

6. The Strange Case of Russian Anti-Semitism

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Abstract

Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, anti-Semitism (in both public discourse and policies and as manifested in the infrequency of anti-Semitic incidents) was at a historical low, and simultaneously Russia's relationship with Israel was on the rise. Officially, the Kremlin denounced xenophobia and made a crucial distinction between the isolationist ethnic nationalism that it condemned and the broader Russian imperial nationalism that has become Putinism's dominant framework, especially after 2014. The war against Ukraine, which Russia conceptualises as the continuation of its "struggle against the Nazis," is waged in the actual space where the Holocaust took place, and also, semantically, in the historical "bloodlands," following Timothy Snyder's term, that intersect with and evoke issues of Jewishness and Anti-Semitism, reactivating all manner of revisionist discourses about war-time collaboration, the Holocaust, and Ukrainian Jewish history. The Russian regime and its propagandists spin various conspiratorial narratives about the war and Ukraine's leadership that both reactivate dormant Soviet-era prejudices and create new ones (e.g., "sects," "global Satanism," "Western elites," "liberals as the fifth column," etc.) that are linked to Jewishness. Russian anti-Semitism is an inherently dynamic phenomenon that is shaped by and is included in the escalation in the Middle East, Russia's war against Ukraine, and Russia's hostile relations with the "collective West" and as such should be considered within international, domestic, and historical contexts.

Keywords: Russian anti-Semitism, conspiracies, Russia's war against Ukraine, Israel's war against Hamas

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From Gaza to Dagestan

The recent pogroms and riots in the North Caucasus, which followed a two-and-a-half-week massive anti-Semitic campaign on regional Telegram channels, came in the midst of a global surge in anti-Semitism following the 7 October attack by Hamas on southern Israel and the subsequent IDF operation in Gaza (Toler 2023). First, on Saturday 28 October 2023, an angry mob besieged a hotel in Khasavuyurt, Dagestan, galvanised by a rumour that refugees from Israel were staying there. The next day, a crowd of several thousand people chanting anti-Semitic and pro-Palestinian slogans stormed the airport in the republic's capital of Makhachkala. Some trashed and looted the shops in the halls, while others poured into the tarmac and tried to storm a plane that had landed from Tel Aviv. In Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, a Jewish cultural centre was set on fire and defaced with slogans "Death to the Jews." In Karachay-Cherkessia, women demonstrators called on the authorities to prevent "Israeli refugees from entering the republic and grabbing our land" and demanded the expulsion of local Jewish families.

The authorities were indecisive in their response and remarkably lenient in their treatment of the participants. While non-violent anti-war protesters face years in prison for perfectly legal actions, a handful of rioters in the North Caucasus received up to ten days in jail on administrative charges, with a few sentenced to 60 hours of community service. Putin blamed the anti-Semitic incidents on "evil forces operating from abroad," "Western intelligence services," especially "the USA and its satellites," such as Ukraine. The pogroms were thus reframed as an extension of the war that Russia is waging in Ukraine against Washington's "global dictatorship."

Russian leaders and key propagandists have made it abundantly clear which side they support in Israel's war against Hamas (Slisco 2023). On 26 October 2023, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov received a delegation of senior Hamas members and also met with his Iranian counterpart (Iran is widely regarded as an important sponsor of Hamas). On a meeting dedicated to the outbursts of anti-Jewish violence in Dagestan held on 30 October, Putin changed the subject to talk about the humanitarian situation in Gaza: "When you look at the suffering and bloodied children, you clench your fists and tears come to your eyes" (Osborn 2023).

Russia's endorsement of Hamas translates into a global disinformation campaign that it has been waging alongside Iran and China to undercut Israel and its key ally, the United States (Meyers and Frenkel 2023). It signals

