



NCSEJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF  
Washington, D.C. February 3, 2017

## **Poland publishes names of former Auschwitz guards**

**Radio Poland, January 30, 2017**

<http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/291201,Poland-publishes-names-of-former-Auschwitz-guards>

The unprecedented move was taken by Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) as [part of efforts to stamp out the use of historically inaccurate terms like "Polish concentration camps"](#).

The president of the IPN, Jarosław Szarek, told a press conference in Kraków, southern Poland: "Today is historic because this is just the beginning - with this database we are starting the implementation of a large project.

"We are starting with Auschwitz, but we are planning to expand this database to include other German Nazi concentration camps."

Szarek said the unveiling of the database was a response to the use of the term "Polish concentration camps".

The use of such terms by international media outlets has sparked numerous complaints from Poland in recent years, prompting some news agencies to change their style guidelines.

In 2007, following a Polish request, the World Heritage Committee attempted to clarify the matter by listing the Auschwitz camp as a "German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp".

Around 1.1 million people, mostly European Jews, as well as non-Jewish Poles, Roma and Sinti, Soviet POWs and people of many other nationalities, perished at Auschwitz at the hands of the German Nazis occupying Poland during World War II.

The guards' names can be seen at [www.truthaboutcamps.eu/zalogass](http://www.truthaboutcamps.eu/zalogass)

## **Holocaust Victims' Mass Graves Looted Across Ukraine**

**By David Israel**

**Jewish Press, February 2, 2017**

<http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/holocaust-victims-mass-graves-looted-across-ukraine/2017/02/02/>

In recent years, dozens of grave of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust have been dug up and robbed on the outskirts of Ukrainian cities like Zhytomyr and Berdychiv. The robbers are looking for gold teeth, jewelry and even children's skulls.

Some in the Ukraine are calling this grave-robbing a criminal epidemic, but the grave-robbers have not been caught. The gruesome crimes were first discovered when skulls from Jewish mass graves were discovered being sold at the marketplace in towns and cities.

Ukraine-born businessmen Dr. Dimitry Shiglik and Michael Yehudanin, who now live in the US and Europe respectively, have, for several years been engaged in protecting many mass graves to prevent desecration and theft. But the thieves are finding new ways to steal the contents of the graves, the two are saying.

“Unfortunately, in the Ukraine there are many mass graves which are not sufficiently protected, where thousands of Jews were executed during the Holocaust,” said Yehudanin, President of the European Forum of Russian-speaking Jews. “70 years after these terrible murders, their graves are being desecrated and looted. These crimes are absolutely inhuman. We are trying to strengthen the graves, to bring order, and clearly mark the mass graves so their significance is known and understood. Unfortunately there is only so much we can do and there are many graves, as well as many grave-robbers.”

Shiglik, President of the American Forum of Russian-speaking Jews, has called on “the Jewish communities and their leaders to join this struggle and take a more active role in protecting these mass Jewish graves in order to prevent their desecration, and call on the criminals to be severely punished.”

### **Russia’s PM Visits Moscow’s Largest Jewish Museum**

**Hamodia, January 29, 2017**

<http://hamodia.com/2017/01/29/russias-pm-visits-moscows-largest-jewish-museum/>

Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev paid a visit to Moscow’s largest Jewish museum in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day last week.

The Prime Minister was welcomed by the founder and initiator of the museum, Chief Rabbi of Russia, Rabbi Berl Lazar, together with the President of the Jewish Federation of Russia, Rabbi Alexander Boroda.

In his speech, Mr. Medvedev said: “Of the six million Jews that were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust, an estimated 2.7 million were killed on Russian soil. Therefore the tragedy of the Jewish people is one which affects all of us, regardless of faith. This incredible museum, built by the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia, is not only one of the largest Jewish museums today, but is also the most technologically advanced, combining innovation with sensitivity. It is of utmost importance that children, youngsters and people of all ages visit this museum.”

While Prime Minister Medvedev received a comprehensive tour of the museum, and all of its departments, he took great interest in the various exhibits. He was given explanations starting from the six days of creation until the present day, when Judaism is once again experiencing a revival in all of Russia, as well as across the world.

The museum is spread over thousands of square meters and includes many different halls dedicated to various periods in Jewish history. It is host to thousands of visitors each month.

After writing about his impressions in the Guest Book, Medvedev spoke before the Museum’s administrators and dozens of media outlets. He expressed gratitude on behalf of the government for establishing this museum, and for the dedication of the Jewish community to Holocaust survivors in Russia, teaching the younger generation, and not allowing them to forget about the difficult times during WWII.

### **Two New Synagogues open in Ukrainian Prisons**

**FJC, January 30, 2017**

<https://fjc-fsu.org/two-new-synagogues-open-ukrainian-prisons/>

The FJC of Ukraine opened two new synagogues in Ukrainian penitentiaries last month, one in Kharkov and one in Vinnitsa. The facilities will also serve as Jewish centers allowing inmates to come in contact with their heritage and learn more.

Over 200 Jews are estimated to be currently held in Ukrainian prisons, while about seven facilities already have a Jewish center in one form or other, said rabbi Zeev Vinogradov from Dnepr, one of the project's coordinators. "In order to open a synagogue in prison we need two things: good will on behalf of the administration and a Jewish activist among the inmates, who will be eager to learn and participate. Then we can accomplish a lot and we get really positive results. As, for example, in Vinnitsa, where the new synagogue opened as a separate building and will be overseen by local Jewish organizations," Rabbi Vinogradov said in an interview to local media.

The preparations for opening the synagogue in the Vinnitsa prison took several months, during which the building was renovated and stocked with furniture, books, a TV and DVD player for audio and video recordings on various topics in Jewish tradition and culture. Vladimir Pedko, an inmate, who has been interested in Jewish tradition for a long time, was the initiator of the project there, Rabbi Vinogradov said.

### **Russia says invite to Israeli, Palestinian leaders to meet in Moscow still open Reuters, February 1, 2017**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestine-russia-idUSKBN15G3PF>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that an invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to meet in Moscow was still in force.

Lavrov said at a conference in Abu Dhabi that Russia was grateful that the two sides had in principle accepted the invitation.

No date has been given for the meeting, which Russia's Foreign Ministry first announced in September.

### **Polish Jews send matzah to TV boss who read poem deemed anti-Semitic JTA, February 1, 2017**

<http://www.jta.org/2017/02/01/news-opinion/world/polish-jews-send-matzah-to-tv-boss-who-read-poem-deemed-anti-semitic>

The Jewish Community of Warsaw sent matzah to a public television official accused of anti-Semitism after he mentioned the Jewish food on air while denouncing anti-government protesters.

Marcin Wolski, the director of the TVP2 state-funded channel, read a poem that he wrote saying protesters outside the Polish parliament were "handing out matzah" during anti-government protests, suggesting Jews were behind the demonstrations against proposed curbs on the media by Poland's ruling right-wing Law and Justice party .

The Jewish Community of Warsaw also filed a complaint for racist rhetoric with the National Council on Radio and Television, which has guidelines against airing such content.

Anna Chipczynska, president of the Jewish Community of Warsaw, included in the matzah delivery to the station a leaflet on how to fight anti-Semitic rhetoric, which she posted on Jan. 24 from the community's head office in Warsaw.

The Monitoring Center on Racist and Xenophobic Behavior, a nonprofit that monitors hate speech in Poland, used harsher language than the community's in its Jan. 22 statement about Wolski's poem.

"We know such rhetoric from history," the center wrote in the [statement](#). "Pointing to the Jews as the enemy has a long tradition – applied by the [German] National Socialist party. You, Wolski, should know the history and the consequences of anti-Semitic actions — also in communist authorities driving out of thousands of Polish Jews from the country in 1968 — yet you indulge in such hate speech."

**Kazakh Jewish community honors Holocaust victims at special event  
World Jewish Congress, February 2, 2017**

<http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/kazakh-jewish-community-honors-holocaust-victims-at-special-event-2-4-2017>

A memorial was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan by the Jewish umbrella organization 'Mitsva' on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

In collaboration with the Consulate-General of Hungary in Almaty a reception was hosted at the House of Friendship of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, at which more than 100 persons took part, including politicians from Kazakhstan, senior diplomats accredited there, and leaders of other faith communities.

