

Andrei says he then told the woman to file a complaint claiming that she was robbed in his district, thereby allowing him and his colleague to chalk up a solved crime.

"As a citizen, I knew that what I was doing was wrong," Andrei said. "But [for my career], it was correct."

Police officers say their profession forces them to commit more serious crimes as well. Taking bribes, they say, is a matter of survival. An average Moscow policeman earns about 20,000 rubles (\$660) a month with minimal benefits, despite regularly working long hours and weekends.

"There are still some people who enter the service with romantic notions, but all of them get a fast reality check," said Igor, who joined the Moscow police force in 1987.

Like other police officers interviewed for this report, Igor spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

There was prestige in police work during Soviet times, with officers earning decent wages and receiving perks for good performance, Igor said.

"I knew that after 33 years in the service I would be able to get an apartment from the state and a small piece of land," he said, adding that such rewards were scrapped long ago.

There was, of course, corruption at various levels of the Soviet Interior Ministry as well, but Soviet police officers were generally scared to take bribes for fear of being caught by the KGB, which oversaw the ministry, Igor said.

Another Moscow police official said the current police leadership would not carry out serious reforms because the financial stakes are so high.

"In just one district of Moscow, a traffic policeman can bring his superiors 500,000 rubles (\$16,000) a month," the official said.

The country's traffic police is widely seen as the most corrupt division of the Interior Ministry. Last week, 19 traffic cops were detained in a Federal Security Service sting in Astrakhan for extorting bribes from drivers over the course of three years.

"A traffic police officer takes bribes to earn money for his family, because he sees the person driving a Mercedes as someone who makes his money easily, while he struggles to make ends meet," one Moscow policeman said.

Several prominent politicians and rights activists have suggested that completely dismantling the Interior Ministry and rebuilding the police force from scratch is the only solution to the endemic corruption.

Top officials have dismissed such categorical proposals, but Medvedev did order Nurgaliyev to slash ministry personnel by 20 percent.

"It will help us raise salaries and establish normal conditions for police officers to perform their duties," Nurgaliyev told reporters late last year.

But many experts and police officers fear that the cuts will affect only policemen on the ground, leaving the ministry's enormous bureaucracy untouched.

"Our system is established in a such a way that ... it would hit the low rank-and-file to preserve the bosses' chairs," one blogger, who claims to be a 48-year-old senior police officer, wrote on the Moscow Police Trade Union's web site.

Meanwhile, cases of police abuse and corruption continue to pile up nationwide, even ones involving erstwhile heroes.

It was Moscow policeman Roman Potyomkin who overpowered fellow officer Denis Yevsyukov last April after Yevsyukov went on a shooting rampage at a local supermarket, killing two shoppers and injuring seven.

Yevsyukov is currently on trial for murder at the Moscow City Court, where Potyomkin recently testified against the officer.

Currently in custody on extortion charges, Potyomkin appeared in the courtroom in handcuffs.

"An ordinary policeman," said Igor, a 20-year veteran of the Moscow force. " ... Today he saves lives, tomorrow he is caught for committing a crime himself."

#17

Ukraine's outgoing president warns of turn East AP, February 16, 2010

KIEV, Ukraine - Outgoing President Viktor Yushchenko said Tuesday the policies of his newly elected successor risk turning Ukraine back into a Kremlin vassal state.

Yushchenko made the statements, some of his harshest against President-elect Viktor Yanukovich, at a news conference nine days before he is due hand over power.

"The victory of Yanukovich is a Kremlin project. It is a policy of deep dependence on Russia," Yushchenko said.

Yushchenko was the leader of mass street protests in 2004 against Yanukovich's Kremlin-backed election victory that year. Dubbed the Orange Revolution, those demonstrations urged the Supreme Court to overturn Yanukovich's fraudulent win and call for a revote, which Yushchenko won.

Since then, Yanukovich has capitalized on Yushchenko's ineffectual rule, the slow progress of European integration, and the economic meltdown of the past year. He won the presidential ballot Feb. 7 against the heroine of the Orange Revolution, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

Yushchenko saved particular venom for Yanukovich's plans to give Russia a stake in managing Ukraine's natural gas pipelines and to extend the lease Russia has on a Black Sea naval base.

