

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 10, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: James Schiller, Chairman;
Mark B. Levin, Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO**

Dear Friend,

Shabbat Shalom!

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10 Washington, D.C. July 10, 2020

A shiva is seen around the world for former Foreign Service officer who died of covid-19

Joe Heim

The Washington Post | July 6, 2020

Wherever life took him, Martin Wenick wanted to know that place and the people who lived there. And as a career Foreign Service officer, life took him to many places. He was posted to Kabul, Prague, Moscow and Rome and visited dozens of other cities around the world. They were not simply locales to check off on a list; they were opportunities to make connections and form lasting friendships. Martin Wenick, 80, died of covid-19 in Washington on May 7.

“He was very interested in different cultures and people of all stripes,” said Alice Tetelman, his wife of 40 years. “He felt he was able to do some good in the world, and he was proud of representing the United States.”

Wenick died May 7 at age 80 of covid-19, the disease caused by the novel

coronavirus, at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, his wife said. At the shiva held via Zoom for Wenick, more than 200 friends and former colleagues from around the world took part, Tetelman said in a phone interview from the couple's home in the District's Cathedral Heights neighborhood.

[Read the full article here.](#)

How Putin pushed aside the oligarchs and made Russia his own **Anders Aslund** **The Washington Post | July 10, 2020**

In her deeply researched new book, Catherine Belton tells a dark tale of Vladimir Putin's rise to power and his 20 years as leader of Russia. Reading "Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West," we are reminded of how far we've come from the romantic days of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Western writers depicted a Russia full of hope and hints of freedom. We've also progressed far from the exhilarating but scary portrayals of the immensely rich oligarchs in the late 1990s who flocked around Boris Yeltsin and his family.

In Belton's view, freedom, private enterprise and liberalism simply don't exist in Russia. To her, Putin's Russia is all gloom. She details how Putin's nefarious efforts took shape with others in St. Petersburg and its seaport, an area that "became ground zero for an alliance between the KGB and organized crime that was to expand its influence across Russia, and later into Western markets and institutions." She delves into territory explored by Russian historians Yuri Felshtinsky and Vladimir Pribylovsky in "The Corporation: Russia and the KGB in the Age of President Putin"; by opposition politicians Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Milov in their white paper, "Putin and Gazprom"; and by Karen Dawisha in "Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?" But Belton, a former Moscow correspondent for the Financial Times, digs deeper.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Two regional deputies from Russia's Khabarovsk Territory arrested on suspicion of embezzlement **Meduza | July 9, 2020**

Two deputies from the Khabarovsk Territory's Legislative Duma, Dmitry Kozlov and Sergey Kuznetsov, have been arrested on suspicion of fraud, reports RIA Novosti. Both deputies are members of the nominally opposition party LDPR. RIA Novosti's source said that the two deputies were arrested in connection with the criminal investigation launched against the Khabarovsk Territory's sitting governor, Sergey Furgal — who was arrested on Wednesday, July 8, on suspicion of orchestrating multiple murders between 2004 and 2005, as part of an alleged organized crime group.

That said, a source in law enforcement told TASS that the criminal case against Kozlov and Kuznetsov "is not yet linked" to Furgal's case.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Steady State: Russian Foreign Policy After Coronavirus **Dmitri Trenin, Eugene Rumer, and Andrew S. Weiss** **Carnegie Moscow Center | July 8, 2020**

The effects of the biggest pandemic and economic downturn of the twenty-first century are a crisis for all—and an opportunity for some. Any global crisis on this scale disrupts the existing global order and inescapably creates a new one. The forces that were losing out under the current system clearly see a chance to reshape the world more to their liking.

This volume seeks to assess some of the early lessons of the pandemic and how it will—or will not—impact Russian foreign policy. Enough time has passed to discern new realities as they are coming into view. But the forces of continuity are no less powerful.

Western democracies, as the prime beneficiaries of the current order, have long monopolized the right to make the rules on the basis that they value human lives and freedom more than the other competing systems. The rest of the world, for its part, expects that the leading countries would justify their right to leadership by demonstrating both their technological superiority and all of the advantages that open democratic societies enjoy as they organized the fight against the new coronavirus.