A highlight of the event was the opening of the exhibition 'Unforgotten fates of the 20th century' by the Consulate General of Hungary. It tells a history of thirty prominent people, mostly Hungarian Jews, scientists and artists, whose lives dramatically changed by the developments in Europe in the 1930s and 1940.

Among them are figures as the writers Miklós Radnóti and Lajos Biro, the scientists Janos Harsanyi and Imre Brody, the composer Imre Kalman, the actor Károly Khusar, the filmmaker Sandor Korda and the football player Jozsef Brown. The exhibition also features the biography of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who saved the lives of tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.

**Limmud FSU 1st-ever Pan-European Conference Opens Friday  
eJewishPhilanthropy, January 29, 2017**

<http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/limmud-fsu-1st-ever-pan-european-conference-opens-friday/>

650 Russian-speaking Jews from more than 20 European countries will gather in Windsor (U.K.) for the first-ever Limmud FSU Europe regional conference, Feb. 3rd-5th. More than 250,000 Russian-speaking Jews currently reside in Europe, making it one of the world's largest Russian-speaking Jewish communities.

The conference will be the first extra-territorial Limmud FSU and will feature more than 100 lectures, workshops, presentations and discussions by leading figures including British members of Parliament; Israeli members of Knesset; French, Russian and American presenters. Ambassador of Israel to the U.K. Mark Regev; former Ambassador of Israel to the U.N. Ron Prozor; American historian Deborah Lipstadt; Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar; and Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Executive Vice Chairman Malcolm Hoenlein are just some of the many who will be addressing the audience.

In preparing for the event, Limmud FSU Europe Chairman Semyon Dovzhik tells us: "Limmud FSU Europe is a unique platform, uniting Russian-speaking Jews from different communities and backgrounds. Russian-European Jews see Limmud FSU as an outstanding opportunity to reconnect with their Jewish roots and preserve their cultural heritage."

eJP will be hosting a panel discussion, "The Art of Giving" with: Ukraine-born American businessman, investor and philanthropist Len Blavatnik; businessman and philanthropist Matthew Bronfman, who is chairman of Limmud FSU's international steering committee; Limmud FSU President Aaron Frenkel; World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder; Genesis Philanthropy Group President and CEO Ilia Salita; and NY philanthropist Diane Wohl.

Speaking exclusively to eJP prior to setting out for Europe, Ilia Salita said: "Bringing together Russian-speaking Jewish young adults from many corners of the continent at Limmud FSU Europe is about celebrating their Jewishness, empowering their activism and forging a sense of community. Genesis Philanthropy Group focuses on developing Jewish identity among Russian-speaking Jews around the world. Investing in this project goes

beyond supporting an inspirational weekend in London. We see Limmud FSU as a worthy and ambitious endeavor and we believe that this gathering will be a vital catalyst for the long-lasting engagement of its participants and their families in local communities across Europe.”

Upcoming North American Limmud FSU events include Limmud FSU Canada (Ontario, March 24-26), Limmud FSU New York (May 12-14) and Limmud FSU West Coast (San Francisco, Nov. 17-19).

## **Poland’s WWII museum caught in political crosshairs**

**BY MARY SIBIERSKI**

**Times of Israel, January 30, 2017**

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/polands-wwii-museum-caught-in-political-crosshairs/>

Poles on Sunday got their first — and possibly last — glimpse of a new Museum of the Second World War, a project slammed by Poland’s right-wing government as underplaying the country’s harrowing wartime fate.

Conceived by EU President Donald Tusk during his time as Poland’s premier, the museum offers a sweeping panorama of the war focused primarily on civilians who made up the majority of its victims.

But led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party, has shown a penchant for a more inward-looking nationalist and “patriotic” approach to everything from the economy to history.

Its vision for the new venue is no different.

The museum’s angular brick-red and glass facade juts sharply into the air in a part of Gdansk’s medieval old town the Nazis razed to the ground.

It lies near the city’s Westerplatte peninsula where the German navy fired the first shots of World War II by attacking Poland on September 1, 1939.

The main exhibitions located three floors underground offer visitors a stark look at the human toll of the war and the rise of the fascist and totalitarian politics that led to it.

A soaring wall of suitcases symbolizes the mass deportation of European Jews to death camps. The tattered shoe of a Polish child killed during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising focuses on the carnage against children. Porcelain melted by the atomic bomb the US dropped on Hiroshima bears witness to the advent of nuclear war.

World War II claimed upwards of 55 million lives, the majority of whom were civilian, according to the museum. Some ten million were children.

‘Good Change’?

A court ruling this month gave the PiS government the go-ahead to merge the new museum with another planned one — which critics say exists purely on paper and may never be built — on February 1, a move widely seen as paving the way for a change of director.

Historian Pawel Machcewicz, who spent the last eight years bringing the venue to life, is a former adviser to the liberal Tusk, whom Kaczynski views as his political arch-rival.

Respected Polish historian Andrzej Paczkowski says the machinations surrounding the museum have more to do with “pure politics” than differing visions of history.

“This is part of the PiS’s ‘Dobra Zmiana’ (Good Change) policy that has seen it systematically take over all the important public posts in Poland since its election” in late 2015, Paczkowski told AFP.

Critics accuse the PiS of installing loyalists as directors in a slew of key state-controlled enterprises and public institutions like television and radio as well as pushing through personnel changes that undermine the independence of the Constitutional Court.

The moves triggered a series of mass protests and an unprecedented threat of EU sanctions over Warsaw's rule of law violations.

"The criticism that the museum neglects the Polish perspective is being used as a justification to remove Machcewicz, because of course, no one is going to admit that it's because he was chosen by a rival political party," Paczkowski told AFP.

Gdansk teacher Krystyna Matejczuk was among the museum's first 4,000 visitors as it opened its doors for a brief stint this weekend amid uncertainty over its fate after February 1.

"The exhibition is absolutely neutral, but it's here in Gdansk, in Poland, and so its greatest focus is on the fate of Poles," she told AFP, adding "there's nothing wrong with showing that other people also suffered during the war."

Poland lost around 17 percent of its population during World War II, giving it the highest national death toll from the conflict.

Some six million Polish citizens, roughly half of Jewish ancestry, died under Nazi Germany's occupation. The vast majority were civilian.

'Urgent warning'

Costing 104 million euros (NIS 420 million, \$111 million) the museum is Poland's most expensive yet, according to Jaroslaw Sellin, a senior culture ministry official.

Machcewicz told AFP on Sunday that "the culture ministry hasn't been in touch for months and (Culture) Minister Glinski has never visited the museum. "I don't know what will happen on February 1. I don't know how the museum will be liquidated. It's unprecedented."

Poland's Culture Minister Glinski offered no clues about the fate of the museum after last week's court ruling.

But last November he vowed that "no one is going to destroy the Museum of the Second World War created by our predecessors."

The PiS simply wants to "complete its message," he said.

According to Paczkowski, its message about the unspeakable human toll of a global war could not be more timely.

"We are now in a period of history when the need for a warning about the consequences of war is especially urgent," he told AFP.

### **Jews With Soviet Background Protest Trump's Ban on Muslim Refugees**

Haaretz/JTA, January 30, 2017

<http://www.haaretz.com/us-news/1.767948>

Hundreds of American Jews with roots in the former Soviet Union signed a petition protesting U.S. President Donald Trump's order that blocks the arrival of refugees from some Muslim countries to the United States.

The online petition was published on Thursday following reports that Trump was planning to issue executive orders temporarily barring U.S. admission of asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

“We, the undersigned Soviet Jewish refugees, write to express our support for the United States’ refugee resettlement program and our opposition to President Trump’s draft Executive Orders that would close America’s doors to vulnerable refugees desperately seeking our protection,” states the petition, which has received more than 400 signatures.

Most of the signatories indicated that they left the former Soviet Union after 1989, when Communist authorities, faced with the disintegration of their country, no longer jailed dissidents and significantly loosened restrictions on movement, free speech and religious worship. The United Nations definition for all refugees, except for Palestinian refugees, is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence.”

