



Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 13, 2019

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Daniel Rubin, Chairman;
Aleksander Smukler, President;
Mark B. Levin, Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO**

Dear Friend,

In a region known for its frozen and intractable conflicts, a rare instance of agreement occurred on Saturday – when Moscow and Kyiv participated in a prisoner exchange. The move, long called for by Western governments, set free 35 prisoners on each side – including the 24 Ukrainian sailors captured by Russia in November of last year during Russia’s blockade of the Kerch Strait. Among those handed over to Moscow was Volodymyr Tsemakh, suspected of involvement in downing a Malaysia Airlines flight over rebel-held east Ukraine in 2014 that killed all 298 aboard. In a positive development for Kyiv, Washington has lifted its hold on \$250 million in military assistance to Ukraine following intense bipartisan backlash from lawmakers who argued that the funding is crucial for warding off Russian aggression in the region. This comes after reports last month from Politico that President Trump requested his security team to review funding for the program.

More unusual news in the region came from Moscow on Sunday, when approximately 1/3rd of Putin’s United Russia party lost their seats in the Russian capital’s local election – despite some of the opposition candidates being barred from running. Such a dramatic shift in Moscow local politics has not been seen since the elections of 1990 – when the communist party firmly lost its grip on the city. The elections represent a small victory for Russian democratic and civil society activists and is evidence that the consecutive protests that occurred in Moscow throughout the summer had an impact on the public’s attitude towards opposition candidates. As it stands now, opposition candidates hold 20 of the 45 seats in the Duma – with Putin’s United Russia holding a thin majority with the remaining 25. In comparison, the party won 28 seats in 2014 plus 10 more from independent candidates that it backed. It is expected the opposition members will push for the release of those who were detained during this summer’s protests.

Netanyahu traveled to the Black Sea Resort to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russian-speaking voters in Israel comprise a considerable portion of the vote in the country. Putin is positive towards Israel, whose 1.5 million post-Soviet immigrants are seen as ‘compatriots’ in Moscow’s view. Russia and Israel see their close diplomatic ties as a means to prevent unnecessary military escalation in a region known for its unpredictability. This is the 13th meeting between the leaders since 2015.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
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Russia And Ukraine Conduct Prisoner Exchange, Renewing Hopes For Talks

Samantha Raphelson

NPR, September 7, 2019

Russia and Ukraine conducted a major prisoner swap on Saturday that released 70 people who had been imprisoned in both countries, a deal aimed at easing tensions sparked by Russia's 2014

annexation of Crimea.

While several obstacles still stand in the way of peace negotiations between the two countries, the exchange renews hopes that Moscow and Kiev will hold talks. France and Germany have been working behind the scenes to make such a summit happen.

[Read the full article here.](#)

US pulled top spy from Russia due to fear Trump would leak info on him — report

Michael Bachner

Times of Israel, September 9, 2019

The United States in 2017 successfully pulled one of its top spies inside the Russian government from the country, after US intelligence officials were alarmed by President Donald Trump discussing highly classified information on a secret Israeli mission in Syria with Russian officials, CNN reports, citing multiple Trump administration officials.

The report says the then-CIA director told other officials that too much information was being shared by Trump regarding the covert source. The spy was extracted in a complex mission after it was determined he was in danger.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Russia exhibit to showcase medieval Jewish life in Afghanistan

TOI Staff

Times of Israel, September 9, 2019

When Westerners think of Afghanistan, if they do at all, the mental picture evoked by decades of news coverage is of a remote, desolate and war-ravaged land.

However, during the 9th to 11th centuries, the region was booming, being at the time an integral part of the Silk Road trading route connecting Europe and China.

The region featured a thriving Jewish community whose history is chronicled in a series of documents collectively known as the Afghan Geniza, which are set to go on display this week at St. Petersburg's famous Hermitage museum.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The Kremlin Won - and Proved It Can't Win Fair

Leonid Bershidsky

Bloomberg, September 9, 2019

Sunday's local elections in a spate of Russian regions, including the country's two biggest cities, showed that there's no way to beat a cardsharp while playing by the rules. Moscow's summer of protest ended with the pro-Kremlin party, United Russia, commanding a comfortable majority in the city council and some activists beginning prison terms. But the tension under the surface is still there, especially in Moscow. The undeniable message for the Kremlin was that people in the city that sealed the Soviet Union's fate in 1991 are tired of its methods.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Kremlin Says Reported U.S. Spy in Russian President's Office Was Fired Years Ago

Reuters

Haaretz, September 10, 2019

The Kremlin on Tuesday played down U.S. media reports of a CIA spy inside Russia's presidential

administration, calling them "pulp fiction", but said a low-level official who Russian media suggested was the agent had worked there before being fired.