the end of more than three decades of entente between Russia and Israel, which has been cemented in the last 16 years by Putin's personal and ideological affinity with Netanyahu's brand of nationalist authoritarian populism (see Weiss-Wendt 2022). In its efforts to assert itself as a leader of the Global South, Russia seems ready to resume its old Cold War era role as a patron and champion of the Palestinian cause. Conveniently, in targeting both domestic and foreign audiences, its propaganda can draw on the rich repertoire of anti-Zionist narratives it has inherited from the four decades of Soviet demonisation of Israel, some of which have already been reactivated in Russian TV shows, "Z" (pro-war) Telegram channels, and the massive disinformation campaign being waged across multiple digital and media platforms. This campaign seeks to relativise Russia's own aggression against Ukraine, distract global public attention from this war, and possibly undercut Western supplies of arms and military support to Ukraine. It pushes the narrative of "double standards" by comparing Western condemnation of Russian aggression against Ukraine with what it claims to be an endorsement of Israeli retaliation against Hamas, comparing the numbers of children killed in Ukraine and Gaza. It spurns conspiratorial fantasies, blaming all current military confrontations in the world on the machinations of the United States, which Putin recently likened to a "spider" that is the "root of all evil" – an image eerily familiar to scholars of both Nazi anti-Semitic and Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda (Slisco 2023). Last but not least, the sheer scale of this digital and media campaign, overwhelming users with an avalanche of visceral, emotionally charged content, some of it AI-generated or recycled from other war zones such as Syria, further polarises global public opinion and deepens confusion and distrust of all reporting and media coverage of both the Russian aggression against Ukraine and Israel's war against Hamas.

However, the current rise in violent anti-Semitism in Russia is more than a mere reflection of the global trend, fuelled by the post-7 October escalation in the Middle East, and to better understand its dynamics, it is crucial to examine not only the international but also the domestic context.

Anti-Semitism as the Arch Conspiracy Theory

To those observing the rise of anti-Semitism in Russia since the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the riots in Dagestan were a continuation of

very disturbing developments. Since 24 February 2022, Putin, his officials, and propagandists have made a slew of anti-Semitic comments. Most, although not all, of these remarks relate to the Russian leadership's obsession with Volodymyr Zelenskyi's Jewishness that has long posed an awkward problem to Russia's "denazification" narrative. In an interview with Russian propagandist Pavel Zarubin on 29 August 2023 Putin argued that "Western managers put an ethnic Jew in charge" in order to "cover up the anti-human nature of modern Ukraine" (Zarubinreporter 2023).¹ Speaking at an annual economic forum in Saint Petersburg on June 16, 2023, Putin admitted to always having had a lot of Jewish friends since childhood, who "say that Zelenskyi is not Jewish, that he is a disgrace to the Jewish people" (Kaplan 2023). This remark echoes the words of foreign minister Sergey Lavrov in his 1 May 2022 interview on Italian TV who was similarly struggling to explain Russia's portrayal of Ukraine as a "Nazi state" given the Jewish origins of its democratically elected president: "[That Zelenskyi is Jewish] means absolutely nothing. Wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews." "Hitler too, had Jewish blood," Lavrov added (BBC 2023).²

In his highly personalised authoritarian regime, Putin has long played the role of "tsar-liberator" and emancipator, sending signals down the power vertical and to the population at large about the changing do's and don'ts, overturning previously held taboos. With a few exceptions, of which more can be found below, public expression of anti-Semitism has long been one such taboo in Russian political and public discourses, solidifying Putin's reputation as someone sympathetic with Jews, even a philosemite. Today it no longer matters whether Putin personally harbours anti-Semitic prejudices or not. If he does, parenthetically, it would not have been all that unusual, since Putin and others from his entourage, from Lavrov, to Chemizov, Patrushev, and Cherkesov, hail from the Leningrad KGB, which by many accounts, was one of the most viciously anti-Semitic of all the KGB organisations. However, Putin's personal convictions are beside the point: what matters is what he says and does, since these are the signals eagerly awaited by his propagandists and senior officials who then spread them further. The very logic of his regime and the forces it has unleashed domestically

¹ "This makes for an extremely disgusting situation in which an ethnic Jew is covering up the glorification of Nazism and of those who led the Holocaust in Ukraine, which brought the destruction of millions of people," Putin said.

² Following public outcry in Israel, Putin called Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to apologise for Lavrov, but subsequent anti-Semitic remarks by both Putin and his entourage and leading propagandists were not followed by any apologies.

and globally has made the return of anti-Semitism into political rhetoric inevitable.³

Putinism has long been described as lacking a cohesive ideology and remarkably capable of mutating and adjusting to various ideological demands. From Putin's third term onwards, the ideological vacuum at its core has been increasingly filled with Manichean 'us-versus-them' conspiracy thinking that has contaminated public imagination, manifesting itself in various ways, in Russians' denialist attitudes to COVID-19, the besieged fortress mentality, and currently, with the pervasive public denial of Russian atrocities in Ukraine. In a sense, anti-Semitism is *the* arch-conspiracy narrative that feeds various discourses from the corruption of culture and economic exploitation to a global cabal and offers a convenient repertoire of interchangeable enemies, all of which can be substituted with the code word "Jew."