"It is painful and demeaning for me to hear these pledges. It discredits us as a nation, as Ukrainians," Yushchenko told a sparsely attended briefing, appearing dejected but calm.

Yushchenko has fought bitterly to kick out Russia's Black Sea fleet, which he sees as a threatening military presence on Ukrainian soil. He called Yanukovich's pledge to allow the fleet to stay a "policy of being colonized."

In a statement, Yanukovich responded to Yushchenko's attack with a pledge to pursue a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy.

"I can only say one thing to anyone who expects my presidency to weaken Ukraine - don't count on it," Yanukovich said.

#18
Ukraine Will Be a Bridge Between East and West
We are a nation with a European identity, but we have historic cultural and economic ties to Russia as well.
We can benefit from both.
By Viktor Yanukovich
Wall Street Journal Europe, February 17, 2010

Over the past month, Ukraine has demonstrated twice that it cherishes the values of democracy and the belief that it is important for people to vote. Ukraine's presidential election was validated by all of the major international observer groups as free, fair and transparent, which attested to the Ukrainian people's resolve for a democratic election. The people of Ukraine desired change and their voices were heard. Now we have the great responsibility to help our fellow countrymen, who have cast votes for me hoping for a better life.

This election was defined by a financial and economic crisis that has devastated our country. Before the global economic crisis, Ukraine was one of Europe's top emerging markets, and economic prosperity did not seem beyond our reach in the near term. Now all that has changed, and the people demanded change in the way our Government works in Ukraine.

We must still put an end to the political turmoil that has crippled Ukraine and held our country hostage for so long. I will work ardently to do this as president. The only way that this can be accomplished is for the top political forces and their leaders, immediately after the presidential election results have been declared and certified, to avoid confrontation and unite for the sake of saving our country. We are a nation capable of great things but we will accomplish none of them if we continue to bicker among ourselves and ignore the enormous challenges that we must confront.

Let me say here, a Yanukovich presidency is committed to the integration of European values in Ukraine. Ukraine should make use of its geopolitical advantages and become a bridge between Russia and the West. Developing a good relationship with the West and bridging the gap to Russia will help Ukraine. We should not be forced to make the false choice between the benefits of the East and those of the West. As president I will endeavor to build a bridge between both, not a one-way street in either direction. We are a nation with a European identity, but we have historic cultural and economic ties to Russia as well. The re-establishment of relations with the Russian Federation is consistent with our European ambitions. We will rebuild relations with Moscow as a strategic economic partner. There is no reason that good relations with all of our neighbors cannot be achieved.

If we hope to become a bridge between two important spheres we cannot merely talk and make promises; we must deliver concrete policies and achieve real progress. If we hope to join the European Union we must secure political

stability and establish ourselves as an economically viable nation. We must be pragmatic and focused to achieve EU membership. We must create transparent policies that allow our economy to thrive and demonstrate that Ukraine will add value to the EU as a new member state.

I am committed to conducting a policy that would strengthen our links with respected international financial institutions, and increase our standing in the world economic community. My election program, "Ukraine for the People," is a deep and comprehensive plan that clearly specifies how to achieve social and economic progress. It is not an easy task. We will be confronted with the same conflicts as Europe and Washington have faced-how to stimulate our economy to create jobs while not decreasing the social protections needed by our citizens. We must defeat corruption, which has become rampant over the last several years and has damaged our ability to attract foreign investment.

If we hope to join the EU and raise the standard of living of Ukrainians to that of other European nations, we must restore our economy from within. There are three fundamental objectives the Ukrainian economy must achieve in order to thrive: First, we must create jobs; second, we must stabilize prices so people can afford the necessities that they need to live; and third, we must ensure our citizens receive adequate wages and pensions. Giving our citizens a basic economic foundation is a critical first step to restoring the broken bond between the people and the government of Ukraine.

And so that is my agenda-to restore economic vitality and calm the political turbulence that has plagued our nation; to enable Ukraine to take advantage of its natural positioning as a thriving bridge between Russia and the West; and finally, to prepare a free and open Ukraine, economically and politically, to join the European Union when the time comes.