In the petition, the co-signatories wrote: “The United States must not turn our backs on the human beings fleeing violence and persecution like our families did when we left the former Soviet Union, nor abandon our highest national values and the demands of basic decency.”

Jewish tradition, they added, “teaches us that our own experience as foreigners, immigrants and refugees must compel us to create a compassionate society where the rights of migrants are protected.”

Among the co-signatories is Masha Gessen, a well-known Russian-American journalist and author who has spoken critically of Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Last year, the United States gave asylum to nearly 85,000 refugees, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of data from the State Department’s Refugee Processing Center. Of those, 38,901 self-identified as Muslims. It was the highest number of Muslim refugees in any year since data on self-reported religious affiliations first became publicly available in 2002.

During an interview Thursday with Fox News, Trump defended his intention to issue executive orders suspending in part the refugee program.

“Right now, the FBI has over 1,000 [terrorism] investigations going on ... and these are people that we let in. We don’t need this,” the president said. “Some people have come in with evil intentions. Most haven’t, I guess, but we can’t take chances.

“We’ve taken in tens of thousands of people. We know nothing about them. They can say they vetted them. They didn’t vet them, they have no papers. How can you vet somebody when you don’t know anything about them and they have no papers?”

## **UKRAINIAN JEWISH LEADER SAYS COMMUNITY IN DANGER OF EXTINCTION**

**By TAMARA ZIEVE**

**Jerusalem Post, February 2, 2017**

<http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Ukrainian-Jewish-leader-says-community-in-danger-of-extinction-480365>

The future of Ukraine's Jewish community "doesn't look very bright" and is in danger of disappearing altogether, according to one of its leaders, who ended a four-day visit to Israel on Thursday.

Eduard Dolinsky, Executive Director of the Kiev-based Ukrainian Jewish Committee painted a bleak picture of a struggling and scattered community, during an interview with The Jerusalem Post at the David Citadel hotel in Jerusalem on Tuesday afternoon.

He was visiting Israel together with the Committee's president, Ukrainian MP Olexander Feldman; they were hosted by the Israeli-Jewish Congress, an organization which seeks to reinforce the bond between Israel and Jewish communities in Europe.

One of the main purposes of the trip was to try to heal a diplomatic rift caused between the two countries after Ukraine voted in favor of the anti-Settlements United Nation Security Council resolution in December, angering Israel. But the pair also sought to gain support from Israel in strengthening Ukraine's Jewish community.

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"The Ukrainian Jewish community is in crisis," Dolinsky states matter-of-factly, referring to the ongoing war in Donbass and the country's dire economic situation as major factors.

While many Donbass Jews fled to Israel, Kiev or other areas of the country, some still remain in the conflict-stricken region.

The dispersed Jewish community lacks a solid foundation and, according to Dolinsky, is suffering an identity crisis.

"Either we should decide that the last one turns off the light, or we need to continue our struggle," he tells the Post.

For the latter option, which he clearly prefers, he believes Israel can help.

Estimates of the Jewish population in Ukraine vary wildly, but Dolinsky puts it at around 250,000.

"We simply don't see the future, where we are going as a Jewish community," he explains. "I believe the problems of development, education, youth and identity need to be addressed." The community lacks organization and structure.

"We have no professional resources for addressing these problems and we we could do with the help of Israel.

"Either Israel sees as just a resource for aliya or it will help us," he says pointedly. "We need an open discussion to promote a plan for the Jewish community... a discussion between the Diaspora, Israel and Ukraine about problems of the particular community."

The Israeli-Jewish Congress seeks to aid the organization with this endeavor, by giving it a voice with Israeli officials.

The Israeli-based organization helped facilitate a number of the meetings between their Ukrainian guests and various Israeli officials and decision makers, which included representatives from the Knesset, the Foreign Ministry, the Diaspora Affairs Ministry and Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky.

Educational initiatives and bilateral engagement on the professional and community levels, as well as on the diplomatic, are the answers Dolinsky and Feldman seek.

As a gesture toward trying to repair the fractured Israel- Ukraine relations, Feldman has proposed a bill to move the Ukrainian Embassy to Jerusalem.

While the chances of that law passing may be slim, Dolinsky stresses its significance in transmitting the message that Ukraine desires better relations with Israel. The importance of a strong Ukraine-Israel alliance is a point repeatedly emphasized by Dolinsky and Feldman, both back home and during their meetings in Israel.

On Wednesday, Feldman welcomed an apparent thawing of the ice, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko spoke on the phone and agreed to further strengthen the Israel-Ukraine friendship.

A scheduled visit by Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman had been canceled by Israel following the Security Council vote, but after Wednesday's conversation it was put back on the table.

Feldman remarked that he is "very happy that this communication happened and relations between the two countries will develop in the same trustful and friendly manner as it was before."

While political relations may be on the mend, Ukraine's Jewish community remains hungry for a stronger sense of being backed by Israel. "There is a feeling of a lack of support from Israel, though we are very pro-Israel," Dolinsky lamented.

Noting that almost all Ukrainian Jews have friends and family in Israel, he said their connection to the country is all the more strong.

Antisemitism and Holocaust denial are among the struggles the community is grappling with. Dolinsky flags a failure by his country in monitoring antisemitism, partly stemming from a lack of any definition of antisemitism and hate crimes.

He points to numerous instances of vandalism of Holocaust mass graves and Jewish cemeteries, as well as continued glorification of nationalist Holocaust deniers and antisemites.

On New Year's Day, for instance, a march to mark the birthday of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera saw participants yelling antisemitic slogans, including 'Juden raus' (Jews out!) in German. "It was guarded by hundreds of police... but after the march police told journalists they hadn't seen any antisemitic incidents," Dolinsky recalls.

According to Dolinsky, the glorification of Holocaust-denying Ukrainian nationalist groups is "getting worse by the day."

"It's an absolutely unacceptable situation to which Israel does not react," he said. One idea is a ban on antisemites from entering Israel, he said.

### **Kremlin says Putin and Trump could meet before G20 in July**

**Reuters, January 30, 2017**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-putin-idUSKBN15E0SF>

The Kremlin said on Monday it was too early to talk about any possible deals with the United States over sanctions on Russia, but that President Vladimir Putin could meet U.S. President Donald Trump before the G20 in July.

Putin and Trump spoke by phone on Saturday and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call on Monday the exchange had been a good one.

"(But) it's hardly possible to talk about any kind of deals (over sanctions)," said Peskov.

"To start with we must fix the date and time of a meeting between the two presidents. Aides are working on this now," he said, adding that a meeting could happen before a G20 summit scheduled to take place in Hamburg on July 7-8.

Peskov said that Putin and Trump had not discussed sanctions in their phone call on Saturday, their first conversation since Trump's inauguration.

But, he said: "We have seen a readiness to solve difficult problems through dialogue, which President Putin has long been calling for and unfortunately in previous years did not find a response (to)."

Peskov said that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi would attend the St Petersburg International Economic Forum in June.

### **Ukraine clashes rage for third day, sparking EU concern**

**AFP, January 31, 2017**

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/ukraine-clashes-rage-third-day-sparking-eu-concern-151326291.html>

Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed rebels were locked in fighting for a third straight day Tuesday at a flashpoint town that left thousands shivering without power and sparked renewed EU concern about security in its backyard.

The industrial hub of Avdiivka came under an unexpected assault on Sunday from insurgents seeking to wrest back territory controlled by Kiev during the nearly three-year war.

The clashes have claimed the lives of at least 13 civilians and fighters on both sides since Sunday -- the worst outburst of violence since the two sides agreed a new truce on December 23.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko underscored the urgency of the situation by cutting short a visit to Berlin on Monday and convened an emergency meeting of his National Security and Defence Council.

Poroshenko is worried that Donald Trump's rise to the US presidency and praise for Russia's Vladimir Putin may add fuel to a conflict that began shortly after Ukraine's 2014 ouster of its Moscow-backed leader and tilt toward the West.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters the Kremlin was "extremely worried" but had "reliable information" that renegade units of pro-Kiev fighters were in fact responsible for the initial attacks.

An AFP reporter saw the separatists shell the town of about 20,000 people with repeated rounds of Grad multiple rocket systems and artillery fire from the early morning.

