



Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 31, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

Several important events occurred this week. The House of Representatives passed an amendment introduced by Reps. Ted. Deutsch and Max Rose to the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill as part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021 that doubles the budget for the Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism in the State Department. NCSEJ strongly supports this legislation.

I was privileged to virtually attend a signing ceremony between the government of Uzbekistan and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum on the sharing and exchanging of archival material. This agreement further strengthens the ongoing relationship between the Uzbek Archival Agency and museum.

On Thursday, the Department of State released a report to Congress under the Justice for Uncompensated Survivors (JUST) Act of 2017. The Act, adopted by Congress and signed into law by President Trump in May 2018 assesses the progress of 46 countries on restitution or compensation for property wrongfully seized during the Holocaust.

NCSEJ, as a member of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), supported the passage of the JUST Act. We continue to work closely with WJRO and the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues at the State Department to pursue justice for Holocaust survivors. [Please see the link to WJRO's press release](#) and statements from [Members of Congress](#) on [the release of the report](#).

On Wednesday, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Yankel Bleich addressed our weekly webinar on the current situation of the Jewish community in Ukraine. He also discussed the controversy surrounding the proposed museum at Babyn Yar, a recent anti-Semitic incident in Mariupol, and U.S.-Ukraine relations.

Finally, this weekend my mother Betty Levin will be celebrating her 100th birthday. Our family had planned a special evening but had to cancel due to the coronavirus. Instead we will be social distancing and zooming like so many other families today.

My mother was born during the end of the last pandemic to ravage the United States. She lived through the Depression and World War II and like so many of her generation propelled our country to unprecedented heights. Betty believes in fairness and equality for all. In many ways she was ahead of her time — a mother of four who worked full time. She actually worked until the age of 92 and would still be doing the books at a relative's business if her physical challenges had not become so great. My mother is truly a remarkable woman, who I admire, respect and love.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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**NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
Washington, D.C. July 31 2020**

Guard at Ukrainian synagogue fends off ax-wielding attacker
TOI Staff
Times of Israel | July 28, 2020

A man armed with an ax burst into a synagogue in southeastern Ukraine on Tuesday morning and was disarmed and chased away by the security guard. The attempted attack in Mariupol during the morning prayers was captured by the synagogue's security cameras.

A rabbi and several worshipers were inside the building at the time, according to the Jewish News of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine. The report did not specify if the guard suffered injuries.

In footage of the attack, the security guard can be seen wrestling with the attacker for control of the ax. The two exchange blows before the attacker finally runs off emptyhanded.

He then returns, hurls the contents of a sack, and walks off. According to the report, he threw feces, sand and other materials at the synagogue.

[Read the full article here.](#)

What Is Russia's Vagner Paramilitary Group And What Was It Doing In Belarus Ahead Of Vote? **Radio Svoboda | July 30, 2020**

When authorities in Belarus conducted a high-profile operation to detain some 33 suspected Russian mercenaries near Minsk on July 29, officials were quick to connect the incident with the country's August 9 presidential election.

The BelTA state news agency said the men -- and perhaps dozens more still at large -- were in Belarus to "destabilize the situation in the country ahead of the election."

But most analysts see an even more complex scenario being played out, one in which Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has found a convenient opportunity to discredit and contain a growing opposition movement and to exert even stricter control over an election in which the authoritarian ruler is seeking a sixth term as president.

A hastily organized meeting of some members of Belarus's Security Council on July 30 decided to impose stricter security measures at public events, a move that Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich said was aimed first of all at a planned opposition rally in Minsk set for July 31.

Security checkpoints will be set up and everyone will be thoroughly searched by police, Karbalevich said in an interview with Current Time, a Russian-language network led by RFE/RL in cooperation with VOA.

"This is all being done in order to sharply restrict the number of people attending the demonstration and to cut way back on the protest wave in general because the authorities are genuinely concerned about its scope," he said.