Ukraine is a beautiful country with hard-working and virtuous people who ask only for a chance at a better life. I know that if we can come together, we will achieve great things. As president, I plan to give Ukrainians the nation they deserve-a Ukraine for the people.

Mr. Yanukovych is president-elect of Ukraine.

#19

Ukraine's Election: No Change We Can Entirely Believe In

By Wayne Merry

American Foreign Policy Council, February 16, 2010

The best commentary on Ukraine's presidential election outcome I have heard is from a colleague with lots of experience in the country and region: For ten years, Ukraine has been a disappointment to the West; now it is Russia's turn.

Many commentators think Moscow somehow "won" in Ukraine. Certainly, Russian interests did not lose, but that would have been the case with Tymoshenko. Some tangible Russian goals may be advanced, but in general, the Russian leadership may come to appreciate why there is so much "Ukraine fatigue" in Washington, in Brussels and other European capitals.

First, Ukraine is a mess. It inherited all the problems of other former Soviet states. Its demographics are, amazingly, even worse than Russia's. Agriculture still suffers the legacy of collectivization; industry remains pretty much the step child of central planning; infrastructure is (how else can one put it?) Soviet. Ukraine is the most energy inefficient economy (BTUs per unit GDP) on Earth. Certainly, there have been many positive changes in the past couple of decades, but like Belarus, Moldova and Russia itself, Ukraine suffers from seven decades of catastrophic bad policies. The political crisis of the past five years since the so-called "Orange Revolution" has seen progress in some important areas (legitimate elections are not small potatoes in that part of the world), but inertia pretty much across the board. Not an exciting time to be young and Ukrainian.

Next, Yanukovich will hardly be a strong leader and will need to compromise all the time just to maintain some kind of coalition in the Rada. Yanukovich pretty much came back from the political dead of four years ago, but he owes

many people for his resurrection, and they will want the debts paid, big time. Politics in Kyiv may be more effective than in recent years (how could they be worse?), but this is nothing like the kind of new start and new authority which Putin exercised ten years ago. In any case, Yanukovich is not Putin. He has lost some weight and got a better wardrobe, but he is still nobody's idea of an inspiring leader. He is smart enough, however, to know he must not be overly and overtly in Moscow's pocket. He remembers how former President Leonid Kuchma confounded expectations by maintaining a balance between Europe and Russia, and almost certainly will do likewise.

Then, the fact remains that most Ukrainians - even those who speak only Russian - want Ukraine to remain independent of Russia both in name and in fact. Those in Moscow who envision a voluntary anschluss are dreaming. Even the big eastern Ukrainian oligarchs who bankrolled Yanukovich think of themselves as European, and certainly do not want to be junior-league Russian oligarchs. These guys have their luxury properties in Vienna, London and the south of France, and want acceptance of themselves and their country as part of Europe broadly defined, and not as provincial Russia.

Moscow can take gratification on some things.

First, Viktor Yushchenko has exited the political stage. In recent years, the departing Ukrainian president has alienated all but his most stalwart supporters, and provoked rumors that the poison which disfigured his face also damaged his mind. The man has long had something of a messiah complex, but his behavior became not only erratic but profoundly damaging for the most basic interests of his country. In the first round of the presidential election, Yushchenko had traction only in areas which had once been Hapsburg. Indeed, his conduct had come to resemble that of Charles II, the last of the Spanish Hapsburgs. If Yanukovich has anyone to thank for his fairly narrow second-round victory, it is Yushchenko.

Second, NATO membership for Ukraine is a dead issue for years to come, but in reality it already was because the people of the country decisively do not want it. It may very well come to pass that Ukrainian cooperation with NATO within Partnership for Peace may increase, as the question of MAP status is now off the table. Certainly, Ukraine will pursue the best ties it can get with the European Union, enjoying the advantage of WTO membership (still on the horizon for Russia).

Third, a base deal on Sevastopol which meets Russia's requirements is likely, but the broader question of Crimea remains, and this is a question on which no Ukrainian leader can compromise.