Yet it's precisely this moral basis for Western leadership that is being challenged most by the pandemic. Events on the ground no longer correspond to the simple division of the world into humane effective democracies on one side, and callous, inept authoritarian regimes on the other.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Belarusian spring? Politicisation of the wider society

Olga Dryndova

The New Eastern Europe | July 8, 2020

The presidential election, scheduled for August 9th, was not expected to be interesting in any meaningful way. Before a surprising boost of activity among citizens was observed in May – a record number (55) of initiative groups submitted applications to nominate candidates to the Central Election Commission. This is compared to just 15 in the previous elections in 2015. Ex-head of Belgazprombank, Viktor Babaryka, managed to recruit almost 9,000 volunteers for his group in only one week. President Lukashenka, with his huge administrative resources, was able to register about 11,000. Over 127,000 people were involved in collecting signatures for potential candidates across the country between May 21st and June 19th.

Unexpectedly, these four weeks became somewhat of a political 'reality show' for both Belarusians and those watching from abroad. Pictures and footage have circulated showing citizens representing social circles far beyond the classical opposition actively engaging with politics. This was made clear by unprecedented queues of people lining up to voice their support for «anybody but Lukashenka», both in the capital and regions. This was in spite of the ongoing pandemic, with many people making emotional appeals on camera asking the president to leave his post. Following the arrest of Babaryka, supposedly the most popular alternative candidate, "solidarity chains" were formed in many cities. Babaryka was leading online opinion polls carried out by the independent media with up to 56 per cent. However, the state Academy of Sciences quickly banned these unofficial surveys. No alternative polls have been made available so far.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Ukraine's 'Holocaust Disneyland'

Vladislav Davidzon

The Wall Street Journal | July 9, 2020

The territory of Ukraine was the site of countless horrors committed against the Jewish people under Nazi occupation. Yet the resource-strapped country lacks a major museum and memorial dedicated to the Holocaust. While an international initiative to create one began in 2016, the ambitious project is in disarray, with one critic calling it "Holocaust Disneyland."

For centuries Ukraine has constituted the historical homeland for much of European Jewry, and more than half of American Jews have roots in the region. An estimated...

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Moscow Declares Pause in Normandy Negotiations on Ukraine

Vladimir Socor

The Jamestown Foundation | July 9, 2020

Russia's presidential envoy for conflict-management in Ukraine, Dmitry Kozak, has unilaterally announced a pause in the Normandy negotiation process, pending "clarifications to Ukraine's positions." Kozak's announcements concluded and followed the "Normandy" meeting (Germany, France, Russia, Ukraine), held on July 3-4, in Berlin, at the level of diplomatic advisors to the four heads of state and government.

The Berlin meeting was held in spite of the coronavirus emergency and lasted 11 hours without breaks, apparently reflecting a sense of urgency on the part of Berlin, Paris and Kyiv (each from its own considerations) to energize the Normandy process. Moscow's envoy, Kozak, however, saw to it that the meeting failed to produce a concluding document or any decision by quadripartite consensus. Some concluding document is supposed to be coordinated among the four sides by telephone, at an unspecified later time. In Berlin, they only agreed on recommending to the Minsk Contact Group to discuss "additional ceasefire measures in the very near future [no deadline stated]" (Ukrinform, July 4; TASS, July 4, 8).

[Read the full article here.](#)

How Improved US-Russian Relations Could Weaken Putin's Case for Remaining in Kremlin Until 2036

Paul Saunders

RussiaMatters | July 8, 2020

Considering Russian President Vladimir Putin's stated preferences and Moscow's reputation for "managing" Russia's voting, it hardly seems surprising that the Central Election Commission (CEC) claimed an overwhelming level of public support for constitutional amendments that could allow Putin to remain in office until 2036. Though Putin may intend to rely on the results of the referendum to remain Russia's president indefinitely, the plebiscite first and foremost reinforces his present-day power, which is likely a more immediate concern for a leader approaching what would otherwise be the end of his final term. A more nuanced understanding of Putin's possible motives—and how the U.S could shape them in its policy toward Russia—could facilitate Russia's leadership transition rather than hinder it.