"Right now, there is no power. We have not resolved problems with heating homes, and the gas pipe has been shattered," local Ukrainian army unit spokeswoman Olena Mokrynychuk told AFP.

The town's military administrator Freedom Vekua told AFP he was preparing for a possible evacuation of the town that sits just north of the rebels' de facto capital of Donetsk because of the power outage.

Ukraine is struggling through freezing conditions in which temperatures drop to -20 degrees Celsius (-4 degrees Fahrenheit) at night.

"The issue of an evacuation has not been decided fully. We see it as our very last resort because there is still a chance of restoring heating," said Vekua.

The town's heating is provided by a coke plant that has been heavily damaged by the falling shells.

Plant director Musa Magomedov said it would be incredibly difficult to resume gas production were the factory's generators shut down.

That would leave Avdiivka without a source of local power and uncertainty about its future. The fighting has prevented repairs being carried out, Magomedov said.

- Global condemnation and concern -

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is responsible for monitoring ceasefire violations and organising peace talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine.

It helped negotiate a February 2014 truce deal in Minsk that was co-sponsored by Germany and France and which EU leaders cling on to as the one remaining roadmap to peace.

"The intense fighting around Avdiivka in the last few days... is a blatant violation of the ceasefire, as stipulated by the Minsk agreements," the EU foreign affairs arm said in a statement.

The OSCE said the fighting was "of grave concern" while the US embassy tweeted that it was especially worried about "the 2,500 children who are without water, electricity and heat".

Charge d'affaires Kate Byrnes of the US mission to the OSCE's Permanent Council said that "Russia and the separatists initiated the violence in Avdiivka".

"We call on Russia to stop the violence, honour the ceasefire, withdraw heavy weapons, and end attempts to seize new territory beyond the line of contact," she said in an address to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna.

The conflict has killed nearly 10,000 people since 2014 -- more than half of them civilians -- and plunged Moscow's relations with the West to a post-Cold War low.

The Kremlin denies backing the insurgents and only admits that Russian "volunteers" and off-duty soldiers have entered the warzone of their own free will.

### **Russia Federal Agents Suspected of Treason Reportedly Passed Secrets to the CIA Moscow Times, January 31, 2017**

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russia-federal-agents-suspected-of-treason-are-reportedly-being-charged-with-passing-secrets-to-the-cia-56994>

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) agents arrested for treason and illegal hacking reportedly passed confidential information to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, sources close to the investigation told the news agency Interfax.

Sergei Mikhailov, a top cybersecurity specialist in the FSB, and his deputy Dmitry Dokuchaev are being accused of "breaking their oath and working with the CIA," Interfax reported, citing an anonymous source that did not specify if Mikhailov and Dokuchaev worked directly with the CIA or through intermediaries.

"Four people have been arrested in this case, and eight individuals in total have been identified as accomplices. Only four suspects have been charged, and the others could get off as witnesses," the source told Interfax.

Another source told the news agency that the treason charges and allegations of illegal hacking against Mikhailov and his accomplices are separate cases that do not intersect.

“Each of the suspects performed his own role. One person developed and deployed the cyberattacks, and another person collaborated with foreign intelligence agents. And these operations were parallel and, as a rule, they didn’t intersect,” the second source told Interfax, explaining that the group’s members were acquainted in the IT and information security sectors.

“And the the main link in this chain wasn’t the person with the most senior position and rank,” the source said. Last week, the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported that Sergei Mikhailov, Dmitry Dokuchaev (who worked in the same FSB unit as Mikhailov), Ruslan Stoyanov (the head of cybercrime investigations at Kaspersky Labs), and a fourth suspect had been arrested on suspicion of leaking secret information to the U.S. intelligence community.

According to Novaya Gazeta, the FSB believes Mikhailov tipped off U.S. officials to information about Vladimir Fomenko and his server rental company “King Servers,” which the American cybersecurity company ThreatConnect identified last September as “an information nexus” that was used by hackers suspected of working for Russian state security in cyberattacks.

The name of the fourth treason suspect is still unknown.

Dokuchaev has allegedly been revealed as an infamous Russian hacker. He reportedly worked as a hacker under the alias “Forb” until the FSB threatened to jail him, an unverified source told the RBC newspaper.

### **Trump Ready to 'Move Forward' With Russia, Says Foreign Policy Campaign Aide Moscow Times, February 1, 2017**

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/trump-is-ready-to-go-forward-with-russia-says-his-foreign-policy-campaign-aide-57006>

Donald Trump understands the misgiving some members of the Congress might have about the current state of U.S.-Russia relations, but is ready for both countries to “move forward”, a Trump foreign policy advisor during the election campaign [told](#) RIA Novosti, a Russian state-owned news agency.

Walid Phares, a scholar of Lebanese Christian descent who Trump picked as his Middle East policy advisor during the presidential campaign, explained to RIA that “some Congress members are worried” about the “multitude of problems inherited from the past but still troubling us today.” He added, however, that “[Trump] is convinced that we are now in the next stage and must go on.”

Despite Donald Trump’s repeated verbal advances towards Russia — made both during his campaign and while in office — this might represent the first time someone from his team spoke directly to Russian media. While still on the campaign trail, Trump himself was interviewed by Larry King for his show *Politicking* which King syndicates to RT (formerly Russia Today, a government-funded foreign-language news service). Trump later backtracked from the interview, saying through a spokesperson he was only talking to King as a favor to a friend and didn’t expect the interview to be published by RT — a claim with King later [disputed](#).

### **Poland Taking Russia to UN Court Over Late President's Crash AP/NYT, February 1, 2017**

<https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/02/01/world/europe/ap-eu-poland-russia-court.html? r=0>

Poland's government says it is taking Russia to the United Nations' principal court over the continuing probe into the 2010 death of Poland's president in a plane crash in Russia and Moscow's refusal to turn over the wreckage.

The twin brother of late President Lech Kaczynski leads Poland's ruling party. Jaroslaw Kaczynski blames the crash on Moscow. He has made finding those responsible and recovering the plane's pieces for Poland's own investigation part of his political agenda.

Russian prosecutors say they still need the wreckage for their ongoing probe.

Aviation experts said the crash was an accident.

Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski said Wednesday that Poland is drafting up a complaint to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Netherlands.

The court rules on disputes between nations and gives advisory opinions on legal questions.

### **Anti-Kremlin Activist Hospitalized Again in Moscow**

**Moscow Times, February 2, 2017**

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/prominent-anti-kremlin-activist-hospitalized-in-moscow-57019>

The head of one of Russia's most prominent anti-Kremlin organizations has been hospitalized in Moscow.

Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr., the head of opposition group Open Russia, has been placed on life support and is in a medically-induced coma.

The activist's symptoms are similar to those which saw him slip into a coma almost two years ago, his lawyer Vadim Prokhorov told the Interfax news agency.

Although the incident in May 2015 was officially blamed on kidney failure, friends of Kara-Murza alleged he had been poisoned.

Kara-Murza had been visiting the offices state-owned legal news agency when he suddenly became violently ill and was rushed to hospital.

After his recovery, the politician told journalists that there was no way of proving if his illness had been an attempt on his life, but said that it was "difficult to believe it was an accident."

Kara-Murza appealed to Russia's Investigation Committee in January 2016, asking them to carry out a comprehensive toxicological screening in order to rule out foul play. No criminal case was ever initiated.

Open Russia is a pro-democracy group founded by former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was jailed for a decade on charges which have since been condemned as politically motivated. Relaunched in 2014, the group supports projects which it believes will promote and strengthen democracy in the country.

### **Poroshenko Says He Plans To Hold Referendum On Ukraine Joining NATO**

**RFE/RL, February 2, 2017**

<http://www.rferl.org/a/poroshenko-says-plans-hold-referendum-ukraine-joining-nato-german-newspaper/28274357.html>

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko told German media that he is planning a referendum on whether Ukraine should join NATO now that polls show 54 percent of Ukrainians favor such a move.

"Four years ago, only 16 percent favored Ukraine's entry into NATO. Now, it's 54 percent," Poroshenko told Germany's Funke Mediengruppe newspaper chain in an interview published on February 2.

"As president, I am guided by the views of my people, and I will hold a referendum on the issue of NATO membership."