"This is a tactic in the election campaign that the authorities are using in order to cool the protest ardor," he concluded.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Cyber-enabled disinformation campaign targeted US-Poland alliance **Givi Gigitashvili** **The New Eastern Europe | July 29, 2020**

In April, Poland was targeted by a sophisticated disinformation attack that aimed to undermine Warsaw's relationship with the United States. Although the Polish government has not presented technical evidence or intelligence data to link the disruption with specific actors, Stanisław Żaryn, the spokesman for the country's 'Minister-Special Services', has argued that this particular operation corresponds closely with Russia's broader disinformation activities in Poland.

In light of the Kremlin's assertive foreign policy in post-Soviet space, Poland now views Russia as an "existential threat" to its security. Warsaw has sought to boost military ties with the United States in order to counterbalance this Russian threat. However, growing military cooperation between the US and Poland is perceived as a threat by the Kremlin, which strives to undermine the alliance. Against this backdrop, the timing of the cyberattack is significant. Since March, Poland has been hosting several thousand American soldiers as a part of the 'Defender Europe 20' military exercises, with major activities occurring throughout June. Although Defender Europe 20 was slated to be "the largest deployment of US-based forces to Europe in the more than 25 years," NATO reduced the size of trainings and rolled back some of its activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Long before the outbreak, however, Russia denounced these military exercises along its western border, describing such events as a destabilising factor in the region.

On April 22nd, hackers compromised the Polish War Studies Academy (WSA) website and replaced pre-existing content with a fabricated letter, which was allegedly written by the Polish General Ryszard Parafianowicz. The forged letter condemned the "occupation of Poland" by the US and called for Polish soldiers to resist. Subsequently, emails were sent to various Polish and international institutions asking recipients to comment on the general's letter. Hackers also replaced articles on Polish outlets Prawy.pl and Lewy.pl with pieces containing the fake letter. According to a Stanisław Żaryn, the main objective of this operation was to encourage anti-US sentiment in Poland.

[Read the full article here.](#)

The Perils of Perestroika: Why Putin Chose to Prolong His Rule **Alexander Baunov**

Carnegie Moscow Center | July 30, 2020

Russian President Vladimir Putin has always embraced the idea that he rules Russia not with an iron fist but with a light touch and that he is the unchallenged leader of his country because the public puts its trust in him. Now, by declaring his intention to stay in power almost indefinitely, Putin has broken that unwritten pact with the Russian public. But it is hard to know exactly what is driving Putin. After all, it has been nearly six months since the launch of a constitutional reform process that even Kremlin loyalists had interpreted as the start of a search for a successor in 2024—and that turned out to be a giant facade.

Putin's flamboyant change of heart created unexpected tensions with Russia's political class. For the upper echelons of the Russian elite, the "2024 problem" was never about Putin. It was about holding on to power themselves. Before Putin's hasty decision to amend the constitution, these elite groups were busily anticipating a world in which they could maintain their collective power without Putin occupying the post of president.

Of course, Putin's perspective counted far more than theirs. As far as the president was concerned, Putin's Russia was synonymous with Putin the individual: there is no one else who can drive the machine. So, he rejected the complicated constitutional maneuvers suggested by his advisers for 2024 and chose the simplest and crudest solution—to stay on as president.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Beijing Implies Tajikistan's Pamir Region Should Be Returned to China **Paul Goble**

The Jamestown Foundation | July 30, 2020

A major scandal has broken out between China, on the one hand, and Tajikistan and Russia, on the other, regarding alleged Chinese claims on the Pamir region. This past month, official outlets of the People's Republic of China (PRC) repeatedly republished an article by Chinese historian Cho Yao Lu, who says that the entire Pamir region belonged to China at one time and consequently, he implies, Tajikistan should now or in the future return it to Beijing. Of course, such a territorial concession would dramatically change the geopolitical balance in this corner of Eurasia, affecting not only the position of the Central Asian countries but also those of neighboring Afghanistan and Western powers like the United States, whose military forces are deployed there.