American media accounts of the voting have understandably though superficially emphasized Putin's longevity in power—including four terms as president and two stints as prime minister—and presume that he seeks to remain president until 2036, if not beyond. Some have pointed out that Putin is one of the world's longest-serving leaders, while others have noted for some time that he is the longest-serving Russian leader since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Though the latter comparison raises some questions about how to count Putin's four-and-a-half years as prime minister and, for that matter, the years before Stalin fully consolidated his rule, it does provide a useful yardstick in thinking about Putin's time in office. His next approaching milestone has a rather different symbolism, however; in roughly eighteen months, his tenure (including the asterisked years as prime minister) will surpass that of Russia's last emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, who reigned from 1894 until the Provisional Government took over shortly after Russia's February 1917 revolution. Bolshevik revolutionaries shot Nicholas II and his family nine months after the October 1917 Revolution, which established Soviet Russia and its Communist government. Though Russia does not appear to be nearing a comparable event, polls do demonstrate dissatisfaction with the authorities' conduct and the direction that the country is headed.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Polish President Rejects Jewish Property Claims Before Election

Marek Strzelecki

Bloomberg | July 8, 2020

Polish President Andrzej Duda said he'll never allow compensation for Jewish property lost in World War II as the controversial topic resurfaced just three days before the country's election.

Jewish organizations have for years called for a restitution law to return property of those who died in the Holocaust and left no heirs. Duda has said that descendants can seek compensation in courts, while rejecting suggestions that Poland should pay any damages for the historic wrongs of a war that began with Nazi Germany's invasion of its territory.

"There won't be any damages paid for heir-less property," Duda told tightly controlled state television on Thursday, when asked about the Jewish compensation issue. "I will never sign a law that will privilege any ethnic group vis-a-vis others. Damages should be paid by the one that started the war."

[Read the full article here.](#)

Lithuania picks the wrong man to honour

Laurence Weinbaum

The JC | July 10, 2020

The nineteenth-century French historian and orientalist Ernest Renan once observed that forgetfulness and historical error are crucial elements in the creation of a nation. To be sure, that observation has proven particularly relevant in the reborn nation states that emerged from the ruins of the Soviet empire.

This is especially so in the Baltics, which had enjoyed only a brief period of independence in the interwar years before their rapacious eastern neighbour gobbled them up whole. In June 1941, the equally rapacious Germans flushed the Red Army out, but by the summer of 1944, it was back.

Until the end of the 1980s when the first holes became visible in the Iron Curtain, there was little cause to believe that Moscow would ever loosen its vice-like grip on what were called in émigré circles “the captive nations.” Only a handful of octogenarian diplomats in exile continued to keep that flame of hope flickering, even as most of their compatriots at home had long since thrown in the towel and resigned themselves to life under Soviet suzerainty.

But then the unimaginable happened. The Soviet Union collapsed. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia could finally determine their own destiny and rejoin the family of nations. Within a short time, all three firmly embedded in Nato and the European Union. Had someone forecast such a turn of events in the 1980s, he or she would have been sent for a psychiatric examination.

However, the road to national rebirth, to say nothing of national renaissance, has been marred by an unremitting refusal on the part of these countries to confront the sinister chapters in their wartime history—and the ghosts that will never cease to haunt them until a final reckoning is achieved. Nowhere is this more evident than in Lithuania, once a mighty citadel of Jewish life and learning whose rabbis, scholars, and educational institutions were celebrated across the Jewish world

[Read the full article here.](#)

Diplomat Who Saved Jews During WWII Honored Sophie Panzer The Jewish Exponent | July 9, 2020

Carl Lutz saved more than 50,000 Jews from extermination during the Holocaust, but many people don't know his name.

The Mid-Atlantic - Eurasia Business Council held a virtual celebration on June 30 to honor the Swiss diplomat's life and educate audience members about his heroism.

“He was an exceptional person, who was able to grow in the most challenging circumstances,” said Val Kogan, president of MAEBC.

An in-person celebration was originally scheduled for Lutz's 125th birthday, March 30, but it was postponed until November due to the pandemic.

During the celebration, audience members viewed a 10-minute sneak peak of “Dangerous Diplomacy,” a new documentary about Lutz's life that is available to stream on Amazon Prime.

The film narrates the story of Lutz's career, starting with his immigration to the United States from Switzerland in 1912. He attended George Washington University and worked at the Swiss Legation in Washington, D.C., before he was appointed chancellor at the Swiss Consulate in Philadelphia.

During World War II, he moved to Budapest to work as the head of the Swiss Legation's Department of Foreign Interests, where he kept lines of communication open between nations and protected foreign citizens stranded in Hungary.

[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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