

Weekly Top 10

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WASHINGTON, D.C. October 23, 2020

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

This morning, the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia will meet with Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, for diplomatic talks. The two, however, will not meet with Pompeo together. Fighting began between the two countries in September continuing a long time conflict over the disputed Nagorno Karbach region -- a breakaway territory which is within Azerbaijan but is controlled by ethnic Armenians. Last Saturday, a Russia-brokered ceasefire collapsed within minutes of its declaration. Secretary Pompeo is attempting to bring the two sides together to end nearly a month of bloodshed.

The Bulgarian Medical Association has named Associate Professor Alexander Oscar, head of the Ophthalmology Clinic at Alexandrovska Hospital in Sofia, Doctor of the Year 2020 for his campaign over the last 7 years to provide free eye examinations and glasses to young children. Dr. Oscar serves as the President of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria-Shalom. Dr. Oscar said that the award holds a special value for him, recalling that 80 years ago the president of the Bulgarian Medical Association, Dr. Ivan Koychev, sent a letter to the Speaker of the 25th National Assembly, asking him to make efforts to prevent the adoption of a law that would put Bulgaria's Jewish population in danger. As a result, 50 000 Jews were saved from Nazi concentration camps.

Yesterday, Estonia announced that it has designated all of Hezbollah as a terrorist group and would impose sanctions on the organization. The move was applauded by the United States, Israel, and the organized American Jewish community. Estonia, a member of the U.N. Security Council, has joined the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Latvia, and other countries that have

recognized Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10
Washington, D.C. October 23, 2020

At Front Lines of a Brutal War: Death and Despair in Nagorno-Karabakh
Anton Troianovski
The New York Times | October 18, 2020

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh — On the front line, the stench is overwhelming. The remains of fighters have been lying there for weeks.

In the trenches, there is fear. The Armenians are defenseless against the Azerbaijani drones that hover overhead and kill at will.

At the military graveyard, bulldozers have scraped away a hillside. It is already lined with two rows of new graves, along with soon-to-be-filled, freshly dug, rectangular holes.

The three-week-old conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over a disputed territory in the Caucasus Mountains, where Europe meets Asia, has settled into a brutal war of attrition, soldiers and civilians said in interviews here on the ground in recent days.

Azerbaijan is sacrificing columns of fighters, Armenians say, to eke out small territorial gains in the treacherous terrain of Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave that is part of Azerbaijan under international law.

Civilians who have stayed behind live in their damp and unheated basements, converted in recent weeks with makeshift kitchens, and where some sleep on flattened cardboard boxes. The shelling and missile barrages into the towns in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan have killed dozens of civilians and hundreds of soldiers and have filled the nights with terrifying flashes and booms.

In the city of Stepanakert in Nagorno-Karabakh, which I visited over four days last week with the photographer Sergey Ponomarev, artillery fire could often be heard in the distance. Late Friday the city itself came under attack. Air raid sirens and bangs and thuds sounded throughout the night, as hotel guests rushed repeatedly for the basement. At least one of the shells landed by the city center, illuminating my hotel window with a bolt of yellow light.

[Read the full article here.](#)

With unrest on all sides, Russia's regional muscle is being tested
Isabelle Khurshudyan
The Washington Post | October 16, 2020

MOSCOW — The cease-fire talks lasted 11 hours, dragging past 2 a.m. in Moscow — what Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called "an all-nighter."

But what started as a triumph for the Kremlin last week — getting Armenia and Azerbaijan to discuss ending renewed fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave — turned into a muddle as clashes flared within hours of the deal.

It also revealed the limits of Russia's ability to shape events in what the Kremlin considers its backyard: the former Soviet republics and regions from Central Asia, through the Caucasus and into Eastern Europe.

Each point of the map these days offers another test for Moscow.

To the south, the three-decade-old conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has reignited. To the west, protests calling for Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko's ouster are well into their second month. And to the east, Kyrgyzstan is facing its third political crisis in 15 years after recent parliamentary election results were annulled.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Estonia bans entry to Hezbollah members, sanctions terror group

TOI Staff

The Times of Israel | October 22, 2020

Estonia on Thursday said it would sanction Hezbollah and prevent officials from the terror organization, or those affiliated with it, from entering its territory. The country's Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu said the Hezbollah posed "a considerable threat to international — and thereby Estonian — security," but appeared to stop short of officially blacklisting the group.