Current anti-Semitic discourses proliferating in Russia do not need to be logical or cohesive, as their efficiency lies in planting certain buzzwords, like "cults," "liberals-traitors," "the fifth column," "Western globalist elites," "Russophobes," and "Satanists," linking them in public consciousness with Jewishness. The fertile soil of the cultural memory of Soviet anti-Semitic and anti-Western campaigns then does the rest. What is new here is the transition from latent anti-Semitism, which used to be publicly condemned in post-Soviet Russia, to overt or thinly veiled anti-Semitic innuendos that are unabashedly voiced by Putin's advisers, diplomats, and propagandists and no longer cause embarrassment.

³ Russia's growing radicalisation and isolation in the post-2014 era made Putin as the self-proclaimed leader of the global far-right, ever more ready to embrace of the most radical, xenophobic international, groups. RT has repeatedly given stage to conspiracy theorists, neo-Nazis, members of the AfD, white supremacists, and anti-Semites, including RT's favorite "expert" on a plethora of subjects and a notorious Holocaust denier Ryan Dawson, who is introduced as a "peace activist." In 2015, RT aired an anti-Semitic segment denouncing Hillary Clinton as an "Illuminati candidate" because the tech company working for her campaign had a logo vaguely resembling an Illuminati triangle and their parent company had a Hebrew name – i.e., "backers who spoke Hebrew." The same year, Saint Petersburg hosted an International Conservative Forum with Ugo Voigt, Samuel Taylor, Nick Griffin, Jim Dowson, and Roberto Fiore among its guests and speakers. While many of the participants were notorious neo-Nazis, advocates of alt-right conspiracy theories, white supremacists, and Holocaust denial, the Forum sought respectability by denying accusations of Nazi sympathies and externalising the label, decrying instead the "fascists in Ukraine" and the "euro-bureaucratic Nazis in Brussels". For more on the subject, see Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (London: Routledge, 2017).

“Satan’s Seed”

A 2022 soldier’s manual approved by the Defence Ministry explains the goals of Russia’s invasion in Ukraine to the freshly mobilised recruits:

“Ukraine as a state does not exist, it is a territory of the former USSR temporarily occupied by a terrorist gang. All power there is concentrated in the hands of citizens of Israel, the US, and the UK, who have masterminded the genocide of indigenous inhabitants. [...] Today all of us, Russian Orthodox and Muslims, Buddhists and shamanists are fighting against Ukrainian nationalism and the global Satanism that backs it” (Razumov et al. 2022).

The passage echoes the 2019 article by Sergey Glazyev, Putin’s economic adviser at the time, in which Glazyev argued that US support for Zelenskyi was a sign of the Americans acting in cahoots with far-right forces in Israel in order to implement a mass transfer of Israeli Jews who were allegedly tired of the endless war in the Middle East and eager to settle in the lands of south-eastern Ukraine that, Glazyev asserted, had been “cleansed” of ethnic Russians by the Kyiv regime (Glazyev 2019). “Global Satanism” as Russia’s main enemy in Ukraine, made headlines again in late 2022 when former President Medvedev declared that Russia fought “to stop the supreme ruler of Hell, whatever name he uses – Satan, Lucifer or Iblis” (Reuters 2022).

This newly found obsession is more than just a spill over from the Russian Orthodox Church’s apocalyptic rhetoric with regards to the war in Ukraine. It signals the addition of another bogeyman to the repertoire of different evils that Russia is currently fighting in Ukraine that is planted next to references to “Jews” or “sects.” Another Russian official’s rhetoric clearly illustrates how this new trope of “satanic cults” fits into the repertoire of the freshly emboldened high-ranking anti-Semites. In his column for the nation’s most popular weekly in October 2022, a two-star general Aleksey Pavlov, assistant to Nikolai Patrushev, head of the Security Council of Russia, spoke of the need to “de-satanise” Ukraine, which he claimed had been turned into a totalitarian hyper-sect masterminded from Washington D.C. and home to hundreds of neo-pagan cults. One of these cults, Pavlov asserted, was Chabad-Lubavitch, an Orthodox Jewish Hasidic movement traditionally popular in Eastern and Central Europe (Pavlov 2022). Patrushev rushed to apologise for his assistant, who was sacked by Putin three months later, with no public reasons or explanation offered. The usually compliant Chief Rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar, expressed outrage at the

incident, warning of the onset of “a new era in Russia’s relations with Jews” (Gross 2022).