CNN reported on Monday that the United States had successfully extracted one of its highest-level covert sources inside Russia in 2017. The New York Times later said the informant had sent secrets to Washington for decades.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Lukashenka, Bolton and Russia's Double-Headed Eagle

Grigory Ioffe

Jamestown Foundation, September 9, 2019

United States National Security Advisor John Bolton's visit to Minsk was preceded, accompanied and followed by an unprecedented number of commentaries in Belarus and Russia. For the most part, however, they constitute a self-contained phenomenon. That is, the respective publications hardly cast any light on the visit. Rather, they are reflective of whose feathers have been ruffled the most.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukraine and Russia Are Finally Ready to Talk Peace

Leonid Bershidsky

Bloomberg, September 9 2019

Russia and Ukraine finally made a major exchange of prisoners on Saturday, and two names on the list make it clear that the trade sets up substantive negotiations on the future of eastern Ukraine.

Pro-Russian separatists, who hold a substantial part of eastern Ukraine (also known as the Donbas), have been battling the Kyiv government for more than five years. The two sides traded 35 prisoners each; their reception in the two countries on Saturday couldn't have been more different. The Ukrainians were met at the Kyiv airport by an emotional crowd of relatives and journalists - and by President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, whose bodyguards were pushed aside during the chaotic scene. In Moscow, Ukraine's former prisoners, of whom 13 were Ukrainian citizens and the rest Russians, were bused away without ceremony; some of them face months of intelligence debriefings.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Transitional justice in Ukraine: What if the war was over?

Iryna Matviyishyn

New Eastern Europe, September 11 2019

In July 2019, a united coalition of human rights organizations and experts, Human Rights Agenda, presented 13 steps for the new parliament to protect human rights in Ukraine. The list of challenges, unfulfilled by the previous government, includes an abstract on "the national model of Transitional Justice" (TJ). A rather new concept in Ukraine, TJ is set of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to redress human rights abuses in a post-conflict society. It includes prosecution of the guilty, truth-seeking, reparations for victims, and institutional reforms. Although the Russia-provoked war in the Donbas is ongoing, human rights experts assure that it is high time to address conflict-related problems that have arisen in Ukraine.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Russia Raids Offices and Homes of Navalny Allies

Andrew Higgins

NY Times, September 12, 2019

MOSCOW — In a nationwide crackdown to prevent discontent in Moscow from spreading to far-flung regions, Russian security forces on Thursday raided and searched hundreds of homes and offices of

activists across the country who were affiliated with the opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny.

The raids, the biggest operation yet against Mr. Navalny and his supporters, were carried out in more than 40 cities and towns as part of a criminal money-laundering investigation announced in August by the authorities against his Anti-Corruption Foundation. The foundation has been the vanguard of recent street protests in Moscow that led to the arrests of more than 2,000 people.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Putin's Star Is Fading

Leonid Ragozin

Politico, September 11, 2019

For democracy activists in Russia, the real victory this week isn't that Vladimir Putin's party performed so poorly in Sunday's Moscow city council election.

That's just a consequence of a far more important change in the country: the shattering of a feeling of helplessness in the face of the government's authority.

In Russia, conformism is the safest course for a vast majority of people. "Initiative shall be punished," went a popular Soviet-era saying.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Trump administration backs off hold on Ukraine military aid

CAITLIN EMMA, JACQUELINE FELDSCHER, WESLEY MORGAN and CONNOR O'BRIEN

Politico, September 12, 2019

The Trump administration has lifted its hold on \$250 million in military assistance to Ukraine following intense bipartisan backlash from lawmakers who argued that the funding is crucial for warding off Russian aggression in the region.

POLITICO first reported last month that President Donald Trump asked his national security team to review funding for the program, known as the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, in order to ensure the money is being used in the best interests of the United States.

A senior administration official confirmed on Thursday that the funds are now available. The official didn't provide any information on the results of the administration's review.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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About NCSEJ

Founded in 1971, the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry represents the organized American Jewish community in monitoring and advocating on behalf of the estimated 1.5 million Jews in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, including the 15 successor states of the former Soviet Union.

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