

Weekly Top 10

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 18, 2022

TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

Dear Friend,

We were all moved by the stirring words of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to a joint session of Congress earlier this week. President Zelenskyy spoke about freedom, the right of a nation to determine its own course, and the Ukrainian nation's willingness to defend itself. In his emotional appeal he called on the United States to lead the rest of the world in supporting Ukraine against the Russian invasion.

President Zelenskyy shared a heart wrenching video showing the human and physical toll the invasion has had on his nation and his people. He thanked the American people and government for the humanitarian and security support provided since the Russian invasion and detailed the ongoing needs to survive this onslaught. NCSEJ and many of our member agencies continue to support increased aid from the United States to Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Jewish community joined the rest of the Jewish world in celebrating Purim. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia didn't prevent Jewish communities from Kyiv to Dnipro to Lviv from the traditional reading of the Megilla. The message of Purim is a universal one demonstrating the need to stand up, be counted, and speak truth to power. Please see the [attached photo of the Dnipro Purim celebration](#).

Earlier this week we sent out an [Advocacy Alert \(see attached\)](#) highlighting what can be done to support Ukraine and the Ukrainian Jewish Community. One request was to communicate with your members of Congress on several issues, including additional humanitarian and security support as well as urging them to push the Administration to expedite the process to allow Ukrainian refugees into the United States. This is critical given the three million plus refugees who have crossed into Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. Please take a few minutes and email your Senators and Representatives on these vital issues.

We continue to coordinate with our membership and are in contact with our Kyiv Representative and government officials in Ukraine, the U.S., Israel and the countries bordering Ukraine. We will keep you apprised of current developments and what needs to be done.

Sincerely,
Mark B. Levin
NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO

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NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF NAFTALI BENNETT'S RUSSIA MEDIATION?

Michael J. Koplow

Israel Policy Forum | March 17, 2022

In recent weeks, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has assumed what is for him the new role of international crisis mediator. On Saturday March 5, Bennett made a secret trip to Moscow—despite it being Shabbat and Bennett being the first strictly observant Israeli prime minister—where he met with Vladimir Putin for three hours to discuss the fighting in Ukraine. Bennett followed that up with immediate phone calls to Volodymyr Zelensky and other world leaders, and was back in the midst of the fray this past Monday, when he left a cabinet meeting to conduct back-to-back conversations with Putin and Zelensky.

What Bennett is precisely up to remains unclear. Israeli sources have alternately portrayed Bennett as using his relationship with both sides to hasten an end to the fighting, and as seeking to protect Israeli interests vis-à-vis Russia, whether those be Israel's freedom of action in Syrian skies or the safety of the Russian and Ukrainian Jewish communities. There were also reports—subsequently denied by Israeli and Ukrainian officials—that Bennett was pushing Zelensky to accede to Russian demands, and speculation that Bennett is also ostensibly using the opportunity to discuss Ukraine with Putin to influence the Vienna negotiations over a potential return to the JCPOA. Some of these goals make more sense than others given Israel's position and Israeli interests, but what it all adds up to is a situation that is more precarious for Bennett than it may seem at first glance.

To take things at face value, Bennett sees an opportunity to do some good on the world stage by taking advantage of Israel's unique position in order to mediate between Russia and Ukraine and end the bloodshed.

[Read the Full Article Here](#)

This Is Why Putin Can't Back Down

David Brooks

The New York Times | March 10, 2022

Carl von Clausewitz famously asserted that war is the continuation of politics by other means. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is the continuation of identity politics by other means.

I don't know about you, but I've found the writings of conventional international relations experts to be not very helpful in understanding what this whole crisis is about. But I've found the writing of experts in social psychology to be enormously helpful.

That's because Vladimir Putin is not a conventional great power politician. He's fundamentally an identity entrepreneur. His singular achievement has been to help Russians to recover from a psychic trauma — the aftermath of the Soviet Union — and to give them a collective identity so they can feel that they matter, that their lives have dignity.

The war in Ukraine is not primarily about land; it's primarily about status. Putin invaded so Russians could feel they are a great nation once again and so Putin himself could feel that he's a world historical figure along the lines of Peter the Great.

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Jews in war-torn Ukraine use Purim story as guide to resilience

Debbie Bohnblatt

The Jerusalem Post | March 18, 2022

“It shows me that the Jewish people lives, that the Jews of Ukraine have, and will have, a flourishing Jewish life, and that there will be a future for Ukrainian Jewry,” he said.

Holtzberg was on a trip outside the country when the Russian invasion began but returned to Ukraine. He toured Jewish communities to ensure that they were able to celebrate the festival, including holding communal readings of the biblical Book of Esther. “It shows me that the Jewish people lives, that the Jews of Ukraine have, and will have, a flourishing Jewish life, and that there will be a future for Ukrainian Jewry,” he said.

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‘It’s God’s work’: Christians are helping hundreds of Ukrainian Jews escape the war to Israel

Cnaan Liphshiz

Jewish Telegraph Agency | March 17, 2022

JTA - She risks her life to get Jewish people out of bombed-out parts of Ukraine’s capital city, but Nataliya Krishanovski doesn’t exactly see her actions as humanitarian work.

Krishanovski, 60, is part of a 20-person team of Christians who for years have been helping Ukrainian Jews immigrate to Israel because they believe doing so helps fulfill biblical prophecies and makes up for antisemitic persecution.

“It’s God’s work, not humanitarian work,” Krishanovski, who works in the Ukraine office of the Christians for Israel movement, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a phone call.

Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that began on Feb. 24, the Christian Zionist organization has used connections and contingency plans they have spent years building to help hundreds of Ukrainian Jews leave the country — representing a significant portion of the thousands of Ukrainian Jews who have fled during the war so far.

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Uzbekistan calls for an end to aggression in Ukraine

Eurasianet | March 17, 2022

Uzbekistan has broken ranks among its Central Asian peers, who have pointedly refrained from adopting explicit positions on Russia’s war, by stating that it recognizes Ukraine’s territorial integrity and that it will not recognize the independence of the breakaway self-styled republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Speaking in the Senate on March 17, Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Komilov urged both sides in the conflict to reach a diplomatic solution.

“The situation around Ukraine is a cause of deep concern for Uzbekistan,” Komilov said. “We support pursuing a peaceful

solution for this situation and to settle this conflict by political and diplomatic means. For that to happen, it is necessary first to bring an end to the military activities and aggression.”

The statement stops short of categorically assigning blame to either side for initiating the conflict, but the fact that it has been made at all is notable in light of the depth of diplomatic and economic ties between Uzbekistan and Russia.

All other countries in Central Asia, whose economies are like Uzbekistan’s strongly dependent on that of Russia, have adopted fiercely noncommittal positions.

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In a Romanian resort town, Jewish children from Odessa celebrate Purim as refugees

Marcel Gascon Barbera

Jewish Telegraph Agency | March 18, 2022

NEPTUN, Romania (JTA) — Hundreds of Jewish children from Odessa shook the Romanian Black Sea resort of Neptun out of its winter lethargy with a Purim party that, at least for a little while, usurped the tragic reality in their homeland.

“It is not easy knowing what’s going on at home, but it is a mitzvah to be happy for Purim; they’ve been through a lot and deserve to have a great time this evening,” said Alina Feoktistova, one of the organizers, before the start of the event on Wednesday.

Like nearly everyone else among the 800 people celebrating Purim in Neptun this week, Feoktistova is associated with Tikva, an Orthodox Jewish aid organization based in Odessa that serves vulnerable Jewish children.

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US earmarks \$180M for military assistance to Baltic NATO members

Jordan Williams

The Hill | March 17, 2022

The U.S. approved \$180 million in security assistance to the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania under the \$1.5 trillion government funding bill President Biden signed on Tuesday, Estonia’s Ministry of Defense said.

The bolstered aid represents \$11 million more than the \$169 million the U.S. committed under the initiative last year and comes as Washington seeks to bolster its NATO allies amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

In a statement, Estonian Defense Minister Kalle Laanet said that Washington has “taken a clear initiative in the current security crisis by supporting its NATO Eastern Allies, Ukraine, and bringing Russia to the attention of the international community.”

“The decision of the Congress shows that the United States is committed to the protection of our region and clearly understands that the defense of their own country also begins in the Baltic States,” Laanet said.

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Opinion: Could Putin lose? Here’s why the ‘End of History’ author is optimistic.

Greg Sargent

The Washington Post | March 14, 2022

Is Russia destined to lose in Ukraine? What would that mean for the future of liberalism and the West?

Francis Fukuyama, the political theorist who developed the famous “end of history” thesis, is generating some buzz with a new piece that makes a stark prediction: “Russia is heading for an outright defeat in Ukraine.”

Fukuyama argues that Russian President Vladimir Putin badly miscalculated, underestimating Ukrainian resolve to resist annexation, and that Putin doesn’t have the military resources to subjugate the whole country.

This comes as fears are mounting that Putin, angry and frustrated, is escalating the civilian slaughter to industrial levels. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky just warned that the situation is “urgent.”

Yet Fukuyama remains optimistic, and not just about a near-term Russian defeat.

[Read the Full Article Here](#)

For Holocaust survivors from Ukraine, Russian invasion stirs painful memories

Tara Bahrapour

The Washington Post | March 16, 2022

For Novitsky and others who fled Ukraine and whose families were victims of Nazi atrocities, watching the bombardment and displacement of Ukrainians following the Russian attack feels like peering through a mirror at their own childhoods.

On the eve of the German invasion in 1941, Ukraine had the largest Jewish population in Europe, including around 160,000 in Kyiv, according to the U.S. Holocaust Museum. At least 1.5 million Jews are estimated to have been killed in Ukraine, and in some cases Ukrainians, Russians, and other local people collaborated, according to the museum.

For many, watching the news out of Ukraine now is so painful that they can’t talk about it, said Shelley Rood Wernick, managing director of the Center on Holocaust Survivor Care and Institute on Aging and Trauma at the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA).

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Explainer | The South Caucasus braces for Russia’s hard landing

Maximillian Hess

Eurasianet | March 16, 2022

The South Caucasus countries are beginning to feel the effect of Western sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. As in Central Asia, there will be far more losers than winners.

Take Georgia. Tbilisi has not had diplomatic relations with Moscow since its own war with Russia in 2008 and the Kremlin’s subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent.

Yet Georgia remains exposed. Russians tourists are a top visitor; the World Tourism and Travel Council estimates tourism supports 10 percent of Georgian jobs. As for trade, last year 55 percent of Georgia’s wine exports were sold to Russia.

Moscow has used these ties to pressure Tbilisi in the past. It banned Georgian wine and mineral water between 2006 and 2013; in 2019 the Kremlin slapped a tourism embargo on the country when it was unhappy over anti-Russia protests.

The decreased value of the Russian ruble – and the new difficulty converting it – will thus have a direct impact by making it more expensive for Russians to visit and buy Georgian products.

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202-898-2500 | www.ncsej.org

1120 20th Street NW, Suite 300N, Washington, DC 20036

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