This new era has been inaugurated with Zhenia Berkovich’s and Svetlana Petriychuk’s May 2023 arrest on charges of “justification of terrorism” for the play *Finist the Brave Falcon* that Petiychuk wrote and Berkovich directed in 2021. The play tells the story of Russian women who were lured by Islamic radicals to join them in Syria and who were later sentenced to prison time in Russia for their “ties” with ISIS. The prosecution in Berkovich’s case employed a team of pseudo-experts to analyse the play, among them – a certain Roman Silantiev, Ph.D., the inventor of the pseudo-science of “destructology” that deals with “destructive cults and extremism.”

In an interview Roman Silantiev explained his support for Berkovich’s and Petriychuk’s arrest by claiming that:

“[Theatre productions] justifying terrorism are absolutely unacceptable [...] even when it’s done by people who have, I beg your pardon, Jewish background. It’s not the first time that I get to see it – the Jews actively support the Wahhabis, it seems that they do it to spite the Russians. We have an entire group of Jews that have joined this organisation [ISIS] and nicely met their end there. When I see all of that, given that the Wahhabis want to slaughter all of the Jews, when I see the Jews defending these actions... it’s simply post-modern. But it’s there, it’s there in famous theatres, and we have to put an end to this outrage” (Lomovka 2023).

“The Liberal Traitors”

Berkovich’s case activates another powerful anti-Semitic trope: for both the official media and large swaths of the receptive public, “a Jew” has come to mean liberals, the proverbial “fifth column” of traitors who flee (i.e., betray) the country and do not support its war. With her unambiguous anti-war stance, Berkovich fits the bill to a tee, although she stayed in Russia. This trope has been in the making for more than a decade, chiselled in a series of public scandals involving targeted attacks of liberal figures of Jewish origins. The attackers invariably suffered no consequences; the notoriety boosted their careers rather than destroyed them.

In 2012, an ultra-nationalist writer and political activist, Zakhar Prilepin, penned “A Letter to comrade Stalin” written in the name of “Russia’s liberal community” that, Prilepin asserted, demonises Stalin instead of being grateful to him for “saving [their] tribe”:

“If not for you, [comrade Stalin], our grandfathers and great-grandfathers would have been killed in gas chambers... and our question would have been finally solved. You slayed seven layers of Russians in order to save our seed. [...] When we tell you that we, too, fought in the war, we are aware that we only fought in Russia, against Russia, on the backbone of the Russian people” (Prilepin 2012).

Prilepin never once used the word “Jew” but references to the Holocaust make the true target of his writing unmistakable. The anti-Semitic letter did not damage his career in the least: Prilepin continued to receive major literary awards in Russia and repeatedly took part in Frankfurt Book Fair even after he had become a commanding officer in the People’s Republic of Donetsk, casually boasting in his interviews of having killed a lot of Ukrainians.

In 2013, opposition journalist and politician Leonid Gozman posted a critical review of a new TV-series, in which he compared the notorious Red Army intelligence service SMERSH to the SS and the NKVD to the Gestapo. The next day Ulyana Skobeyda, the staff writer of the nation’s popular tabloid, posted a lead that stated: “Sometimes one regrets that the Nazis did not make lampshades from the skins of the ancestors of today’s liberals. We would have had fewer problems today.” The lead was quickly changed to “The liberals are revising our history in order to cut the ground from under our country,” but the original post became viral, with the journalist keeping her job (Skobeyda 2013).

In the spring of 2014, a huge poster was hung in Moscow’s central bookstore, clearly with the approval of the authorities. Above the faces of opposition figures denouncing the annexation of Crimea, the caption read: “The fifth column: strangers among us.” One of the depicted “traitors,” Boris Nemtsov, was assassinated 10 months later. In a letter of condolence to Nemtsov’s 87-year-old mother, Putin addressed her by her maiden name, Eidman, which is clearly Jewish. For generations, Soviet Jews excelled at picking up subtle signals of danger from above, and the act of ‘unmasking’ someone’s Jewish name is clearly perceived as anti-Semitic.

