



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

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Related Categories: Israel; Russia; Ukraine

BLACKING OUT HRW

The website of Human Rights Watch, one of the world's leading human rights watchdogs, is no longer accessible to Russian citizens. The website was blocked (along with some two dozen others) by Russia's state censor, ROSKOMNADZOR, following its publication of an article covering the war in Ukraine that was at variance with Russia's official narrative regarding the conflict. Most of the other websites blocked by the agency were those of Ukrainian news organizations. (Agentura.ru, April 18, 2022)

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF... ISRAEL

Over the course of the current war in Ukraine, Israel has emerged as a significant geopolitical player. In the opening stages, both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy looked to Jerusalem to play some form of mediating role, leading to frenzied (though ultimately unsuccessful) shuttle diplomacy on the part of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Since then, though, Israel has increasingly sided with Ukraine - providing the country with significant aid as it continues its efforts to repel Russia's "special military operation." But Israel has also been a boon to Russia as well, with Russian Jews coming to the country in large numbers since the start of the conflict.

They are not staying, however. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, nearly 2,000 of the roughly 6,000 Russian Jews who took advantage of Israel's "Law of Return" (which permits Jews from abroad to claim Israeli citizenship and receive state benefits) have returned to Russia after a temporary visit.

Israeli officials and lawmakers are said to be aghast at the "abandonment data." "The information we received was that Russian Jews feel that the Iron Curtain is expected to come down again, so we decided to allow them these special benefits," one official from Israel's absorption ministry said. "But when a third of those immigrants take advantage of the kindness of the State of Israel and then leave in order to continue living in Russia, this is a serious problem." (*Jerusalem Post*, April 28, 2022)

LAVROV'S MESSAGING MISFIRE

Relations between Moscow and Jerusalem deteriorated further in early May, after Russia's chief diplomat made public comments claiming that Nazi leader Adolph Hitler had Jewish blood. In a May 2nd interview with an Italian television channel, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was asked how his government can claim "de-Nazification" to be a strategic goal in Ukraine when that country's president is himself Jewish. "In my opinion, Hitler also had Jewish origins, so it doesn't mean absolutely anything," he replied.

The comments generated outrage from across Israeli society, with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid calling Lavrov's statement "unforgivable and scandalous and a horrible historical error." "The Jews did not murder themselves in the Holocaust," Lapid said. "The lowest level of racism against Jews is to blame Jews themselves for antisemitism." In the wake of the scandal, Russian President Vladimir Putin is said to have called Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and apologized for Lavrov's remarks. (Associated Press, May 2, 2022; Reuters, May 2, 2022; *Ha'aretz*, May 5, 2022)

OTTAWA TAKES A STAND

The lower house of Canada's parliament has unanimously voted that Russia's conduct in Ukraine amounts to genocide under international law. There is "ample evidence of systemic and massive war crimes against humanity" being committed by Moscow, lawmakers in Canada's House of Commons said. The motion passed by the chamber enumerates that "war crimes by Russia include mass atrocities, systematic instances of willful killing of Ukrainian civilians, the desecration of corpses, forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, torture, physical harm, mental harm, and rape," Reuters reports. (Reuters, April 27, 2022)