"With this step, Estonia stands by the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and Lithuania as well as other countries who have concluded that Hezbollah uses terrorist means and constitutes a threat to the security of many states," Reinsalu said in a statement.

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The ministry stated that entry to the eastern European nation will be prohibited for "Hezbollah affiliates about whom there is information or there are reasonable grounds to believe that their activity supports terrorism and who therefore pose a threat to the Estonian as well as international security."

A separate statement noted that the ban applied to members of both Hezbollah's political and military wings, if they were involved in terror activities.

It was not immediately clear what the sanctions would entail, beyond the entry ban.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Putin says he helped Navalny leave Russia to be treated abroad

Reuters | October 22, 2020

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday he had personally intervened to ensure that Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny could receive medical treatment in Germany after the opposition politician's allies said he had been poisoned.

Navalny, 44, fell ill on a flight in Siberia on Aug. 20 and was airlifted to Berlin for treatment. Blood samples taken from him confirmed the presence of a Novichok nerve agent, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has said. Navalny, convalescing in Germany, has accused Putin of being behind his poisoning, an allegation the Kremlin has rejected as false and insulting.

Addressing a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, Putin said he had asked Russia's General Prosecutor's office to authorize Navalny to leave the country after an appeal from the opposition politician's wife.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Bringing Belarus's Political Crisis to Resolution Requires Realistic Image

of Belarusian Society

Grigory Ioffe

The Jamestown Foundation | October 21, 2020

Moralizing About Coronavirus Policy Does Not Stop Coronavirus,” reads one August headline in Bloomberg. So can moralizing about the Belarusian crisis help bring about an agreeable solution? The European Union’s leaders seemingly think so, at least judging from their non-stop condemnations of Belarusian authorities, intent to extend sanctions to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, and resuming generous aid to the Belarusian opposition (Deutsche Welle—Russian service; Consilium.europa.eu, October 12). Yet this approach failed in the past.

To be sure, the atrocities Belarusian riot police and detention center guards have reportedly committed against peaceful protestors deserve utmost emotional condemnation and rebuke. In one of most publicized cases, a video furtively recorded on August 11 shows detainees forced to run through a gauntlet where they were repeatedly beat by police batons (YouTube, October 11). Another case involves Maxim Khoroshin, a 34-year old co-owner of a flower shop. Detained on October 13 in downtown Minsk, he was beaten unconscious (Svaboda.com, October 13) and left hospitalized with a traumatic brain injury, broken nose, corneal damage, bruised tissues on the left side from the upper back to the buttocks, and a shoulder dislocation (Tut.by, October 15). Painstaking analysis of the catalogued traumas resulting from police brutality in August through September revealed 1,376 victims, including 57 women. The most serious injuries were sustained from rubber bullets and flash-bang grenades (Mediazona, October 13).

[**Read the full article here.**](#)

New Russia Sanctions Are a Call to Action for Kremlin Doves

Alexander Baunov

Carnegie Moscow Center | October 16, 2020

The new round of sanctions introduced by the EU against Russia over the poisoning of opposition politician Alexei Navalny have three key aspects. They target individual people and organizations, rather than entire sectors of the economy; they don’t follow the European Parliament’s suggestion of targeting the subjects of Navalny’s anti-corruption investigations; and they don’t distinguish between the siloviki (security services) hawks and in-system liberals.

The first aspect repeats the EU’s reaction in similar situations. Major actions such as the annexation of Crimea or war in Ukraine’s Donbas region cannot happen without the participation of most of the country’s state apparatus, so in those cases, sanctions targeting entire sections are appropriate. But in single crimes, the EU adheres to a different principle: it searches for the specific individuals and organizations responsible. Since there are not yet any suspects in the legal sense of the word, and it is impossible to investigate a crime that took place deep inside Russian territory, the blame is being put on people and organizations within whose area of responsibility it occurred.

The sanctions list, therefore, includes the Russian State Research Institute of Organic Chemistry and Technology, where the Novichok nerve agent used to poison Navalny was likely produced. In contrast, it does not mention the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, although judging by multiple public statements made on the issue, canceling the pipeline project is seen as the most effective punishment by Western politicians and journalists.

