

# THE GAZA-UKRAINE KREMLIN CONNECTION

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On October 7, following the brutal attack by

Hamas terrorists on Israel, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict began evolving into a full-scale war. The Kremlin's propaganda does not hide the fact that this escalation in the Middle East benefits the Russian state. This raises questions as to what real benefits the Israel-Hamas war brings Moscow beyond its use in propaganda.

Russian narratives regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are closely related to the complex situation the Kremlin found itself in leading up to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow used highly controversial conspiracy theories, with anti-Semitic undertones, to justify its aggression. These theories included the idea that the West was determined to destroy Russia at any cost, as it represents the last bastion of Orthodox Christian values resisting globalization (Tsargrad.tv, November 2, 2022).

At the onset of Russia's invasion, similar conspiracy theories began to proliferate on mainstream Telegram channels. These theories described an alleged Jewish plot aimed at "expanding living spaces at the expense of Ukraine and Russia" (?me/kremlinprachka, April 23, 2022).

Public statements from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov about "Hitler's Jewish blood" and other anti-Semitic outbursts soon followed (BBC News Russian, May 2, 2022). Russian propagandists used Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Jewish heritage to fuel these narratives (TASS, September 5).

A foundational myth of Russian propaganda is distinguishing the "good Jews" from the "bad Jews."

The Kremlin highlights those Israel-based experts who are loyal to Russia and have vocally condemned "Nazism and anti-Semitism in Ukraine" (YouTube, January 12, 2021). Putin himself actively promotes this narrative, having referred to Zelenskyy as a "disgrace to the Jewish people" (Gazeta.ru, June 16).

Furthermore, Moscow openly acknowledges that Iran and other dictatorships in the Middle East that support terrorism are key allies in facing Western opposition in the region (Valdaiclub.com, March 2).

This complex mix has largely determined the main propaganda narratives for the Kremlin in commenting on the fighting in Gaza. Many Russian propagandists do not even try to hide their glee and suggest that the war is retribution for Israel's support of Ukraine, to which Moscow turned a blind eye for far too long (Vzglyad, October 9).

Even more pronounced has been the vengeful views expressed by some propagandists regarding the fate of those Russian-speaking individuals who relocated to Israel once the war in Ukraine began. Margarita Simonyan, head of *RT*, made a number of statements on this topic and declared that "we are waiting for the outcome of the Russian pacifists" (RTVI, October 7).

Her statements were quickly echoed by other propagandists who have attempted to convince the Russians who relocated to Israel that "there is only one world, and the same processes are happening everywhere" (Vzglyad, October 10).

Putin and the propagandists who follow his lead have placed blame for the events in Israel and Gaza squarely on the United States (Ura.news, October 11).

Russian military experts openly mocked the failure of Israeli intelligence and military forces to prevent the Hamas attack (Vzglyad, October 8). As the fighting intensifies, Russian propagandists are increasingly using the situation to advance their primary narratives regarding Ukraine.

For example, they compared the blockade of the Gaza Strip to the blockade of Ukraine's Donbas region. They even likened the tragedy in the Israeli kibbutz of Kfar Aza, where no fewer than 40 mutilated bodies of children were found, as a "staged hoax similar to Bucha" and characterized it as a "horrific lie" (KP, October 11).

The Kremlin's propaganda openly states that the current situation is advantageous for two primary reasons.

First, many observers note that, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, war has become a "new normal" and a common way to resolve foreign conflicts (YouTube, October 12). The fighting in Gaza benefits Russian military officials in this regard.

Even before the invasion began, Moscow sought to include non-Western countries in a new global realignment that could be accompanied by wars and other global upheavals. The Kremlin hoped to sow global chaos in which its actions would not stand out among other authoritarian players (YouTube, December 2, 2021).

These hopes have not been realized. Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, nevertheless, opened Pandora's box, and the world has become much more unstable as a result.

Second, Moscow believes that the United States does not have the resources to support Ukraine and Israel simultaneously (Vzglyad, October 11).

Kremlin propagandists assert that the war in the Middle East will exacerbate internal party divisions in the

United States (Vzglyad, October 12). Meanwhile, they attempt to convince Israelis not to support Ukraine, spreading blatant propaganda that Kyiv has been selling Western weapons to Hamas (??, October 7).

In practice, perhaps the only hope the Kremlin can be certain of is the diversion of global attention from Ukraine to the fighting in Gaza. Moscow's propaganda campaign will likely bring more negatives than positives.

*Concerning arms supplies to terrorists, as early as 2016, Israeli media outlets reported that Hezbollah was receiving heavy weapons from Russia without any restrictions (Times of Israel;Haaretz, January 11, 2016). Other Israeli experts specifically mentioned that Hezbollah and Hamas have been direct beneficiaries of Russian arms deliveries (Krym Realii, January 21, 2016).*

Moscow's close ties with Hamas combined with propagandists' *schadenfreude* may ultimately push Israel away from Russia and closer to the West. Israel heavily relies on aid from the West, presuming expanded cooperation with its Western partners.

Russia, despite its close ties with many dictatorships in the Middle East, no longer possesses the same potential for fueling conflicts that it had several years ago (Valdaiclub.com, October 11). Russian experts used to note that Moscow was using terrorists to achieve its goals in the Middle East (Krym Realii, January 21, 2016).

Now, it appears that terrorists of all kinds are taking advantage of Putin's weakness and how severely his war against Ukraine has shaken the foundations of the international order.

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