He vowed to "do all I can to achieve membership in the transatlantic alliance" if people vote for that. He said Ukraine's military will be up to NATO standards by 2020.

NATO and Ukraine have had a close relationship since the early 1990s, and the alliance's website says their ties are one of the "most substantial" of NATO's partnerships.

However, any move by NATO to admit Ukraine would spark tensions with Russia.

Poroshenko also told the newspaper that Ukraine is making progress on joining the European Union by reducing its budget deficit and curbing corruption.

"Europe should realize that it would be more secure, reliable, and happier with Ukraine," he said.

## **European Parliament Approves Visa-Free Schengen Travel For Georgia**

**By Rikard Jozwiak**

**RFE/RL, February 2, 2017**

<http://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-european-parliament-approves-visa-liberalization/28275007.html>

The European Parliament has voted overwhelmingly to approve visa liberalization for Georgia, paving the way for Georgians to travel to the European Union's Schengen zone without obtaining visas.

European lawmakers backed visa liberalization, long anticipated in Georgia, by a vote of 553 to 66, with 28 abstentions.

Georgians will still have to wait for the European Parliament and the European Council to vote on a mechanism allowing for the suspension of visa-free regimes with countries, including Georgia and Ukraine, under certain circumstances once they are in place.

The suspension mechanism was given preliminary approval in December. EU diplomats have told RFE/RL that the final European Parliament vote is expected at the next plenary session, on February 13-16, and that EU member states are poised to agree on it on February 27 or 28.

Georgians are likely to be able to travel visa-free to the Schengen zone starting in late March or early April, diplomats say.

Georgia has long sought greater integration with Europe but has been frustrated with the pace of EU moves to bring it closer.

The South Caucasus country has faced persistent efforts by Russia to increase its influence since the two former Soviet republics fought a five-day war in 2008.

The Schengen Area countries are Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

## **Romanians rally in biggest anti-corruption protest in decades**

**By Radu-Sorin Marinas and Luiza Ilie**

**Reuters, February 2, 2017**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-romania-government-corruption-idUSKBN15F29F>

More than 250,000 Romanians demonstrated on Wednesday against a government decree decriminalizing some graft offences, seen as the biggest retreat on reforms since the country joined the European Union in 2007.

Romania's top judicial watchdog, the Superior Magistrates' Council (CSM), earlier in the day filed a constitutional court challenge to the decree unveiled by the new Social Democrat government of Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu.

The number of protesters rose to a new high in the evening, reaching 130,000 to 150,000 outside the cabinet building in Bucharest.

Another 100,000 to 150,000 were estimated by riot police to have joined similar rallies in 55 other towns and cities.

The rally in the capital subsided peacefully by 2200 GMT, but after people left the square, a group of about 300 soccer ultras came in and threw fireworks and stones at riot police. The police dispersed them with tear gas. Two policemen and two protesters were slightly hurt by stones, the emergency service said.

The decree that triggered the nationwide protests was approved by the cabinet on Tuesday evening.

"Repeal it, then leave," protesters shouted. "Thieves, thieves." Many waved Romanian national flags.

"Our chances are small but it is important to fight," said Gabriela Constantin, a 36-year-old architect.

If enforced, as planned, within 10 days, the decree would, among other things, decriminalize abuse-of-power offences in which the sums involved are less than 200,000 lei (\$48,000).

That would put an end to the current trial of Social Democrat party leader Liviu Dragnea, accused of using his political influence to secure state salaries for two people working at his party headquarters between 2006 and 2013.

Dozens of other political figures from all parties stand to benefit from the decree.

"I don't understand what the protesters are upset about," Dragnea told reporters on Tuesday.

Two opposition parties, the centrist Liberals and the Save Romania Union USR, filed a no-confidence motion on Wednesday against the government which has little chance of succeeding.

As parliament opened for its first regular session of the year, USR lawmakers paraded banners reading "Shame" and other opposition deputies shouted "Resignation" or "Thieves".

The Romanian leu EURRON=D2 fell as much as 1.4 percent against the euro to 4.5540, marking a seven-month low, while longer-term yields rose 14 basis points.

## ENTRENCHED CORRUPTION

Romania's Social Democrats won back power in a December 2016 election, one year after protesters drove them from office in an outpouring of anger over a deadly fire at a nightclub that many blamed on corruption and impunity.

Anti-corruption prosecutors are currently investigating over 2,000 abuse-of-power cases.

President Klaus Iohannis took part in an emergency meeting of the CSM, telling reporters afterwards:

"The problem is that one cannot act the way the government did in a country with the rule of law, which Romania is and wants to remain."

"The fight against corruption needs to be advanced, not undone," European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker and his deputy said in a statement. "We are following the latest developments in Romania with great concern."

Six western countries including Germany and the United States issued a joint statement warning that the government's move would undermine Romania's international reputation and position in the EU and NATO.

The decree would apply to ongoing investigations and trials as well as new cases. Criminal negligence would no longer be an offence, and the definition of conflict of interest would be narrowed.

The government on Tuesday also approved a draft bill that would grant prison pardons. It says it would bring the criminal code in line with recent constitutional court rulings and ease prison overcrowding, claims disputed by many senior judicial figures.

## **Trump Team Aims to Test Russia's Alliance With Iran**

**By Eli Lake**

**Bloomberg, January 24, 2017**

<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-01-24/trump-team-aims-to-test-russia-s-alliance-with-iran>

As the Trump administration begins planning its outreach to Moscow, one question for the new president will be whether he can persuade Russia to turn away from Iran.

The two countries have grown closer since 2015, when a group of nations lifted some sanctions on Iran in exchange for more transparency about its nuclear program. Russia sells Iran advanced air defense systems, and Iran provides its officers and militias to conquer the Syrian towns and cities indiscriminately bombed by Russian aircraft.

Trump administration officials tell me that they will explore the extent to which Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to end this relationship and cooperate with U.S. policy to counter Iranian aggression in Syria and the Middle East.

"It's important to find out what are the limits of Russia's willingness to cooperate with us with regard to Iran," said Michael Ledeen, who during the transition served as an adviser to Michael Flynn, now Trump's national security adviser. "Those conversations have to take place." Ledeen was Flynn's co-author of "Field of Fight," a 2016 book that outlined the retired general's national security vision.

That book makes the case that Iran must be defeated in order to win the war against radical Islam. At the same time, Flynn and Ledeen are also critical of Russia's value as a partner in the war against the Islamic State. "When it is said that Russia would make an ideal partner for fighting Radical Islam, it behooves us to remember that the Russians haven't been very effective at fighting jihadis on their own territory, and are in cahoots with the Iranians," they wrote. "In Syria, the two allies have loudly proclaimed they are waging war against ISIS, but in reality the great bulk of their efforts are aimed at the opponents of the Assad regime."

Now a great bulk of the Trump administration's diplomatic efforts will be to persuade Russia to cut the Iranians loose in Syria and to end arms sales to the Islamic Republic. Another factor will be the Iran nuclear agreement negotiated by Trump's predecessor. Trump has said he will not withdraw right away from it. But he has also been critical of the deal, and some incoming officials have said they would like to see if it's possible to renegotiate better terms.

In this sense, Trump is hewing closely to Barack Obama's playbook when he came into office in 2009. Back then, the U.S. scrapped a missile defense deployment in the Czech Republic and Poland and did not further pressure Russia on its occupation of Georgian territory following the 2008 war. In exchange, the Russians

supported a U.N. Security Council resolution against Iran's nuclear program and negotiated an arms control treaty limiting long-range nuclear weapons for both countries.

It's unclear what the Russians would want in return this time around. Michael McFaul, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia who was an architect of Obama's first-term outreach to Russia, told me he didn't know what Trump could offer Putin in exchange for abandoning Iran, a key ally and trading partner. "Are we going to buy Russian weapons systems that Moscow can now sell to Tehran? Of course not," he said. "Are we going to get our Sunni allies to do so? That seems unlikely. I just don't see what Putin has to gain from such a deal."

Putin has at times hinted at what he'd like from the U.S. Before the election, the Kremlin announced it was suspending an agreement to dispose of weapons-grade plutonium in October. The Kremlin's announcement said Russia would consider renewing the plutonium agreement if the U.S. reduced its military presence in NATO countries along its borders, canceled sanctions imposed after Russia's annexation of Crimea and compensated Russia for revenue it lost because of those sanctions.