More recently, Putin publicly mocked the founder of Russian e-commerce giant Yandex, Arkady Volozh, and his former adviser and one of the fathers of Russia’s economic reforms in the 1990s, Anatoly Chubais, both of whom now live in Israel. Putin accused Volozh of ingratitude towards Russia and suggested that he was condemning the war in Ukraine only to curry favour with the Israeli authorities. Of Chubais he said:

“Why is Anatoly Borisovich hiding there? They showed me a picture from the Internet where he is no longer Anatoly Borisovich but Moshe Israelivich living there... Why is he doing this? Why did he run away and move to Israel with an illegal status?” (Rozovsky 2023).

Russian propagandists, including RT chief Margarita Simonyan, as well as the “Z” Telegram channels and pro-war culture makers, have attacked celebrities who spoke out against the war in Ukraine and have since left the country, especially those of them who have settled in Israel: “They said they didn’t want to live in a country that was waging war,” the argument goes, “only to move to the one that is constantly at war with its neighbours. Double standards, how typical” (Seddon and Weaver 2023).⁴ In a much-publicised interview, Soviet-era actress Valentina Talyzina claimed that the famous singer Alla Pugacheva (who supported her husband, comedian Maxim Galkin, listed as a foreign agent by the government, in his criticism of the war and Putin’s regime) and the actress Liya Akhedzhakova, a long-time critic of Russian politics, were both “hiding their real Jewish patronymics” (AMIC 2023). In this way, Jews are rhetorically equated with the “liberal intelligentsia,” which is synonymous with being “foreign agents,” which in turn is associated with alleged disloyalty, treachery, cowardice, duplicity, and hostility to the country’s interests and the war it is waging.

“Russophobia as the New Anti-Semitism”

Russian propaganda routinely weaponises accusations of anti-Semitism and historical responsibility for the Holocaust to justify its military aggression against Ukraine. By this logic, the “Nazi,” the anti-Semite, and the “aggressor” is always the other, while Russia is increasingly vying for the position of the main victim, which is coined in the popular expression, “Russians are the new Jews.” A new discourse that has emerged in recent years sees any criticism of Russia’s actions as an expression of “Russophobia,”⁵ which is

⁴ Simonyan posted on X following the Hamas attacks on Israel that she expects to see the return of Russian emigres: “The country that isn’t at war with its neighbors is at war with its neighbors again. Let’s welcome the exodus of Russian pacifists. Actually, no, they’re not welcome.”

⁵ The term Russophobia is usually attributed to the 19th-century Slavophile conservative poet Fyodor Tyutchev, and it took a distinctly anti-Semitic character when it was popularised by dissident nationalist Igor Shafarevich, author of the 1982 eponymous samizdat essay, who accused Jews, “the small nation” of undermining the “big nation” (Russians) from within.

then compared to anti-Semitism. Back in 2017, when questioned by Megyn Kelly about Russia's possible interference in the 2016 US elections, Putin compared these accusations to anti-Semitism: "When one is stupid and inept then the Jews are always to blame. We know what such attitudes lead to: nothing good can come out of it" (Pramuk 2017). In 2022, he again likened an avalanche of Western sanctions against Russia to anti-Semitic attacks: "The West dropped its mask of civility and began to act belligerently. It begs a comparison to the anti-Semitic pogroms in fascist Germany" (AFP 2022).⁶ The chairman of Russia's Human Rights Council and Deputy Justice Minister, among others, has been lobbying for the introduction of criminal liability for "Russophobia," and a member of Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society Alexander Brod, who identifies as a Jew, in his March 2022 article compared "a wave of Russophobia in the West" with the Nazi persecution of the Jews (Brod 2022). Three days later, Brod's thesis was repeated during the meeting of the Russian government chaired by Putin. The fact that such ideas are articulated by somebody who is professionally dedicated to the promotion of Jewish culture is, of course, deeply disturbing, and reminiscent of the Soviet practice of co-opting public Jewish figures into the activities of Soviet anti-Zionist committee. The Vice-Speaker of the Federation Council called Russophobia "the anti-Semitism of the 21st century" yet warned to proceed with caution in criminalising it (Novaya Gazeta Europe 2023; Robinson 2019).