But the EU executive bodies must for now be governed not by the principle of inflicting the greatest harm possible on Russia, but by a more legalistic principle of trying to find and punish those responsible. It helps, of course, that the dividing line between inflicting harm on Russia and self-harm is not now entirely clear, and it’s somewhat risky to start feeling for it by trial and error at a time when European economies have been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

[**Read the full article here.**](#)

Pompeo to meet Armenian, Azeri ministers over Nagorno-Karabakh fighting

Reuters | October 23, 2020

BAKU/YEREVAN (Reuters) - Azerbaijan and ethnic Armenian forces clashed in several areas of Nagorno-Karabakh on Friday, hours before talks were due to start in Washington to try to end the deadliest fighting in the mountain enclave for over a quarter of a century.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was scheduled to meet the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia in a new attempt to end nearly a month of bloodshed

in which Russian President Vladimir Putin said 5,000 people may have been killed.

The collapse of two Russia-brokered ceasefires has also dimmed hopes of a quick end to fighting that broke out on Sept. 27 over Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway territory which is within Azerbaijan but is controlled by ethnic Armenians.

[Read the full article here.](#)

After rent hike, Holocaust museum in Latvia could close

Cnann Lipshiz

JTA | October 21, 2020

(JTA) — The Riga Ghetto Museum, one of the Latvian capital's three Holocaust museums, is facing possible closure after the city's government decided to begin charging it about \$12,000 in rent per month.

The museum's previous 10-year lease, which expired this year, did not charge any rent.

The city has also reclaimed part of the land that the museum had been originally given, according to the head of the institution that runs the museum. The municipality will decide on the final details of the terms it is offering for the new lease by Oct. 27.

"We cannot accept that in our country money is worth more than the memory of our ancestors," Shamir Association head Rabbi Menachem Barkahan said in a statement on Wednesday.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Bulgarian Medical Association names Alexander Oscar Doctor of the Year 2020

The Sofia Globe | October 19, 2020

The Bulgarian Medical Association has named Associate Professor Alexander Oscar, head of the Ophthalmology Clinic at Alexandrovska Hospital in Sofia, Doctor of the Year 2020.

The award, conferred on the occasion of Bulgaria's Day of the Doctor, was given to Dr Oscar who for the past seven years has been conducting a campaign to provide free eye examinations and spectacles for young children.

Dr Oscar volunteered at the very beginning of the Covid crisis. "There was no fear, there was anxiety about the unknown. The unknown still prevails, but now medicine has the necessary means to influence the complications of the disease, and the system is much better prepared to deal with the problem," he said. "I can't help but worry about the fact that frontline medics are dying, and there are relatives who are suffering. I can't help but be worried about the fact that this is complicating both healthcare and our lives."

He urged compliance with the measures - wearing masks and indoors, maintaining physical distancing and avoiding crowds of many people in one place.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Jewish teenager lightly wounded in attack in Uman, Ukraine

Cnann Lipshiz

JTA | October 20, 2020

(JTA) — Three unidentified men assaulted two Jewish teenagers in the Ukrainian city of Uman.

The incident late Saturday night occurred near the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, an 18th-century Hasidic leader whose grave is a pilgrimage site that typically attracts about 50,000 visitors annually.

According to a report by the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, one of several bodies representing local Jews, one of the teenagers, aged 17, suffered a facial wound from a knife, while the other fled the scene. The three attackers then left running, footage from a security camera showed.

Friction between locals and pilgrims has escalated in Uman in recent years, and especially during the coronavirus crisis, resulting in several violent scuffles.

Robberies targeting Jewish visitors from wealthier countries are now a common occurrence in Uman.

[Read the full article here.](#)

Jewish prisoner in Russian penal colony goes on hunger strike to get Shabbat off
Cnann Lipshiz
The Times Of Israel | October 21, 2020

JTA — A Russian-Jewish man imprisoned near Moscow said he’s going on a hunger strike to protest the violation of his religious rights.

Danil Beglets, who has been serving time in a penal colony 200 miles southwest of Moscow since last year, said authorities are punishing him for declining to work on the Jewish Sabbath and not providing with him with kosher food, the RBC broadcaster on Tuesday reported.

“I refused to work, suggesting that my shift be rescheduled so I may observe the day of rest, to which I am entitled,” Beglets wrote in a statement to his attorney.

In response, authorities cut his food rations and threatened to further limit his freedom, Beglets said. He has appealed for Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar to intervene on his behalf, RBC reported.

Beglets was sentenced to two years in prison for shoving a police officer after at a demonstration in Moscow. In May, his sentence was commuted to be served at the penal colony, a correctional facility where prisoners are put to work on public projects.

[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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