Trump himself has not said specifically what he would be willing to offer the Russians, though he has said he would be willing to lift sanctions on Russia under the right circumstances and has said in interviews that he is interested in pursuing new arms-control agreements with Russia.

Either way, the Iranian problem remains. Matthew McInnis, a former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst on Iran who is now a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, told me: "I see absolutely no way that you drive the Iranians out of Syria. But I could see how you reduce Iranian influence and presence there. That is a goal they could pursue." McInnis said this would mean Russia agrees to support rebuilding a Syrian army that would not be under the sway of Iran and its foreign militias.

Trump could also use the opportunity to play mind games with Iran's notoriously paranoid leaders. The Romanovs humiliated Iran in the 19th century with punitive treaties. Last summer tensions rose briefly when the Russians acknowledged they were flying air missions out of Iran into Syria. Iranian mistrust of Russia can be exploited with deft diplomacy.

It will be a balancing act. Trump will have a hard time persuading Congress that any accommodation of Russia these days is worth it, particularly because the intelligence community is now investigating ties between Trump's campaign and Putin's government before the election. Meanwhile Russia will have to weigh whether it values a new friendship with America over the one it already has with Iran.

## **UN Ambassador Haley hits Russia hard on Ukraine**

**By Nicole Gaouette and Richard Roth**

**CNN, February 3, 2017**

<https://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/02/politics/haley-russia-un/>

The US ambassador to the United Nations offered a strong condemnation of Russia in her first appearance at the UN Security Council on Thursday, calling on Moscow to de-escalate violence in eastern Ukraine and saying that US sanctions against Moscow would remain in place until it withdraws from Crimea.

"The United States continues to condemn and call for an immediate end to the Russian occupation of Crimea," said Nikki Haley, President Donald Trump's envoy to the world body. "Crimea is a part of Ukraine. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control over the peninsula to Ukraine."

Haley was speaking at an emergency UN meeting about a sudden upsurge in violence in eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting the Ukrainian army. Her remarks were notable for the stark difference between her rhetoric and Trump's.

Sources told CNN Thursday evening that the White House was aware in advance of Haley's speech. A source told CNN's Dana Bash that Haley didn't get direction from the White House but she wasn't asked not to do it. Another source told CNN's Elise Labott the National Security Council signed off on the remarks.

The first source said Haley made clear in private conversations as well as during her confirmation hearings how she felt about hot spots like Russia, though her point of view clearly differs from some of what the President said during the campaign.

As a candidate, the President hinted he might recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea. In the weeks before and after his inauguration, Trump's refusal to condemn Russian hacking during the election and his attacks on the intelligence community for investigating those hacks raised questions about his ties to Moscow.

Questions only deepened after CNN reported that the intelligence community was looking into reports that Moscow may have compromising financial and personal information about the President. Trump has insisted that he would simply like better relations with Moscow.

At a news conference with British Prime Minister Theresa May last week, he said it was "too early" to discuss sanctions.

On Thursday, the Treasury Department slightly eased a sanction the Obama administration put in place against Russia's Federal Security Service, known as the FSB.

A top State Department official said the move was made as a technical fix to the sanctions that were put in place to avoid "unintended consequences" of US government business with Russia.

While Washington was taking that step, Haley was lobbing verbal grenades. "I consider it unfortunate that the occasion of my first appearance here is one in which I must condemn the aggressive actions of Russia," she said. "We do want to better our relations with Russia. However, the dire situation in eastern Ukraine is one that demands clear and strong condemnation of Russian actions."

"The sudden increase in fighting in eastern Ukraine has trapped thousands of civilians and destroyed vital infrastructure and the crisis is spreading, endangering many thousands more," Haley added. "This escalation of violence must stop."

At one point in the charged meeting, Ukraine's Ambassador to the UN, Volodymyr Yelchenko, held up a photo of a Ukraine serviceman who was killed days ago. Looking at the Russian ambassador, Yelchenko said, "You killed him."

While Haley's remarks echoed many speeches delivered by the Obama administration's UN ambassador, Russia's Ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin told reporters that he thinks "there is a change in tone" with the new US administration. He added that he wasn't surprised by Haley's speech.

Some analysts see the surge in fighting as a Russian test of US resolve or perhaps an attempt to send Ukraine a message that after years of Obama administration support, the Trump administration will be more friendly to Moscow than Kiev.

Fighting between Russian-backed rebels from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and the Ukrainian army exploded a day after Trump had his first phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday. Russia accuses Ukraine of starting the escalation.

Churkin said that Ukraine was "desperately, frantically trying to achieve a military settlement to the conflict." He blamed Kiev for the recent escalation, saying it was meant to keep the issue "on the international agenda" and "at the same time suck in with their reckless confrontational policy newly elected heads of state."

The UK Ambassador to the UN, Matthew Rycroft, told the UN meeting that "we frequently hear from the Russian government, as we did today, that all the problems in eastern Ukraine are the consequence of actions by the Ukrainian government. This is simply not the case. It is an inversion of reality."

He later tweeted, "Great #UNSC debut speech by @NikkiHaley today. Fully agree that sanctions must remain until #Russia returns control of #Crimea to #Ukraine."

Balazs Jarabik, a non-resident fellow at the Carnegie Endowment who studies Central and Eastern Europe, notes that the rebels used rockets that were in flagrant violation of the Minsk Agreement, a ceasefire pact meant to end the fighting.

"Why did they violate it so visibly?" Jarabik asked. "I think there's merit to the speculation that the Russians wanted to show that Kiev doesn't have the backing it used to have from the US."

And initially, the US response was seen as tepid at best. A January 31 statement from the State Department condemned the violence, but didn't mention Russia or contain the statement of support for Ukraine that was customary during the Obama administration.

"There was panicking" in Ukraine after that statement, Jarabik said, speaking from Kiev. "There were Ukrainian pundits saying it's the end of US support -- because it had such a different tone than the Obama administration. The so-called unwavering support seemed gone. It was sending shock waves."

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have long called for a more supportive approach to Ukraine. They often criticized the Obama administration for its refusal to provide Kiev with defensive weapons.

On Thursday, Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida called again for the US to provide weapons. "Vladimir Putin's continued aggression against the people of Ukraine is outrageous, and further destabilization in the region will have profound negative consequences for us here in America," Rubio told CNN.

He noted that Trump's new Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis both advocated during their confirmation hearings for providing Ukraine with weapons to defend its sovereign territory.

"I hope President Trump will heed their advice," Rubio said. "We must stand with the people of Ukraine during this difficult hour and make clear to Putin that relations will not improve until Russia respects Ukraine's sovereignty."

Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey drew a link between Trump's mollifying approach to Russia and the aggression in Ukraine. "At the mere hint that President Trump would take a softer stance towards Russia, we have already seen pro-Russian forces emboldened and renew fighting" in eastern Ukraine, he told CNN.

Menendez is part of a bipartisan group of senators who have introduced the Countering Russian Hostilities Act, which he said would hold Russia accountable for its international aggression and interference in the US election.

"I sincerely hope both the Trump administration and Congressional Republicans don't make the mistake of walking away from longstanding, responsible policies to counter Russian aggression," he said.

### **Letter from Ukraine: Don't Let Refugee History Repeat Itself**

**By Benjamin Cohen**

**Forward, January 31, 2017**

<http://forward.com/opinion/361576/letter-from-ukraine-dont-let-refugee-history-repeat-itself/>

The abandoned 428-year-old synagogue in Sharhorod, Ukraine stands as a powerful reminder of why millions of Jews in the world now call themselves Americans. I traveled there last week from my home in Kyiv, Ukraine's

capital, to better understand where my family comes from. Six of my eight great-grandparents fled villages like Sharhorod – places with names like Vishnevets, Kalius, Mielnica-Podolska - in the first quarter of the twentieth century, planting roots on America's East Coast.

My family's story is not unique among American Jews. Anti-Semitism and industrialization in the Russian Empire slowly strangled shtetls, small, majority-Jewish villages like Sharhorod. From 1880-1924, nearly 3 million Jews left everything behind for new lives across the sea. My family was among them.

