



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Israel; Middle East; Russia

BEHIND THE KREMLIN'S FAILED BID TO CONTROL INTERPOL

Russian officials are crying foul over their unsuccessful attempt to secure the presidency of INTERPOL. Kremlin officials are citing undue Western pressure for the failure of their government's preferred candidate, Major General Alexandr Prokopchuk, to win the leadership of the international police body - and pointing the finger of blame at the United States in particular. "It is beyond doubt that member states of the organization were pressured and cultivated," noted Vladimir Zhabarov, the deputy chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee. "The U.S. brazenly interfered in the presidential election of this international body."

The Russian accusations range from charges of interference to allegations of malfeasance. One Russian lawmaker has charged Western nations with spreading disinformation "discrediting Prokopchuk's dignity and reputation in order to prevent his election," and has called for legal investigations and lawsuits in response. Another has attributed U.S. opposition to Prokopchuk's election to fears "that if a Russian headed Interpol, their plans to illegally prosecute and arrest Russian and other citizens in any country would fail." Prokopchuk, however, isn't completely out in the cold. "Prokopchuk will continue serving as Interpol vice-president for Europe," the Russian Interior Ministry has confirmed. (*The Moscow Times*, November 21, 2018)

HOW PUTIN'S COHORT HAS ENRICHED ITSELF

Serving as one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's cronies, it turns out, can be a lucrative business. A new investigative study launched by the liberal *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project has documented that, over the past two decades, a number of the President's former bodyguards have managed to secure valuable real estate in the Moscow region's Odintsovsky District - land that was "scammed away from sovkhos farmers in the late 1990s." The fraud dates back to the early 2000s, when several Kremlin cronies conspired to steal land away from a number of farmers, who "were given worthless corporate stock in exchange for the land they received after the USSR's collapse." The ill-gotten gains were then sold to a nonprofit partnership established by high-ranking members of the Federal Protective Service, which in turn parceled out plots of lucrative land to such personalities as Oleg Klementev, the former head of Putin's personal guard, and Tula Governor Alexey Dyumin, among others. (*Meduza*, November 20, 2018)

RUSSIA AND ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

The Kremlin is repositioning itself to be a key player in the long-running Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, told reporters that his government stands ready to play an active role in future diplomatic talks between Israel and the Palestinians. "It is impossible to create stability in the Middle East, including in Libya and Iraq, without a solution to the oldest regional problem, the Palestinian problem," Lavrov told reporters in Rome while on an official state visit to Italy. "We support the need for a resumption of direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians," and "confirm again our offer from several years ago to host a meeting between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Russia without any preconditions." (*Algemeiner*, November 23, 2018)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Russia's revived interest in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking comes as part of a drive for deeper engagement throughout the region. In recent months, Moscow has made a concerted bid to expand its involvement in regional economic, political and strategic affairs - outreach that included the conclusion a new strategic partnership agreement with Saudi Arabia and the establishment of new military bases in war-torn Libya.]

THE OPPOSITION'S CASE FOR ARMING THE MASSES

One of the Kremlin's leading critics is advocating for the arming of Russia's citizenry - a proposal that the Kremlin is bound to find worrisome. In an extensive recent interview with *Current Time*, ousted YUKOS tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky argued that Russians should have access to arms - in order to defend themselves not from crime and terrorism, but from "their own government." "I think that if we want to be a free people then people should have weapons. And these weapons should allow them not to defend themselves from criminals; criminals should be dealt with by the politicians working in conjunction with law enforcement authorities. The people should have weapons to defend themselves from their own government," Khodorkovsky said.

The Russian government, the oligarch-turned-opposition activist contends, has proven willing to target opponents with deadly force. As a result, he argues, Russia's dissidents require arms for protection: "I know that in the current situation if Putin were to decide to have Aleksei Navalny or me, or anyone, killed, then it is doubtful we'd be able to defend ourselves." (*Current Time*, November 27, 2018)