Finally, elections change politicians but not underlying realities. The Ukraine which emerged from the Soviet collapse is the widest country in Europe, both in geography and in political culture. Any government in Kyiv with good sense must balance not only the country's external west/east orientation but its internal west/central/south/east composition. Ukraine ultimately can never again belong to Russia because Russia has lost its legitimacy as Slavic hegemon. Neither can Ukraine belong to the Europe of the EU because it remains part of the eastern Slavic world with its legacy of Soviet and pre-Soviet history. The proper task of the new Ukrainian leadership is to ameliorate the burdens of its inhabitants rather than to play (or be played) in geo-strategic games. Moscow may find a less adversarial Ukraine is still more liability than asset.

#20

Russia signs deal to build military base in Abkhazia

By Denis Dyomkin

Reuters, February 17, 2010

MOSCOW - Russia and the Georgian rebel region of Abkhazia signed a deal on Wednesday allowing Moscow to build a military base on its soil, increasing its dependence on its sponsor and stoking tensions with Tbilisi.

The base will accommodate at least 3,000 Russian land troops, already stationed in the Black Sea territory, for at least 49 years, Abkhaz officials said.

"This agreement creates a foundation for the development of Abkhazia as an independent state", said Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, flanked by Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh, at a signing ceremony in the Great Kremlin Palace.

Moscow recognized Abkhazia in August 2008 after crushing an assault by U.S. ally Georgia on the other pro-Russian breakaway region of South Ossetia in a five-day war.

The regions, which broke away from Georgia in bloody wars in the early 1990s, are almost completely dependent on Russia. Both use the Russian rouble and Moscow has issued most residents with Russian passports.

The new base is one of several that Russia plans to build in the sliver of land, which is near NATO member Turkey, in the near future. The others are for airborne troops and the navy.

Georgia has decried the plans for a land base as illegal and called it part of Moscow's "occupation" campaign.

In April 2009, Russia formally took control over the de-facto borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, provoking condemnation from Western powers.

The European Union and Western alliance NATO have repeatedly expressed concern that a Moscow-led military build-up in Abkhazia threatens Georgia's territorial integrity.

It is also watched with unease by Western powers for its proximity to crucial energy routes which flow to the EU.

Russia also installed land, air and naval troops in the rebel region of 200,000, and started work on several bases which are yet to be completed, causing NATO and the United States to call the moves a violation of international law.

Medvedev said the base would not violate Russia's international obligations.

#21

Netanyahu lobbies Russians for ancient Hebrew texts

By Noah Kosharek

Haaretz, February 17, 2010

Israel's desire to retrieve the historic Guenzberg collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts from Russia was discussed during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting on Monday with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

Israeli officials said afterward that due to the improved relations between Jerusalem and Moscow, Russian officials will "positively consider" Israel's request.

Netanyahu personally raised the subject of the collection, which is thought to be the world's second-largest anthology of ancient Hebrew literature, after the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Aides to the prime minister also presented the Russians with documents proving ownership of the collection, Haaretz has learned.

The Guenzbergs, a Russian-Jewish noble family, acquired their collection over three generations beginning in the 1840s.

The collection includes 14,000 books, 45 incunabula (books published in the 14th century, at the start of the printing era), more than 2,000 Hebrew manuscripts and 1,000 Arabic manuscripts.

Following the death of Baron David Guenzberg in 1910, Zionist activists, among them Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, sought to retrieve the collection and arrange for its relocation to prestate Israel. In May 1917, the Russians agreed to sell the collection to the Jewish National and University Library for a sum of half a million rubles.

The purchase was made possible by contributions from Russian Zionists.

But after the money had already been paid and the collection was packaged and ready for shipment, World War I erupted, delaying the shipment.

Bolshevik expropriation

Shortly afterward, the Bolshevik Revolution engulfed Russia. The newly installed Soviet authorities then expropriated the collection and placed it on display at the V.I. Lenin State Library in Moscow.

Two years ago, the issue was revisited mainly because negotiations over the Sergei building in Jerusalem, which was built circa 1890 adjacent to the Russian Compound, were in an advanced stage. The building was named for Prince Sergei, heir to Czar Nicholas II, who was executed by the Bolshevik revolutionaries.

The Russian government has long demanded ownership of the building, and talks over the transfer of ownership were completed last year, to the Russians' satisfaction.

But in return for transferring the building to Russian ownership, officials at the Jewish National and University Library urged the government to demand that Moscow relinquish the Guenzberg collection.