In 1924, Congress almost entirely closed the gates. President Calvin Coolidge signed the Johnson-Reed Act - also known as the National Origins Act - into law, severely curtailing immigration by Eastern European Jews. According to the [Office of the Historian at the Department of State](#), the purpose of the law was to “preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity.”

Some of those who were denied entry to the United States because of the Act found other countries that would take them in. Those who did not, however, were forced to return to the places they had fled. For Jews, that meant Nazi Germany. Most were brutally slaughtered, including many of the passengers on the ill-fated [S.S. St. Louis](#), a ship carrying Jewish refugees from Europe that was turned away by the United States government in 1939. I imagine what would have happened if my great-grandparents had been unable to leave. History tells me they would probably not have survived.

Any of this sound familiar?

Last Friday, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, President Trump signed an executive order halting the U.S. refugee program for Syrians and barring entry to people from seven Muslim-majority nations. That not one terrorist who has committed a terrorist attack on American soil from 1975-2015 comes from any of the countries included in the ban raises questions about its intent. Trump's affirmation that Christians from these countries will be given priority consideration over their fellow Muslim citizens amounts to nothing less than religious discrimination. This is not about national security. This is bigotry.

As Jews, we must speak out. We understand the life-saving benefits of immigration. Many of these immigrants are fleeing horrific violence. In Syria alone, over 400,000 people have been killed and over 6.5 million are displaced.

We have no right to be silent when President Trump turns his back on refugees, condemning the innocent to die because they are Muslims and therefore unwelcome in the United States. When even the President's son-in-law and close adviser Jared Kushner, the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, fails to speak out, we must speak even louder.

My great-grandparents fled their homes and arrived in the United States with little more than the shirts on their backs. They found jobs, raised families, sent their children to American schools, and built the foundations on which my family continues to thrive. They made America great, because immigrants make America great.

Silence on this issue is the ultimate hypocrisy. It is a betrayal of our own history, our values, and our communities. Call your representatives. Join protests. Write letters. Donate to the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council on American-Islam Relations, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. As Jews, it is our duty to work together and undermine this inhumane policy.

## How Israel sold Russia drones to stop missiles from reaching Iran

By YAAKOV KATZ, AMIR BOHBOT

Jerusalem Post, February 3, 2017

<http://m.jpost.com/#article=6017NTkwOTc2MjQ4RDgyQTRBRUYwNzU1MUU2NzY1OEE2REQ>

Russia's interest in Israeli drones was sparked during the war it fought with Georgia in South Ossetia in the summer of 2008. The war lasted five days, and while Russia ultimately won, the fighting exposed a severe decline in the Russian military's technological capabilities, particularly when it came to drones.

In the weeks leading up to the war and amid growing concern that Russia was going to annex the breakaway territories, Georgia began flying drones on routine reconnaissance missions over the conflict zone. These weren't just any drones. They were Hermes 450s, manufactured by Elbit in Israel and used by the Israeli Air Force. In the span of three months, Russia shot down three drones.

While the downings of the drones were impressive on their own, Georgia's use of drones highlighted a problem on the Russian side. To begin with, Russian drones were late to the battlefield and failed to provide real-time intelligence, forcing Moscow instead to dispatch fighter jets and long-range bombers for standard recon missions. One drone used during the war was the old Tipchak, which Russia later admitted made too much noise, making it easy to detect and intercept.

On the other hand, the Georgian military effectively gathered intelligence, largely due to its small fleet of Israeli drones.

Weeks after the war ended, Russia turned to Israel and asked to purchase the Hermes 450, the same drone used by Georgia. Israel was initially shocked. Russia had never before purchased weapons from a foreign country, let alone from Israel. But the war was a wake-up call for Moscow, which was willing to admit that it needed technological assistance.

Everyone agreed that no matter what, Israel could not sell drones that were still in operational IAF use.

During the Second Lebanon War, in 2006, Hezbollah fired dozens of Russian anti-tank missiles at Israeli tanks. The last thing Israel could afford was to have its own drones one day be used against it.

But then defense officials came up with an idea. What if, by selling drones to Russia, Israel could prevent the sale of sophisticated arms that were supposed to be delivered to Iran or Syria?

That would not only make it possible to live with the risk the drone sale posed, it could even make it worthwhile. In Israel, opinions were split. The Foreign Ministry supported the sale and claimed that it could help strengthen ties with Moscow, especially at a time when Iran was moving ahead with its nuclear program.

The sale of drones, these officials argued, would provide Israel with real leverage over Russian policy on issues such as Iran.

While the Defense Ministry was in favor of obtaining some leverage over Moscow, it had difficulty overcoming the genuine concern that the drone technology would one day find its way to Iran, Syria and then even Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

At the time, there was one Russian arms deal that everyone in Israel agreed needed to be stopped at all costs: the delivery of the advanced S-300 air defense system to Iran.

The original \$800 million deal had been signed secretly in 2005, but under pressure from Israel and the US, Russia was delaying delivery. Israel's reasons to even consider such a quid pro quo were simple.

The S-300 was one of the most advanced air defense systems in the world, was combat proven, could track up to 100 targets simultaneously and had the potential to make an Israeli air strike against Iran's nuclear facilities impossible.

The Russians were well aware of Israel's concern regarding the S-300. It came up in almost every conversation.

About a week after the war ended in South Ossetia, Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert spoke by phone with Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. Russia was upset with Israel for supplying Georgia with arms and drones.

During the conversation, Olmert agreed to a moratorium on Israeli arms sales to Georgia but also pressed Moscow on its sale of weapons to Syria and Iran.

Officially, the Kremlin gave Israel assurances that it would not transfer weapons to Iran that could destabilize the region, a message that could be interpreted as a decision not to supply the S-300.

At the same time, though, Moscow explained to Israel that if Iran met its obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency – the United Nations' nuclear watchdog – delivery of the S-300 would be reexamined positively. Anyhow, the Kremlin argued, the S-300 was a defensive system, and Israel, if concerned about it, should simply not attack.

Russia refused to reveal its true intentions.

In early 2009, for example, US Senator Carl Levin visited Russia. Levin was chairman at the time of the Senate Armed Services Committee and had come to Moscow to try to increase cooperation on missile defense in face of Iran's continued pursuit of a nuclear weapon.

A vocal supporter of Israel, Levin also raised the S-300 sale and urged Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov to hold back from delivering the weapons system to Iran. But Ryabkov stood strong, saying that while the deal was currently frozen, it didn't help that everyone kept talking about it.

"The less we hear from Washington about this, the better," he said.

News of the freeze did not alleviate Israeli concerns. In Jerusalem, some thought that an attack on Iran would need to be moved up so it could take place before the S-300 arrived.

Israel made sure to get this message out to some of the moderate Arab states it was friendly with in the Persian Gulf.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) chief of staff Hamid Thani al Rumaithi, for example, met with Richard Olson, the US ambassador to Abu Dhabi, in early 2009 with an urgent request: that the US immediately deploy five Patriot missile defense batteries in the UAE.

The reason was fear that due to the S-300 deal, Israel was on the verge of attacking Iran, and Iran would then retaliate against the UAE.

"I need to be open and frank with you, there are changes in the region that concern us," Rumaithi told Olson. The Patriot batteries, he explained, would be deployed in and around Abu Dhabi to protect against potential Iranian missile attacks in retaliation to an Israeli strike.

When pressed on what might precipitate an Israeli attack, Rumaithi referred to the delivery of the S-300 system.

"I don't trust the Russians, I've never trusted the Russians or the Iranians," he added.

Back in Israel, the drone deal suddenly became even more urgent. The final decision, though, wasn't just in the hands of the Defense Ministry.

If the Foreign Ministry vetoed the deal, the Defense Ministry could still bring the sale to the Israeli Security Cabinet, which had the authority to overturn the decision.

The Security Cabinet convened a number of times during 2009 to discuss the proposed deal. Russia wanted to purchase long-endurance drones like the ones Georgia had used during the war. Israel made a counter offer: It would consider selling drones, but only older models like the Searcher, which the air force had retired several years before.