Dushanbe has demanded that Beijing renounce this article and stop publishing others like it, and Russian outlets have sharply criticized what they suggest is an effort by the Chinese to test the waters regarding potential future border changes (Stanradar.com, July 27; Ozodi.org, July 20; Lenta, July 24; Rossaprimavera.ru, July 25). The offending article, albeit written on a historical theme, has aggravated Tajikistani and Russian concerns that recent Chinese moves involving security and economic development in Tajikistan have been anything but altruistic. Increasingly, Dushanbe and Moscow view the PRC's construction of border posts and airports in the Pamir region as well as its involvement in the gold mining industry there to be elements of a larger Chinese plan to eventually annex this area. Such an outcome would put China in a position to fully dominate a rump Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan as well.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Poland listed in US State Department's Report on Jewish Property Claims

The First News | July 30, 2020

Poland, among other countries, has been listed in the State Department's annual Act 447 report for not having yet enacted full legislation on domestic property restitution or Holocaust-related confiscation.

The authors of the report point out that its aim is to describe the actions necessary to "ensure justice for Holocaust survivors and their families". The 209-page document states that Poland "has not yet enacted comprehensive legislation on domestic property restitution or compensation for Holocaust-related confiscations."

However, the report also mentions the positive steps taken by Poland. "Poland is seriously involved in commemorating the Holocaust; the government finances museums and monuments, including eight state memorial museums on the sites of former German Nazi concentration and extermination camps operating in occupied Poland," the report reads.

The document also mentions that Poland allocates public funds to Holocaust survivors. "According to data received in mid-2019 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since the entry into force of the Act (the 1991 act on veterans and victims of war repression and the post-war period - PAP), the Polish government has paid PLN 28.4 bln (Eur 6.43 bln) in the form of pensions to survivors of the Holocaust.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Israel could open its skies by mid-August

MaayanJaffe-Foffman

The Jerusalem Post | July 29, 2020

Israel could reopen its skies as early as August 16, according to the Health Ministry – and anyone who wants to visit Israel from a “green state” may not have to go into isolation or even take a coronavirus test.

Speaking at a meeting of the State Audit Committee overseen by MK Ofer Shelah (Yesh Atid), Health Ministry deputy director-general Itamar Grotto said: “We are preparing to approve an outline for opening the skies,” adding that it “won’t happen tomorrow morning, but as far as we are concerned, we will make every effort.”

The expected date for the start of some of these flights is August 16, Israeli media reported.

The announcement came on a day when Israel hit another coronavirus peak: 2,104 new patients in one day, the Health Ministry reported on Wednesday. An additional 1,207 people were diagnosed between midnight and press time.

[Read the full article here.](#)

A surprise from the Far East

Kirill Shamiev

Riddle.io | July 27, 2020

On 10 July 2020, the Khabarovsk Region (Krai) gained global fame. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of the region’s cities and have remained there for more than a week, protesting against the arrest of their governor. He is accused of organising murders of businessmen in 2004–2005. Sergei Furgal, who represented the region in the country’s parliament (Duma) for eleven years on behalf of the right-wing populist LDPR party, won the September 2018 elections on a wave of dissatisfaction with United Russia. His arrest vented public discontent that had accumulated over the years due to the Kremlin’s inefficient and unfair policies

[Read the full article here.](#)

Dozens of headstones smashed at Jewish cemetery in Russia

Cnaan Lipshiz

Jerusalem

An unexploded German mortar was uncovered in the major Jewish cemetery in Warsaw during renovation works on Monday.

Established in 1806, the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery has borne witness to Jewish life and death in the Polish capital ever since and it is the final resting place for over 200,000 people. Major figures including rabbis, intellectuals and entrepreneurs are buried there, often under elaborate tombstones and commemorative monuments. The area was also included in the boundaries of the ghetto established by the Nazis after the occupation of Poland and many of their victims were also buried in it.

“A few years ago, we received funding from the government to carry out a major cleaning of the cemetery which had not been done since before the Second World War,” Rabbi Yehoshua Ellis told The Jerusalem Post.

Ellis has been living in Poland for several years as an emissary for Shavei Israel, an organization that describes its mission as “to help descendants of Jews reconnect with the people and State of Israel.” The rabbi also heads the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland that ensures that activities in the facilities are carried out respecting Jewish laws and traditions. The device was exposed during the cleaning of the First Quarter of the Okopowa Cemetery, which is the oldest of the site, presenting at least two levels of burial.

[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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