The equation of anti-Semitism with "Russophobia" struck a chord with the Russian public at large on both ends of the political spectrum, as it was eager to pose as the main victim of both the war against Ukraine and Western sanctions. Rock band "Leningrad" recorded a song titled «Входа нет» ["No Entry,"] in which the lead singer decried "genocide unleashed against the Russians" and claimed that for Europeans "A Russian is a new *zhyd* [kike] and should be burnt in a furnace." In the video released with the song, dancers are clad in Russian folk shirts with huge Jewish stars sewn onto their chests. Discussions of EU travel restrictions on Russian-language

⁶ In that same speech in mid-March 2022, Putin spoke about the "fifth column": "The West will try to rely on the so-called fifth column, on national traitors, on those who earn money here with us but live there. And I mean 'live there' not even in the geographical sense of the word, but according to their thoughts, their slavish consciousness. Such people who by their very nature, are mentally located there, and not here, are not with our people, not with Russia. But any people, and even more so the Russian people, will always be able to distinguish true patriots from scum and traitors, and simply spit them out like a gnat that accidentally flew into their mouths, spit them out on the pavement."

social media accounts in the spring and summer of 2022 similarly drew comparisons between Russians struggling to obtain EU visas and the Jewish passengers of the MS St. Luis fleeing Nazi persecution in 1939, adopting some of the Kremlin-spun propagandistic clichés that delegitimise the historical narratives and security concerns of Poland and the Baltic states by invoking wartime collaboration in the destruction of local Jews.

Russian Jews Fear the Revival of Soviet Anti-Semitic Policies

The above-mentioned discourses do not show the entire repertoire of anti-Semitic accusations circulating in the Russian media and political rhetoric, as a more comprehensive inventory would require a much longer study well beyond the scope of this chapter and would include both domestic and imported narratives of the Jewish “puppeteers” behind the war in Ukraine and the Maidan, Zelenskyi’s alleged connections to the international “Jewish circles” that enable him to procure support for Ukraine, and so much more (Gershovich 2023). The frequency with which references to Jews, Israel, or various aspects of Jewish history (most notably, the Holocaust) have been used by Russia’s leading politicians, culture-makers, and propagandists since the onset of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine understandably cause mounting concerns among the country’s remaining Jews.

In the summer of 2022, sociologist Aleksey Levinson of the Levada Center conducted a series of group discussions with the Jewish residents of several large Russian cities. Whereas in the Levada Center’s 2020 study respondents claimed that there was almost no anti-Semitism in Putin’s Russia to speak of, the 2022 survey revealed a pervasive *expectation of its growth* and fear of the possible return to Soviet anti-Semitic practices (Levinson 2022). This return is all the more expected since Russia’s domestic and foreign politics has noticeable shifted towards Soviet practices both in terms of style, rhetoric, and substance, and the state – embodied by the president – is still perceived as the key agent capable of stirring or suppressing hostility towards certain minorities (Gudkov 2022). The closing of the Russian office of *Sokhnut* (Jewish Agency for Israel) in 2022, the forced departure of the former Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt (listed as foreign agent by the government) who refused to support the war against Ukraine and called on the Russian Jews to emigrate, as well as the vilification of Israel

and public anti-Semitic innuendos, are all perceived by the Russian Jews as familiar signals that their fortunes have changed.

The return of anti-Semitism to the public sphere is an important symptom of the ongoing degeneration of both the political system and the 'norms' that held society together, which have become increasingly unhinged since the start of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Just as the rise of anti-Semitism in the last years of Stalinism reflected both the isolationist paranoia of the public and the regime's search for new enemies, so the current resurgence of anti-Semitism in Russia is a miasma signalling the moral decay of social and political institutions and pervasive conspiracy thinking. It is useful to understand anti-Semitism not as a coherent ideology, but as a state of mind, an element of consciousness, or – to use a biological metaphor – a bacterium that can lie dormant for years until its host organism is weakened by a crisis, then becoming pathogenic and beginning to multiply at an astonishing rate. At present, both the international context – Israel's war against Hamas, Russia's war against Ukraine – and the domestic imperatives that stem from the very nature of Putin's regime (isolationism, conspiratorial thinking, witch-hunts, and a conscious rejection of previously held taboos and norms) have created a pathogenic environment that has reactivated previously dormant Russian anti-Semitism and brought it to the centre of public and political discourse. It remains to be seen whether this will remain purely rhetorical or whether it will be translated into discriminatory practices in the future.

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