In June 2009, Israel's new foreign minister, Avigdor Liberman, flew to Moscow. That occurred during a period of flourishing Israeli-Russian ties, cultivated mostly by the Moldovan-born Liberman. By that summer, five Israeli cabinet ministers had visited Moscow, tourism was at an all-time high, a free trade agreement was in the works and Russia was talking to Israel about hosting a Middle East peace conference in Moscow.

In some Washington circles there was concern that Israel was looking to replace the US as its primary ally. Israeli-US ties were frayed, in any case.

Benjamin Netanyahu had been reelected as Israel's prime minister and was already knocking heads with Barack Obama, the new US president. During his meetings in Moscow, Liberman raised the S-300 sale. The Russians, who openly opposed an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, told him that the S-300 was "only destabilizing if you are planning to attack Iran" and refused to rule out supplying the system.

If Israel was going to move ahead with the drone deal, now was the time. Before it could sign with Moscow, Israel had to pass one more major hurdle, which was the United States. Russia and America were old adversaries, and Washington would not be happy with Israel selling advanced drones to a country that once was and – in some circles still is – an enemy.

## **'Our Work Has Never Been More Important'**

**BY GARY ROSENBLATT**

**The Jewish Week, January 31, 2017**

<http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/our-work-has-never-been-more-important/>

After serving 10 years as the youngest dean of Columbia Law School, David Schizer, 48, formally assumed his new duties last month as CEO of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Jewish community's global humanitarian aid program. He succeeds Alan Gil, who returned to Israel, where he worked for JDC for many years. Schizer, a Brooklyn native, has a law degree from Yale and clerked for Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the Supreme Court. He headed a \$353 million capital campaign at Columbia, doubling its traditional fundraising and expanding its faculty. Among his activities in Jewish communal life, he served on the board of the 92nd Street Y, the Ramaz School, Natan and the Columbia-Barnard Hillel, and he was a senior advisor to The Tikvah Fund.

We interviewed Schizer in person and by phone.

Q: What motivated you to leave your post at Columbia and take the helm of JDC?

A: I have long felt a need to pay back to the community. I'm named for an orphaned grandfather who fled pogroms and the violence of the Russian Revolution in Ukraine. He took his two younger siblings with him and came to America to make a new life. I'm proud to be part of JDC's work, which has never been more important, so I can repay my grandfather for all he did for me.

What are JDC's priorities at this time?

Our mission is constant: saving Jewish lives and building Jewish life all over the world. We are especially focused on the former Soviet Union, where many elderly Jews are living on the equivalent of \$2 a day. Without us, many would die. Also, Venezuela looms large. The economy is in free fall and the Jewish community has gone from about 20,000 to 6,700, with growing needs. And of course there is Israel, where about 18 percent of the population lives under the poverty line.

I was surprised at the outset to learn how much we do in Israel, where we are the innovation arm of the government. We do pilot programs, and if they are successful, the government takes it over and scales it up. For example, we now adapt apartments to the needs of residents with disabilities rather than placing them in residential facilities.

As the population of Holocaust survivors decreases with time, how do you address their needs?

At the end of 2015, there were close to 56,000 survivors in the Former Soviet Union alone. While their numbers decrease, the needs of the aging population increase. We are always working to be more efficient in saving as many lives as possible, providing food, medicine and home care. Some years ago we replaced direct delivery of food packages and began to provide people with cash cards to buy food and medicine. Another mission is to help sustain and develop local Jewish communities, often by making grants to local institutions.

How does JDC manage to reach people in more than 70 countries?

Our budget last year was about \$324 million. About one-third comes from the Claims Conference and Restitution Funds. The JDC board, endowments, foundations and thousands of individual donors make up about \$84 million. Jewish Federations and the government of Israel each provide about \$50 million, and this year, a new four-year \$52 million partnership with the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, will provide for elderly Jews in the FSU. These funds allow us to maintain a staff of about 1,100 people, about half based in Israel, and with offices around the world.

How is JDC planning for the future?

In our work with local communities, one emphasis is on resilience and security. That includes dealing with trauma, offering counseling and training in terms of preventing terror attacks and dealing with their aftermath. We have set aside 15 slots on our board [out of 180] for people in their 20s and 30s who bring their energy and commitment to the table. And we engage millennials through our Entwine program, which catalyzes Jewish identity and a sense of responsibility on a global level. We have 18,000 young Jewish adults involved and this year we will have 700 of them serving communities overseas in short, medium and long-term programs. Young people are drawn to our international humanitarian work, and we believe in building community at home through building community abroad.

## **Solovey on the Shape of the Emerging Putin-Trump 'Big Deal' on Ukraine and Much Else**

**By Paul Goble**

**Window on Eurasia, January 30, 2017**

<http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2017/01/solovey-on-shape-of-emerging-putin.html>

Staunton, January 30 – Valery Solovey, one of the best connected and most thoughtful of Moscow's foreign policy commentators, says that the telephone call between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin was the "first step toward 'a big deal'" between the two not only over bilateral ties but also over a re-division of the world that will leave many countries at Russia's mercy.

The MGIMO professor outlines what he sees as the seven most important aspects of such a deal in a Facebook post ([facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1842744842662560&id=100007811864378](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1842744842662560&id=100007811864378)), that subsequently has been picked up by other outlets (<http://echo.msk.ru/blog/vsolovej/1918678-echo>) and

<http://hvylyya.net/news/exclusive/ssha-blizki-k-zaklyucheniyyu-s-rf-bolshoy-sdelki-kasayushheysya-ukrainiyi-solovey.html>).

Solovey's seven points of a possible "deal" between Putin and Trump are:

1. "Moscow considers that a personal meeting of Putin and Trump will be marked by mutual understanding and can lay the groundwork for a strategic deal."
2. "In the new American administration there are influential people who think that agreement with Russia corresponds to the national interests of the US. Expert workups of these agreements have already begun."
3. "For the US, the main themes of the deal are the destruction of ISIS and restraining Iran and China. For Russia, they are the *de facto* recognition of a new geopolitical *status quo*, a recognition of the post-Soviet space (except for the Baltics) as a zone of Russian influence, a normalization of relations with NATO, and a decisive easing of sanctions."
4. "A mass joint operation of the US and Russia against ISIS (the theater of military operations in addition to Syria would include two or three additional countries) would prove capable of removing the objections of the Congress against a deal with Russia."
5. "Regarding the policy of post-sanctions Iran, Moscow now has poorly concealed objections so that a firm base for a future agreement exists."
6. "For Russia, it is critically important to avoid complications with China, therefore the potential model of agreement with the US regarding China may be formed not on a military-political but on a geo-economic basis involving massive economic cooperation in Siberia and the Far East, with the involvement of South Korea and Japan."
7. "Regarding Ukraine, the position is the following: to give guarantees that the Russians will not seize Ukraine, and in the future to allow the two neighboring sides to agree among themselves. The US has other priorities."

It is important to remember that Solovey's conclusions, however accurate they may be as a statement about where Putin and Trump are now, may not be what any final "deal" will look like: There are simply too many players in both Russia and the US to be certain of that. But they do point to two disturbing possibilities in the former Soviet space.

On the one hand, if Solovey is right, Trump is prepared to leave the 11 former Soviet republics to face Russian power on their own, something that will represent a betrayal of what has been American policy since 1991. Moscow apparently is prepared to recognize that the Baltic countries are out of its zone, but any Putin promise to not try to take Ukraine is worthless.

And on the other, in the MGIMO analyst's view, Trump and Putin are prepared to launch a major military campaign against ISIS not because it would really defeat Islamist radicalism – the experience of Syria shows how unlikely that is -- than because it could serve as a means for Trump to marginalize critics in the Congress of his all-too-obvious tilt toward Russia.

Given the gratitude that Trump would likely have for such additional Russian assistance in US domestic politics, it would be most unlikely that the US president would do anything to block Putin's authoritarianism and imperial pretensions in Eurasia, guaranteeing not only more violence there but destroying what is left of US credibility more generally.

And tragically, if Solovey is right, Trump apparently is only concerned about containing Islamic radicalism and China and is prepared to yield to Russia on everything else. Thus his constant promise to "make America great again" will in the first instance contribute to making Russia great again even as it diminishes America's influence and standing in the world.